



BACKGROUND NOTE

1. The increasing complexity of the global economic environment makes it imperative to run and mobilize effective network of institutions, media and business houses involved in the policy dialogue, which can generate considered documents for policy makers to take informed decisions. With the Commemorative Summit 2012, India-ASEAN relation has been elevated to the Strategic Partnership level. The relation between them has been strengthened with ASEAN-India FTA in goods and other initiatives such as connectivity projects.
2. India's engagement with the ASEAN is at the heart of its Look East Policy. ASEAN and India have taken several initiatives to deepen the relations. Bilateral trade between India and ASEAN has grown at a healthy rate in recent past. The volume of trade between ASEAN and India stood at US\$ 74 billion in 2013-14, of which India's export to ASEAN was US\$ 33 billion and import was US\$ 41 billion, respectively. We are confident that we can achieve our bilateral trade target of US\$ 100 billion by 2015 and US\$ 200 billion by 2020. We should aim for an even higher target for our trade turnover with inclusion of services and investment in ASEAN-India FTA.
3. ASEAN and India are in need to establish a Comprehensive Free Trade Area between ASEAN and India, creating favourable conditions for ASEAN and India and other partners to negotiate the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is likely to expand the market size and improve the competitiveness. With both sides showing keenness to deepen and widen their economic partnership, there is need to dwell on a range of issues, including trade in services, investment and connectivity, and development cooperation, which can help realize this objective. Building a common

market between ASEAN and India may be achieved provided the trade liberalization is adequately complemented by trade facilitation and connectivity.

4. Trade barriers are major obstacles, limiting the economic integration between the two sides. ASEAN and India have been contemplating ASEAN-India Transit Transport Agreement to facilitate movement of vehicles along the Trilateral Highway. India announced to extend Trilateral Highway to Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam. Soft infrastructure such as trade facilitation is thus very important to strengthen the trade relations. ASEAN and India need to identify the barriers and address them in order to increase the competitiveness of Indian products in the ASEAN countries and vice versa. Presently, India is one of the top five leading sources of tourists of ASEAN. Thus, the accomplishment of agreement on transport cooperation will contribute in expanding trade and tourism between the two sides. Some other important areas in ASEAN – India Strategic Partnership are cooperation in information and communication technologies, especially digital connectivity, which also needs to be accelerated. At the same time, challenges are plenty and need effective policy interventions. The regional challenges have to be addressed through joint initiatives taken by India and ASEAN.

5. India's connectivity with ASEAN has witnessed some important developments in recent years. India provides high importance to Trilateral Highway, Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP), Mekong – India Economic Corridor (MIEC) projects, which connect Southeast Asia with India. A transit transport agreement between India and Southeast Asian countries is essential in order to achieve seamless trade. Seamless transportation between India and ASEAN is needed for higher trade and investment. Simple, harmonised and standardised trade and Customs processes and procedures and related information flows will reduce transaction costs and time between ASEAN and India, thereby facilitating regional integration process.

6. Higher investment would narrow the development gaps within ASEAN and also between some of the ASEAN countries and India. ASEAN and India therefore shall cooperate more closely to strengthen cooperation, particularly to have a long-term investment strategy, through which India will be motivated to invest in ASEAN in the areas like automobiles, pharmaceutical, chemicals, plastic, consulting services, infrastructure and construction, health services, higher education, agricultural and processed foods, mining and minerals, etc.

7. The fundamental contribution of the ASEAN countries and India not only serve the interests of India and ASEAN, but also promote peace, security and prosperity of the entire region. Therefore, the two sides need to have a collective response to the challenges and opportunities in the context of geopolitical, geo-strategic, geo-economic developments in East Asia. ASEAN and India need to use all the existing cooperation mechanisms between them, particularly the regional forums such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting plus

(ADMM+) and other regional cooperation mechanisms. ASEAN and India currently have 26 regular dialogue mechanisms in several fields. Therefore, ASEAN and India will continue to give priority to building, sharing experiences and bridging the research institutes of ASEAN and India to promote economic development, ensuring peace and stability in the region.

