

ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

Background

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was set up in 1993 as a regional security cooperation and dialogue platform based on deliberations in the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference between the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN and its full dialogue partners. In 1995, the ARF agreed to an evolutionary approach to effectively tackle security issues and adopted a 3 stage process viz, 1st stage- Confidence Building Measures (CBMs); 2nd stage- development of preventive diplomacy; and 3rd stage- elaboration of approaches to conflicts. ASEAN values of consensus, confidence building and progress at a pace comfortable to all have guided the ARF process since inception. At present, ARF has 27 members. The list is attached at Appendix.

Structure

2. The ARF process is three-tiered - Track-I, Track I ½ (activities approved by ARF and involving scholars and officials from member states acting in their personal capacity) and Track-II (which provides a non-governmental forum for academics, scholars, researchers to interact in their private capacity with a view to developing structured regional processes). At the Track I ½ level, ARF has established an Experts and Eminent Persons (EEPs) meeting. The first meeting of the EEPs was held in 2006 and has since been held annually. At the Track-II level, the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia and Pacific (CSCAP) and ASEAN Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) have been regularly engaged with the ARF process.

3. At the top of the pyramid of Track I activities is the annual ARF meeting at the level of Ministers held in August in the capital of the ASEAN Chair for the year (Lao PDR – 2016). At the second level is the ARF Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) and at the third level is the Inter-Sessional Support Group (ISG) on CBMs and Preventive Diplomacy (ISG on CBMs and PD). The ISG on CBMs and PD constitutes the core ARF inter-sessional activity under Track-I. It acts as a clearinghouse and catalyst for CBM proposals. Interaction among defence officials alongside diplomats is also an established ARF practice. Defence Officials' Dialogues are normally held before each meeting of the ISG on CBMs and PD and SOM. Since 2005, an annual ARF Security Policy Conference (ASPC) is also held on the margins of the SOM. On specific issues of interest, ARF has established annual inter-sessional meetings (ISMs). Currently, there are four ISMs, on: Counter-Terrorism and Trans-National Crime (CTTC), Maritime Security, Disaster Relief and Non-Proliferation & Disarmament.

4. A Vision Statement for ARF for 2020 was adopted at the 16th ARF Ministerial held in Phuket, Thailand in July 2009. The Vision Statement recognizes that ARF is a central pillar in the emerging regional security

architecture. A Hanoi Plan of Action (POA) for implementation of the Vision Statement was adopted by the 17th ARF Ministerial held on 23 July 2010 in Hanoi. The POA contains policy guidance for the Forum to develop and implement concrete and practical actions including in the fields of disaster relief, maritime security, non-proliferation and disarmament, counter-terrorism and peacekeeping.

5. A High Level Task Force (HLTF) was set up in 2011 to review the ASEAN related meetings with regard to their relevance in the current set up. The HLTF has made 72 recommendations which were prioritised as immediate to medium. One of the recommendations was to reduce the number of ARF DOD and ISG on CBMS and PD to two and one respectively. During the ARF Ministerial Meet in 2015, it was decided to conduct a trial run of having only one ARF ISG and two ARF DODs in the inter-sessional year 2015-16. Accordingly, India and Lao PDR co-chaired the 2016 ARF ISG. India hosted the sole ARF ISG meeting in New Delhi on 11-12 April 2016.

ARF Activities

6. ARF organises periodic activities with a view to addressing non-traditional trans-boundary issues such as terrorism, trans-national organized crime, maritime security, natural disaster management, and peacekeeping while continuing the basic objective of promoting confidence building and mutual trust in the Asia-Pacific. These efforts are in the form of capacity building activities, information exchange, sharing of experiences/best practices, exercises, etc. In May 2009, the first field exercise “ARF-Voluntary Demonstration of Response Exercise” on disaster relief was held in the Philippines.

7. ARF Ministerial meetings comprise of plenary and retreat sessions. Global and regional security issues and the future direction of the ARF constitute the agenda. Reports on activities of the past year and a Programme of work for the next year are adopted. A chairman’s statement is issued at the conclusion of each meeting- this is not a negotiated text but tends to sum up the broad consensus emerging out of the discussions.

India & ARF

8. India became a member of ARF in 1996. India’s participation in the ARF demonstrates our increasing engagement in the Asia – Pacific region, both in the politico-security and economic spheres and underlines our commitment to the objective of sustaining regional peace and stability. Our participation is consistent with our “Act East” policy and development of closer links with the ASEAN as a full dialogue partner. ARF provides a venue for constructive dialogue on political and security cooperation in the region, with the ASEAN continuing to play a central role in the process.

9. India has been active participant in the ARF meetings including the 22nd ARF Ministerial Meeting in 2015 and the 2016 ARF Senior Officials Meeting in Lao PDR. India co-chaired the ARF Inter-Sessional Group (ISG) Meeting on Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and Preventive Diplomacy (PD) for the inter-sessional year 2015-16. The ARF ISG was held in New Delhi on April 11-12, 2016. India actively participates in all the four Inter Sessional Meetings (ISMs). India participated at the 10th ARF EEP meeting in Singapore from 29 February – 2 March 2016 as well. India has organised several seminars, workshops and training programs for ARF members. Most recently Secretary (East) led the Indian delegation at the ARF SOM in Lao PDR on May 2016. The 23rd ARF Ministerial is scheduled on July 2016.

May 2016

List of Countries in ARF

10 ASEAN Member Countries

1. Brunei Darussalam
2. Cambodia
3. Indonesia
4. Laos
5. Malaysia
6. Myanmar
7. Philippines
8. Singapore
9. Thailand
10. Vietnam

10 ASEAN Dialogue Partners

1. Australia
2. Canada
3. China
4. EU
5. India
6. Japan
7. ROK
8. New Zealand
9. Russia
10. United States of America

7 Other Countries

1. Bangladesh
2. DPRK
3. Mongolia
4. Pakistan
5. Papua New Guinea
6. Timor Leste
7. Sri Lanka

Events organized by India under ARF

- Seminar on Anti-Piracy in Mumbai by Coast Guard, 18-20 October 2000.
- Co-chaired ISG on CBMs in 2001, along with Vietnam. Hosted a meeting of ISG on CBMs in New Delhi on 19-21 December 2001.
- Seminar on “Peacekeeping: Best Practices and lessons learned” (organized along with Canada and Malaysia), New Delhi, 20 -21 March 2002.
- Workshop on Maritime Security, February-March 2003.
- The 7th ARF Meeting of Heads of Defence Colleges/Universities and Institutions, New Delhi, 2003
- Workshop on Training for Cooperative Maritime Security, Kochi, October 2005.
- Workshop on Cyber Security, 6-8 September 2006.
- Workshop on UN Peacekeeping- Challenges and Prospects, New Delhi, 26-27 April 2007.
- Co-Chair, along with Indonesia on ISM on Counter Terrorism and Trans-National Crime (ISM-CTTC) in Semarang, Indonesia, 21-22 February 2008.
- ARF Training Programme on Maritime Security, organized by Coast Guard at Chennai, 18-22 May 2009.
- Co-chaired ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group (ARF ISG) on CBMs and Preventive Diplomacy in the inter-Sessional period 2009-10 along with Vietnam. The meeting was held in New Delhi on 9-11 November 2009.
- Co-chaired ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group (ARF ISG) on CBMs and Preventive Diplomacy along with Lao PDR in 2014. The meeting was held in New Delhi on 11-12 April 2016.