



## Ministry of External Affairs

Government of India

[Home](#) > [Media Center](#) > [Speeches & Statements](#)

# English Translation of External Affairs Minister's Address during India-ASEAN Youth Awards Event (January 23, 2018)

January 24, 2018

Respected Ministers of the ASEAN countries present on the dais,  
My colleagues in the cabinet, General V K Singh, Colonel Rajyavardhan Rathore,  
Ambassadors of the ASEAN countries present on the dais,  
And other distinguished dignitaries invited in this gala dinner,

Namaskar,

Today's event has been organized in the series of the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit. I would like to tell you that the group of 10 countries of South East Asia is known as ASEAN.

India cannot be a part of that group because of geographical reason as this is a group of South East Asian countries and we as a country are situated in South Asia, but our relations with all these ten countries have been such that we felt that we need to have some kind of relations even in the current times, so 25 years ago ASEAN India Partnership Dialogue was started and today's commemorative summit is being organized on the occasion of silver jubilee of that partnership dialogue.

I would like to tell you that even though this commemorative summit is being organized on the occasion of 25 years of India ASEAN friendship but our friendship is not 25 years old only. This friendship is centuries old and these friendships and relations have not been restricted to any one particular area. We have had friendly historic, cultural, commercial and educational relations with all these countries.

First choice for all these countries in the field of education had always been Nalanda University which was situated in India. If Indian businessmen would venture out for trade then it would be for these ten countries. And even today there is this tradition of Bali Yatra in Odisha where women on the day of Kartik Purnima would float a lighted lamp in the sea because traditionally traders used to sail their ships on that day.

As far as cultural relations are concerned, if anybody had the chance to visit those countries then they could see it is present everywhere and history is witness to it. There are two things that primarily connect India and ASEAN countries, one is Buddhism and the other is Ramayana and we have kept both of them as the central theme of this summit.

For this commemorative summit, we organized Dharma Dhamma Conference for Buddhism in Nalanda, Rajgir. As far as Ramayana, you would be surprised to know, we have just started this Ramayan festival on 20th of January, that of the ten countries of ASEAN, Ramayana troops from eight countries have come here. And the artists of those countries have not specially prepared themselves to come here, these are those eight countries where Ramayan is played every year.

And let me surprise you even more, Indonesia, which is the world's largest Muslim representative country, which is considered as a Muslim-dominated country, their Ramayana is the most famous Ramayana among ASEAN countries and it is staged every year and they come to India also.

I remember once, when Atal Ji was the Foreign Minister, he went to Indonesia on a visit. There he saw that some people on the roadside were making idols and to him it seemed that the idols were of Hanuman Ji. He says that he got curious and got down from his car and asked them about what they were making? Those people replied that they were making idols of Hanuman Ji. Atal Ji again asked, yours is a Muslim majority country and even you seems to be a Muslim to me? They said, yes sir. So Atal Ji again asked, so why are you making idols of Hanuman Ji to which they replied, sir we have changed our religion but not our ancestors.

Recently I was visiting Indonesia as I had a joint commission meeting there with the Foreign Minister Ratno. All of them expressed there that religion and culture are two separate things. Our religion is Islam but our culture is still that old one. So we are not only linked culturally but we are still connected.

Do you know that the name of their air service name is Garuda, we have Air India here while there it is Garuda. Sanskrit shlokas are written everywhere, Lord Krishna's chariot on which he gave the sermon of Geeta can be seen at every intersection.

In all these eight countries Ramayana has different names, somewhere it is Ramakien, somewhere it is Kakawin, while somewhere it is Hikayat Seri Rama and these all are interpreted in different ways. But we have eight troops which have come here and who have started their program from 20th January and they will also be visiting various states of our country.

So Buddhism and Ramayana, both have very old cultural linkages, but our future generations should also be aware of such cultural linkages. So in that context when we started planning for this commemorative summit, we decided on near about 50 such programs and most of them are predominantly centered on youth.

