# Road to Manila: India's agenda at the 23rd India-ASEAN Summit

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## Why in the news

November 13, 2026: At the invitation of Philippines President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Manila from November 16 to 17, 2026. The Philippines holds the ASEAN chair this year and will host the 23rd India-ASEAN Summit and the 21st East Asia Summit (EAS) on November 17. According to the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs, the participation of 19 world leaders in the summits has been confirmed. This visit is a proposed programme, so it would not be appropriate to speculate in advance about its outcomes.

## Introduction: what are ASEAN and the East Asia Summit

ASEAN is a regional grouping of 10 countries of Southeast Asia, focused on trade, security and cultural cooperation. The India-ASEAN dialogue partnership began in 1992, and summit-level meetings between the two sides have been held since 2002.

The East Asia Summit (EAS) is an ASEAN-centred wider forum in which major regional and global powers such as India, China, Japan and the United States, along with ASEAN members, share views on regional and global issues.

The Act East Policy (2014) is that pillar of India's foreign policy under which India deepens political, economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. According to the Prime Minister's Office, India-ASEAN relations are a central pillar of this policy and the Indo-Pacific vision. The year 2026 is being celebrated as the India-ASEAN 'Year of Maritime Cooperation', and in 2027 the two sides will complete 35 years of dialogue relations and five years of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

## Main part: what is on the agenda

Strategic partnership: the India-ASEAN Summit will review the implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, including the 'India-ASEAN Plan of Action 2026-2030', and set the future direction of cooperation.

Maritime security: in view of the 2026 Year of Maritime Cooperation, maritime security and cooperation in the South China Sea region are high on the agenda.

Trade - AITIGA review: India wants the review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) to be completed soon. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, building consensus among 10 ASEAN members is a complex process; meanwhile, India is also moving ahead with bilateral trade facilitation agreements.

## Significance for the exam

From the Prelims point of view: facts such as ASEAN's membership (10), the start of the India-ASEAN dialogue partnership (1992), summit-level relations (since 2002) and the full form of AITIGA are asked directly.

From the Mains point of view: issues such as the Act East Policy, the Indo-Pacific strategy, maritime security and the review of trade agreements are essay topics for GS-II (international relations).

## Way forward

The joint declarations after the two summits on November 17 will show how much progress was made on the AITIGA review, maritime cooperation and the Plan of Action 2026-2030. Until then, this visit should be seen only as a proposed programme.

## Prelims practice questions

Question 1. Where is the 23rd India-ASEAN Summit (November 2026) being held?

(a) Jakarta

(b) Manila

(c) Kuala Lumpur

(d) Bangkok

**Answer and explanation**

Answer: (b) Manila

Explanation: The Philippines holds the ASEAN chair this year and is hosting the 23rd India-ASEAN Summit and the 21st East Asia Summit in Manila on November 17, 2026.

Question 2. Consider the following statements with reference to India-ASEAN relations: I. ASEAN has 10 member countries II. The India-ASEAN dialogue partnership began in 1992

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

(a) I only

(b) II only

(c) Both I and II

(d) Neither I nor II

**Answer and explanation**

Answer: (c) Both I and II

Explanation: Statement I is correct: ASEAN is a grouping of 10 countries of Southeast Asia. Statement II is correct: the India-ASEAN dialogue partnership began in 1992; summit-level meetings between the two have been held since 2002.

Question 3. What is the full form of 'AITIGA'?

(a) ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement

(b) ASEAN-India Technology and Investment Growth Agreement

(c) Asia-India Treaty on Integrated Goods Access

(d) ASEAN-India Transport and Infrastructure Grant Accord

**Answer and explanation**

Answer: (a) ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement

Explanation: AITIGA, the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement, governs trade in goods between the two sides. Its review is underway and India wants it concluded soon; according to the Ministry of External Affairs, building consensus among the 10 members is complex.

## Mains practice question

In the context of India's Act East Policy, explain the significance of the India-ASEAN summits. Also shed light on the challenges arising in the AITIGA review. (General Studies-II; 250 words, 15 marks)

Answer outline:

In the introduction: Give a brief introduction to the Prime Minister's proposed Manila visit (November 16-17, 2026) and the 23rd India-ASEAN Summit; set the background of the dialogue partnership since 1992.

In the body: Explain why ASEAN is a central pillar of the Act East Policy (2014) and the Indo-Pacific vision; discuss the review of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, the Plan of Action 2026-2030, the Year of Maritime Cooperation 2026 and maritime security. Analyse the complexity of consensus among 10 members in the AITIGA review and India's parallel track of bilateral trade agreements.

In the conclusion: Conclude that regular summit-level engagement gives direction to India-ASEAN relations; concrete outcomes on trade and maritime security will make the partnership meaningful.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Summary answer: Prime Minister Modi will visit Manila on November 16-17, 2026, where the 23rd India-ASEAN and 21st East Asia Summits will be held on November 17; the agenda includes the strategic partnership, maritime security and a review of the AITIGA trade agreement.

## Question: When is the Prime Minister's Manila visit and on whose invitation?

At the invitation of Philippines President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., Prime Minister Modi will visit Manila from November 16 to 17, 2026.

## Question: What is the main agenda of this year's summits?

A review of the implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (including the Plan of Action 2026-2030), maritime security and an early conclusion of the AITIGA trade agreement review are high on the agenda.

## Question: What is special about India-ASEAN relations in 2026?

The year 2026 is being celebrated as the India-ASEAN 'Year of Maritime Cooperation', and in 2027 the two sides will complete 35 years of dialogue relations and five years of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

## Sources


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