8. Promoting a long term cooperative partnership based on equality, shared ownership and mutual respect will enable both India and ASEAN achieve long-term national and regional development goals. In order to realize these objectives, policy dialogue among relevant institutions, media and business community from India and ASEAN assumes utmost importance. These deliberations would not only help in promoting awareness about the potential of the India-ASEAN partnership, they would also help in exploring new vistas for strengthening regional cooperation. By adopting a more proactive strategy for harnessing the inter se relationship between two of the most dynamic economies, the dialogue between institutions, media and business community will help identify the challenges to furthering cooperation in identified areas. Deliberations between the think-tanks would help provide well-considered policy inputs to the governments.

9. Round Table of ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tank (AINTT) is an outcome of Indian Prime Minister's Statement at the 7th India-ASEAN Summit 2009, where he suggested establishment of an India-ASEAN Round Table comprising think-tanks to bridge the knowledge gap. One of the primary objectives of this Round Table is therefore to provide policy inputs to the governments of India and the ASEAN countries on future areas of cooperation. RIS was identified as the nodal point from India to organize the Round Table. Another purpose of the interaction between Think-Tanks is to deepen the ASEAN-India partnership through policy research and advocacy. RIS envisages this forum as high quality research platform for the policy makers, academics, professionals, and the research communities. An inclusive dialogue between the key institutions in ASEAN is essential for the policy-making process. This network is expected to provide long-term perspectives on the development of ASEAN-India relations. The ideas that would emerge from the Round Tables of AINTT will help in refining and updating the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership.

10. The mandate to organize think-tanks network was given to RIS way back in 2004. The first major initiative in this regard was the international conference that RIS had organized in 2004 on ASEAN-India Vision 2020 at New Delhi on behalf of the ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT). The AINTT was formed following a decision taken by the Leaders of ASEAN and India at their First Summit held in November 2002. Besides coordinating with Think-Tanks as a part of the India-ASEAN engagement, RIS is also actively involved in several other think-tank networks. These include Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), Asia-Pacific

Research and Training Network on Trade (ARTNet), coordinated by UNESCAP, and BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think-Tanks, among others.

11. The 1st Round Table of AINTT was held in August 2012 at New Delhi and the 2nd Round Table of AINTT was held in Vientiane in September 2013. As agreed in both 1st and 2nd Round Tables, network of think-tanks is continued in order to facilitate deeper integration between India and ASEAN countries through studies, ideas, plans and proposals. RIS has therefore decided to organize the 3rd Round Table of AINTT in Hanoi in 25-26 August 2014 in collaboration with the Institute of India and Southwest Asian Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS) under the theme "ASEAN - India: Integration and Development". The 3rd Roundtable covers three main sessions, each of which discusses the basic issues, challenges and prospects in the process of integration and development between ASEAN and India such as (i) investment cooperation, (ii) development of connectivity, and (iii) strengthening economic cooperation integration.

12. The 3rd Round Table focuses on the issues discussed above; in which scholars will identify the challenges, limitations and difficulties, figure out the remedies and resolutions, as well as put forward a long-term economic investment strategy in the region. In other words, India and ASEAN shall jointly make an effort to not only enhance the integration and economic development but also build a stable and sustainable environment of development. Furthermore, ASEAN and India today are in the spiral geopolitical changes due to new economic trends and strategies in the Asia-Pacific and the Indo-Pacific regions. Therefore, this Round Table will discuss a number of regional issues, which have policy implications on the process of regional integration of ASEAN and India.

13. The 3rd Round Table will be attended by about 25 participants (two persons from each of the ASEAN member countries, two representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat and three from Indian side). Besides, ASEAN Missions in Hanoi and Indian Embassy will also send their representatives at the Round Table. Several scholars of VASS will also attend the Round Table.

14. Participants in each technical session will present a paper. Subsequently these papers would be expanded and would be distributed amongst the policymakers and other relevant stakeholders either in the form of individual discussion papers or compiled volume.

15. For further information about ASEAN-India Centre, please visit <http://aic.ris.org.in>. If you have any further queries on AINTT, please contact Dr Prabir De, Coordinator, AIC and AINTT, and Professor, RIS, e-mail: prabirde@ris.org.in
