

India - Thailand Relations

1. India and Thailand, located in each other's extended neighbourhood, share unique civilizational links going back several millennia. The shared link of Buddhism is reflected in regular pilgrimages to places of Buddhist interest in India by a large number of Thai people. Hindu elements can be found among those reflected in Thai architecture, arts, sculpture, dance, drama and literature. The Thai language incorporates Pali and Sanskrit influences. A large Indian Diaspora living and working in Thailand is another important bond.
2. Over the past two decades India's 'Look East' policy has been complemented by Thailand's 'Look West' policy in bringing the two countries closer. India and Thailand would celebrate 65 years of their diplomatic relations in 2012. In recent years, political contacts have intensified as reflected in a series of high level visits by leaders of the two countries. Trade and economic linkages and tourist traffic continue to grow steadily.
3. Both countries are important regional partners linking South and Southeast Asia. They cooperate closely in the ASEAN, East Asia Summit (EAS) and BIMSTEC groupings as also Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD). The implementation of the India-ASEAN Agreement on Trade in Goods from January 2010 is an important latest milestone of this partnership.

EXCHANGE OF HIGH LEVEL VISITS

4. HRH Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn, a recipient of India Gandhi Prize for Peace, Development and Disarmament 2004, is a regular visitor to India. She visited India last in October 2011 under ICCR's Distinguished Visitor Programme. Her other recent visits were in Mar 2011, Aug 09, Feb 09, March 08, March, Aug 07); Crown Prince HRH Mahavajiralongkorn, accompanied by royal family members and other prominent figures, piloted a special Thai Air flight to Bodhgaya to perform Buddhist pilgrimage on November 13, 2010. HRH Princess Bajrakitiyabha visited Bodhgaya and other pilgrimage sites in November 2011.
5. There have been six Prime Ministerial visits from Thailand to India during 2001-2011. There were four Prime Ministerial visits from India to Thailand during this period. Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra paid a State visit to India on January 24-26, 2012 as Chief Guest for our Republic Day upon invitation of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. She became the first Thai PM to do so. A number of important agreements were signed and new initiatives were announced during the visit. Visits from Thai side were of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva (Apr 2011), Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat (Nov 08) who participated in the 2nd BIMSTEC Summit in New Delhi, Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont (April 07), and Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (Nov 01, Feb 02, and June 05). From Indian side, visits were of PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee (Nov 02, Oct 03) and PM Dr. Manmohan Singh (July 04 – for 1st BIMSTEC Summit). Dr Manmohan Singh also participated in the 7th India-ASEAN and 4th EAS Summits held in Hua Hin on Oct 24-24, 2009.

6. Foreign Minister Surapong Tochakchaikuk visited India to co-chair the 6th meeting of Thailand India Joint Commission on December 27, 2011. Other important Ministerial visits include of Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya (Mar 11, Dec 2009), Culture Minister Niphit Intarasombat (Jan 2011), Industry Minister Charnchai (Feb 2010, June 09), Dy. PM Korbasak Sabhavasv (Oct 2009), Foreign Minister Tej Bunnag (Aug 08), Dy PM & Minister for Industry Panpiemras (Aug 07), Minister of Commerce (Sep 09, April 07). From the Indian side - EAM (July 09 for the Ministerial Meetings of 16th ARF, ASEAN-India and EAS; Sep 07), C&IM (Oct, Aug 2009, twice in April 09; April 08), Minister for Urban Development (Apr 2011), Minister for Road Transport & Highways (Dec 2009), Minister DoNER (March, Oct 07) and MOS Industry (Oct 07). MOS for External Affairs Mrs. Preneet Kaur (Dec 2010 for AMED-III meeting).
7. A Thailand-India Parliamentary Friendship Group was formed in the National Assembly of Thailand in 2008. Group was reconstituted recently in September 2011. A counterpart group has been formed in Indian Parliament in December 2011. Recent parliamentary exchanges include visit of Thai parliamentary delegation led by Mr. Chai Chidchob, President of National Assembly and Speaker of House of Representatives to India in Dec 2009. A delegation of the Standing Committee of the House of Representatives had visited India in Sep 2009. For the 122nd Assembly of Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) held in Bangkok from March 27- April 1, 2010, a 19 member Indian delegation was led by Mrs Meira Kumar, Speaker of Lok Sabha.