First program for youth was organized in Bhopal i.e. India-ASEAN Youth Conference. We invited ten participants from each of the ten ASEAN countries so 100 participants came from the ASEAN countries. The conference was held for one week and all of them stayed there in Bhopal only. I went there to deliver the valedictory address and one of the participants from the ASEAN countries was called on stage as their representative. He said, Madam, we all have very good experiences to take with us. Yesterday we all gathered and we shared our experiences with each other but one thing that was highlighted by all was that we don't want to leave so early, please make us stay for a little more time, he said with a choked throat. By the time I looked at him there were two teardrops on his cheeks. Madam, please make us stay for a little more time.

Later I asked those participants what did they like the most, they said only one thing, warmth and hospitality. So much warmth, 90 percent among us have come to India for the very first time but we did not feel that we have come to a new country. The volunteers that were deployed here, they have become our brothers and sisters in just one week. Is it possible for any country to have such kinship and intimacy? And regarding hospitality they all added that there is no match to the hospitality. Not a single dish was repeated in these seven days, 21 out of 21 times we were offered new and special dishes.

These are the kind of relations we have, that is why we conducted the Youth Music Festival, the Youth Artist Festival, and everywhere participants came they went back with these experiences only.

I will tell you a more shocking incident, it is not from the ASEAN countries, it is from the Republic of Korea, which is also called as the South Korea. Once I went there as the Foreign Minister so the Ambassador there had organized a dinner event where two people came to meet me and they told me that their maternal grandmother was from India. So I asked them both of your maternal grandmothers were from India, to which they said, not only ours but we are ten thousand people whose grandmother is from India, so I was a little surprised. Then they told me that their maternal grandmother was the princess of Ajodhya and once she had a dream that prince of South Korea is waiting to marry her and he looks like this. She got enamored and boarded a ship and came to South Africa, here she got married and we all are her descendent. We have sought land in Ajodhya to make a memorial in her honor. We have already made a memorial there but it is small. Today we have come here to request for an even bigger land because we wish to make a grand memorial there because she was our grandmother. So I asked she wasn't your maternal grandmother, to which they said, we told about grandmother and you thought it to be the maternal grandmother.

Now I want to say this, how this new generation will come to know, how will our future generations know that we have had such old relationships with ASEAN countries and other countries of the world, how will they know, hence it is our responsibility to make them aware.

I repeatedly tell the Ministry of External Affairs that it is our duty to take these old relationships to our children, to our youth, and for that we will have to do different programs, we will have to organize competitions, quiz contests, we will have to invite them here. I have said to those participants in Bhopal that don't worry, we will invite them again.

We want to institutionalize this whole thing and we want to make a mechanism. A mechanism in which the young men and women of all these ten countries continue to visit India and know India and Indian youth visit these countries and not just get a glimpse of their culture, but to fully observe their culture in those countries with which we have had centuries old relations. Today's program is evolved from that competition only.

We had a competition in which the Sports and Youth Ministry was a partner with us. These are 10 different categories, from which we have selected two participants from each category, one participant from India and other from ASEAN nations. So now you will witness 20 prizes being distributed for these 10 categories and you will see the range of the categories for which we have selected the participants. Our ministers from ASEAN countries will also distribute prizes to them, my two colleagues will also distribute the prizes. Prizes for ten categories will be given here now.

I congratulate the winners on my behalf and I'll also say this to my young friends. May your future be bright but the Indian participants, those who have won these prizes, must visit the ASEAN countries and all the participants of ASEAN countries must repeatedly visit India so that our friendships continues and our love and old relationships continue to grow.

**Many many thanks.**

**Namaskar!**



[Terms & Conditions](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Copyright Policy](#) [Hyperlinking Policy](#) [Accessibility Statement](#) [Help](#)

© Content Owned by Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

Visitors: 124702112 , Page last updated on: 24/1/2018

Working hours at Headquarters 9:00 A.M. To 5:30 P.M.