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India-Thailand Joint Commission meet

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What's in News?

Recently, the External Minister of India visited Thailand to attend the ninth meeting of the India-Thailand Joint Commission.

Highlights of the Meet:

Discussions in the meet comprises wide ranging issues of mutual interest and reviewed the progress made in various areas, including political, defence & security, economic & commercial, connectivity, cultural, tourism and people-to-people ties.

This year marks the **75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations** between India and Thailand.

During the meet the following MOUs were signed:

- (i) MoU on Health and Medical Research Cooperation between Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), India and Department of Medical Sciences (DMS), Thailand;
- (ii) MoU for Cooperation & Collaboration on Broadcasting between Prasar Bharti, India and Thai Public Broadcasting Service of Thailand.

External Affairs Minister visited the **Devasthanam of Bangkok** or Royal Brahmin Office of Thai Royal Court is the **official centre of Hinduism in Thailand**.

The temple is the home of the Court Brahmins, who are descended from an ancient lineage of priests from Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu.

This visit thus also underlines the shared religious and cultural traditions of India and Thailand.

India – Thailand Relations:

- Thailand was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with India in 1947.
- Cultural link of Thailand priests to India is since 1500 BCE.
- India shares a long sea border with Thailand as India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands share a maritime border with Thailand along the Andaman Sea.
- Thailand is a key member of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) block which influences the whole Asian continent.

Economic & Commercial Partnership

Bilateral Trade

The bilateral trade and investment between our countries is robust and growing.

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Our bilateral trade was US\$ 12.12 billion in 2019 and it reached US\$ 9.76 billion in 2020 despite the pandemic situation.

The bilateral trade between India and Thailand reached an all time high of around USD 15 billion in 2021-22 as the domestic market remains attractive for Thai investors

Thailand is the fourth largest trading destination for India in the ASEAN region.

Defence Cooperation:

The need to further deepen bilateral security cooperation in the marine domain led to the Indo-Thailand Coordinated Patrolling or **Indo-Thai CORPAT** initiated and launched in 2006.

The MoU on Defence Cooperation between India and Thailand was signed in Jan 2012.

Since 2015, India is participating in **Ex-Cobra Gold**, the largest Asia Pacific Military exercise as ‘Observer Plus’ category.

Cooperation in the field of Education:

MoU on Cooperation in the field of Education was signed in 2005.

During 2018-19, Government of India offered 72 scholarships to Thai students under its various schemes

Currently there are five India Studies Centers in Thailand and in addition, India launched 1000 Doctoral Fellowships at the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology for the nationals of ASEAN countries, including 100 slots for Thai scholars.

Indian Diaspora in Thailand:

There are an estimated 250,000 people of Indian origin in Thailand, many of them having lived in the country for several generations.

The community comprises mainly of Punjabi Hindus, Namdhari and other Sikh sects, Gorakhpuris, Malayalis, Tamils, Gujaratis, Marwaris, and Sindhis; however, other linguistic and regional groups are also well represented.

Historical and Cultural Connect:

The classical Sanskrit and Pali texts from India carry references of the region using various names such as Kathakosha, Suvarnabhumi (the land of god) or Suvarnavipa (the golden island), indicating that this was a region that attracted Indian merchants.

Trade in spices, aromatic wood and most importantly gold is known to have flourished.

In more recent times, European and Indian scholars have referred to Southeast Asia as ‘**Farther India**’, ‘**Greater India**’, or ‘**Hinduised or Indianised states**’.

The first person to do an in depth study of the process of ‘Indianisation’ in Southeast Asian countries was a **French scholar named George Coedes**.

He **coined the term ‘Farther India’** to refer to those states that **experienced “the civilising activity of India”**.

Geographically, it refers to **Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar and the Malay states**.

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The Sanskrit, Buddhist, and Jain texts indicate that interactions between the two regions go back more than two thousand years ago, mainly through sea voyages and that trade played an important role.

Many local languages in the region, including Thai, Malay, and Javanese contain words of Sanskrit, Pali and Dravidian origin in significant proportions.

The **Thai language is written in script derived from Southern Indian Pallava alphabet.**

India's religious links to Thailand:

In the early centuries of the common era, Thailand, which was historically known as **Siam**, was under the rule of the Funan Empire.

Following the decline of the Funan Empire in the sixth century CE, it was under the rule of the Buddhist kingdom of Dvaravati.

In the 10th century, the region came under Khmer rule, which is also known to have links with India.

A Tamil inscription found in Takua-pa testifies trade links between the Pallava region of South India and southern Thailand.

A **mercantile corporation of South Indians called Manikarramam** had established a settlement here and built its own temple and tank, and lived as a **'self-contained' colony**

It is important to note that Brahmanism and Buddhism existed alongside each other in Thailand in the pre-Sukhothai period of the 13th century.

Apart from the popular Brahmanical deities of Ganesha, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, those that are largely absent in Indian socio-religious landscape, such as Indra are also worshiped in Thailand.

Ayutthaya:

Wat Phra Si Sanphet in Ayutthaya, the Thai city that was the capital of the Siamese kingdom for over four centuries from 1351, until it was overrun by the Burmese army.

The ruins of Ayutthaya is now a **UNESCO World Heritage site**

Situated by a vast lake is Wat Phra Ram, initially built as a cremation site for one of the first Ayutthayan king, Ramathibodi I, but later turned into a temple.

It was in one of these sites that the **Thai dance drama form of 'Khon'** originated, again with the Ramakien, and by extension the Ramayana, playing a role as source material.

This site has the influence of both Buddhism and Hinduism.

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