ECONOMIC & COMMERCIAL PARTNERSHIP

8. Economic & commercial linkages form an important aspect of India's partnership with Thailand. The past few years have seen a rapid growth in this area.
9. Bilateral Trade has multiplied six times since 2000 to cross US\$ 6.6 billion in 2010. Global financial and economic crisis impacted the bilateral trade during 2009. The trade figure for 2009 was US\$ 4.9 billion declining by 17% (Indian exports were US\$ 1.7 b, down by 34%, while Thai exports were US\$ 3.2 b declining by 3.6%). Bilateral Trade for the annual year 2011 is about USD 8.19 billion.
10. Investment by Indian and Thai companies into each others' countries is growing. Indian FDI into Thailand is estimated to be around US\$ 2.00 billion since 1970s. (Approved Indian investment from Jan-Nov, 2011 is around US \$ 56 million). Thailand has invested US\$ 90.55 million in India (April 2000-Sep 2011) according to Department of Investment Policy Promotion of Government of India.
11. The major Indian groups doing business in Thailand include: Tata group (automobiles, steel, software), Aditya Birla group (chemicals, textiles), Indo Rama group (chemicals), Ranbaxy*, Dabur, Lupin (pharmaceuticals), Bharti Airtel, NIIT, Punj-Lloyd, Kirloskar, Mahindra-Satyam, etc, reflecting the diverse sectors of interest. Among public sector, Indian Overseas Bank, Bank of Baroda, Air India, New India Assurance etc. are present.

12. Leading Thai companies in the fields of Agro-processing, infrastructure, automotive, engineering, banking, housing and hospitality have active and growing business presence in India. Major Thai companies active in India are - C P Aquaculture (India) Ltd., Ital Thai Development Pcl., Krung Thai Bank Pcl., Charoen Pokphand (India) Private Limited, Stanley Electric Engineering India Pvt. Ltd., Thai Summit Neel Auto Pvt. Ltd., Thai Airways International Pcl., Precious Shipping (PSL) of Thailand, Preuksa Real Estate, Dusit and Amari group of hotels.
13. The ASEAN-India Agreement on Trade in Goods was signed in Bangkok on Aug 13, 2009 and was operationalised w.e.f. January 1, 2010. Negotiations are continuing on concluding its Investments and Services sector components, as well as for a BIMSTEC FTA and an India-Thailand FTA. An Early Harvest Scheme under the proposed India-Thailand FTA is in place since Sep 2004 covering 82 products. Negotiations for a comprehensive bilateral agreement for trade in goods, services, and investments are currently underway, and are targeted to be completed by mid-2012. The 2nd Protocol to amend the Framework Agreement of 2003 was signed during the visit of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra to India in January 2012.
14. Another significant recent element has been the active promotion of trade & investment linkages between the north eastern states of India and Thailand.

TOURISM AND CONNECTIVITY

15. Air connectivity between India and Thailand is growing with nearly 140 flights per week, reflecting a rapidly growing passenger traffic between the two countries. Bangkok is connected by air to 9 Indian destinations. India and Thailand are cooperating closely on improving regional connectivity through initiatives such as India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral Highway, Asian Highway Network (under UNESCAP), BTILS under BIMSTEC framework.
16. About 790,000 Indian tourists visited Thailand in 2010, making India one of the fastest growing markets for Thailand for inbound tourism. In 2011, the number is about 8,30,000 for Jan-Nov 2011 (some slowdown in later part of the year is due to floods in Thailand) The number of Thai tourists to India is around 45,000 (mainly to Buddhist pilgrimage sites).

DEFENCE

17. Defence cooperation comprises regular joint exercises/joint maritime patrols near the international maritime boundary to counter terrorism, piracy and smuggling; training of officers at each others' Armed Forces Training institutions and participation as observers in military exercises, staff talks and exchange of trainee visits at various levels.

CULTURE

18. Cultural exchanges take place under the framework of a Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) between the two governments. An Indian Cultural centre was opened in Bangkok in September 2009. Cultural Agreement Programme for 2012-14 has been signed during the visit of Thai PM in Jan 2012. A number of India Studies Centre are operational in prestigious Thai Universities.

EDUCATION

19. An MoU on Cooperation in the field of Education was signed in 2005. During 2010 the Government of India offered nearly 130 scholarships to Thai students under its ITEC and ICCR sponsored schemes. A large number of Thai students are also studying on self financing basis. Ministry of Human Resource Development provides for secondment of 8 professors every semester for the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Bangkok.

20. Government of India contributed Rs. 1.25 crores (Thai Bht 10 million) in 2008 towards construction of a new building for the Sanskrit Studies Centre at Silpakorn University, Bangkok and has deputed a Sanskrit professor. An India Studies Centre is functioning at the Thammasat University of Bangkok since April 1993. In 2008, the Mahidol University of Bangkok started a Masters of Arts course on Indian studies.

INDIAN DIAPSORA IN THAILAND

21. It is estimated that there are between 100,000-150,000 people of Indian origin in Thailand. Many of them have lived here for several generations over the past century. Majority of them hold Thai nationality. The Indian community comes from different part of India and mainly comprises Sikhs, Punjabis, Gorakhpuris, Tamils and Sindhis. Two persons of Indian origin from Thailand have been awarded the Pravasi Samman in 2006 and 2010.

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