

The planned summit for celebrating 25 yrs of ties with SE Asia will allow PM to deepen his relationship with leaders from the region

# Republic Day: It's Perfect 10 for Modi's Act East Policy

DipanjanRoy.Chaudhury  
@timesgroup.com

**New Delhi:** A Southeast Asian leader was the chief guest at India's first Republic Day parade in 1950, but only five others from the region have attended the celebrations in nearly seven decades since.

President Sukarno of Indonesia, with whom the then Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru shared personal chemistry, was the chief guest in 1950 when the parade was held at what is now the National Stadium in the capital. Sukarno went on to create the Non-Aligned Movement, along with Nehru and leaders of Yugoslavia, Ghana and Egypt.

It is befitting then that leaders from all the 10 nations of the Asean grouping have been invited this year, which also marks 25 years of partnership between India and the Southeast Asian bloc, officials here said.

Some of these leaders share close ties with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Commemorative Summit followed by Republic Day celebrations will give yet another opportunity for the Indian PM and the Asean leaders to deepen that, said people familiar with India-Southeast Asia relations.

Choice of chief guests is based on foreign policy, government's attempts to expand ties and India's friendship with a country

## Early Beginnings



**The then Indonesian President Sukarno was the chief guest at the first Republic Day parade in 1950.**

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## Good Chemistry

**Indonesian President Joko Widodo will be on his second visit to India in less than two years and hopes to host Modi later this year**

**Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong and Modi share good rapport amid the Indian PM's attempts to replicate success of the city-state**

**Vietnam PM's bilateral meeting with Modi will be closely followed given growth in strategic ties**

Leaders of the former Soviet Union and later Russia (4 times), France (5 times), the UK (5 times) and Bhutan (4 times) have been chief guests at Republic Day celebrations several times. Legendary Yugoslav leader Tito was the chief guest twice and so were leaders from Nigeria and Japan. Mauritius leaders have been chief guests thrice.

Civilisational and cultural

links apart, Modi has been hugely impressed with the successes of SE Asian economies. His chemistry with Malaysian PM Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak led to the signing of an agreement with Malaysian agency Permandu to set up a unit for performance management, project delivery and monitoring related to government programmes and delivery in India.

Similarly, Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong and Modi share good rapport amid the Indian PM's attempts to replicate success of the city-state. It is not a widely known fact that as Gujarat chief minister, Modi was a visitor to Singapore and was hugely impressed with the success of the nation. Modi will visit Singapore twice this year — in early July for the Shangri-La Dialogue and later in the year for the East Asia & India-Asean Summits. Singapore is the current chair of Asean and it is hoped that Singapore will push to elevate India-Asean ties to the next level this year. Modi had also previously visited both Malaysia and Singapore and hosted Razak and Lee.

Indonesia is emerging as India's strategic maritime partner in the Indian Ocean Region. President Joko Widodo will be on his second visit to India in less than two years and hopes to host Modi this year.

Meanwhile, all eyes will be on Aung San Suu Kyi. She had a number of meetings with Modi in the past, including during the PM's trip to Myanmar in September. The relations between the two nations have been under spotlight following the Rakhine crisis. Vietnam PM's bilateral meeting with Modi will be closely followed given continuous growth in strategic partnership. Vietnam's President is set to visit India in February.