

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 member states. These include the 10 ASEAN member countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam); the 10 ASEAN Dialogue Partners (Australia, Canada, China, EU, India, Japan, ROK, New Zealand, Russia and United States of America); and 7 other countries, namely, Bangladesh, DPRK, Mongolia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and Sri Lanka.

The ARF process is a three-tier one - 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. 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.

ARF Meetings: At the top of the pyramid of Track I activities is the annual ARF meeting at the level of Ministers in July/August in the capital of the ASEAN Chair for the year. 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 now an established ARF practice. Defence Officials' Dialogue is normally held before each meeting of the ISG on CBMs and PD, SOM and Ministerial. Since 2005, an annual ARF Security Policy Conference has also been 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 and disarmament.

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.

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, exercises, etc.

India and ARF: India became a member of the 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 "Look East" policy, and development of closer links with the ASEAN as a full-dialogue partner. In our view, the 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.

India has been an active participant in the ARF meetings, including the 19th ARF Ministerial in Phnom Penh in July 2012 and ARF SOM in Phnom Penh in May 2012. India participated in the 4th ARF ISM on maritime Security in San Francisco from 14-15 June 2012, the ARF ISG on CBM and PD and DOD in Wellington from 7-9 May 2012, the 11th ARF ISM on Disaster Relief in Brisbane from 16-17 April 2012, the 4th ARF ISM on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament in Sydney from 8-9 March 2012, the 10th ARF ISM on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime in Hoi An, Vietnam from 16-17 March 2012 and the 6th ARF EEP meeting in Bangkok from 01-03 February 2012. Indian Naval ship Kesari and 16-member National Disaster Relief Force participated in the Table Top Exercise (TTX) and Field Training Exercise (FTX) of the Disaster Relief Exercise 2011 (DIREX 2011) in Manado, Indonesia in March 2011.

India has organized several seminars, workshops and training programmes for ARF Members. The themes of these activities have included peacekeeping, maritime security, anti-piracy and cyber security. India co-chaired the ARF-ISG on CBM and PD meetings along with Vietnam for the inter-sessional period 2009-10. An ARF-ISG meeting was held in New Delhi from 9-11 November 2009. India had also co-chaired the 6th ARF-ISM on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime, held in Indonesia in February 2008. In November 2008 and March 2009, India organized two training programmes on maritime security in Chennai. In May 2009, a UN Peacekeeping course was organized in New Delhi.

Recent Developments: 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. The Vision Statement calls for strengthening ARF's role in raising awareness on security challenges and intensifying confidence building and cooperation.

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 suggests 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. The POA recommends that by 2020 ARF should continue its efforts on consolidating CBMs while implementing PD activities/measures. It also suggests measures for expanding and enhancing the effectiveness of ARF's institutional features. The 18th ARF Ministerial held on 23 July 2011 adopted a Work Plan on Preventive Diplomacy as well as a Work Plan on Maritime Security, which provide the framework for taking forward cooperation activities in the respective areas.

Most recently, External Affairs Minister Shri S.M. Krishna participated in the 19th ARF Ministerial Meeting held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia from July 11-12, 2012.

August 2012

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, the 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, 24-29 March 2008.
- The Second (Advanced) Maritime Security Training Programme, organized by Coast Guard, Chennai, 17-22 Nov 2008.
- UN Peacekeeping Course for ARF Member States, Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK), New Delhi, 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. A meeting of the ARF-ISG was held in New Delhi on 9-11 November 2009.