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Взаимодействие АСЕАН и Индии: достижение геополитических и стратегических целей

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Аннотация. Юго-Восточная Азия всегда привлекала колониальные державы своим расположением в районе главных морских путей и обилием природных ресурсов. После того как многие страны региона обрели независимость (к. 1940-х – нач. 1950-х гг.), бывшие империи пытались ликвидировать идеологический разлом, возникший из-за влияния соседей ЮВА – Китая и СССР/России. Формирование АСЕАН было направлено, в первую очередь, на противодействие этому фактору, особенно – влиянию коммунистического блока. Проблема обострилась после того, как в нескольких странах Юго-Восточной Азии, таких как Индонезия и Малайзия, были отмечены народные волнения. Уже после холодной войны АСЕАН начала развивать отношения с Индией. Взаимодействие, зародившееся на культурной и религиозной основе, со временем перешло в плоскость политических задач по стимулированию новых развивающихся государств примкнуть к Движению неприсоединения. АСЕАН три десятилетия взаимодействует с Индией, возведённой в ранг партнёра по диалогу, в рамках «АСЕАН плюс один», в контексте развития стратегических связей и укрепления отношений с рядом стран Юго-Восточной Азии для решения вопросов обороны и безопасности. В 2012 г. стороны подписали соглашение о стратегическом партнёрстве. Их экономическая взаимодополняемость развивалась по мере роста индийской экономики и потребности ряда стран ЮВА в крупном рынке сбыта, таком как индийский. В настоящей статье рассматриваются различные аспекты отношений между двумя сторонами, а также предлагаются способы укрепления взаимодействия, анализируются будущие вызовы, прежде всего, в области региональной безопасности и экономики.

Ключевые слова: Юго-Восточная Азия, АСЕАН, Индия, Индокитай, Индонезия, Малайзия, Движение неприсоединения.

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ASEAN-India Interactions: Meeting geopolitical and strategic objectives

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Abstract. The region of Southeast Asia has always gained attention from colonial powers because it sits astride major sea lines of communications (SLOCs), and also has abundant natural resources which has fulfilled the economic ambitions of the colonial powers. Following the independence of many of the Southeast Asian countries in 1940s and early 1950s, the colonial powers tried to manage the ideological fault lines given the fact that this region lies very close to China and Russia. The formation of ASEAN was primarily to counter their ideological influence, particularly communism, after riots were seen in a few Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. India and ASEAN began to develop relations after the end of the Cold War. Their relationship, which was based on cultural and religious interactions, also fulfilled political objectives of stimulating the newly developing states to join the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). ASEAN and India have completed nearly three decades of interaction as dialogue partners and within the frame of ASEAN plus one dialogue process, developing strategic ties and defence relations with a number of countries in Southeast Asia. In 2012 India and ASEAN also signed the strategic partnership agreement. Their economic complementarity developed with the growth of the Indian economy, as many Southeast Asian countries needed a large market like India. This paper analyzes different facets of relationships between the two sides and also proposes how the relationship can be enhanced, looking into future challenges primarily in areas of regional security and economics.

Keywords: ASEAN, India, Indochina, Indonesia, Malaysia, Southeast Asia, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

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Introduction

India's partnership with ASEAN has evolved over a period of time from that of sectoral partnership (1992) to dialogue partnership (1995), and thereafter ASEAN plus one summit meeting (2002)¹ projected India as one of the major stakeholders in the Southeast Asia. The onset of the Look East Policy in early 1992 paved the way for the Act East policy, which followed in 2014. The strategic partnership agreement (2012) [Jha, Vinh, 2020] between ASEAN and India² has completed a decade of its existence and showcases the multi-faceted relationship between the two sides. For the latest decade the guests at the Republic Day parade were seen as an outlook of India

¹ India, ASEAN cooperation will be key facilitator for growth of Indo-Pacific region. The Times of India. July 18, 2018. URL: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-asean-cooperation-will-be-key-facilitator-for-growth-of-indo-pacific-region/articleshow/65045055.cms> (accessed: 05.06.2022).

² Vision Statement, ASEAN India Commemorative Summit. URL: <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/20982/Vision+StatementASEANIndia+Commemorative+Summit> (accessed: 05.06.2022).

in important partners. Given the importance of the Southeast Asian countries, the ten ASEAN heads of state and leaders [Roche, 2018] attended the Republic Day parade of India in 2018³, showcasing the strategic importance of the ASEAN as an organisation and its relevance for the larger geostrategic imprint of India in the Indo-Pacific region [Haushofer, 2002]. The continuation of the ASEAN division in the Ministry of External Affairs, and the regular interactions which have taken place through defence, strategic and security dialogues with various countries of Southeast Asia indicate that in the last three decades the relationship has been shaped not only by political summit meetings, but also by cultural and diasporic cooperation. India, which started as a sectoral dialogue partner in 1992, became in 1995 the full dialogue partner and also the member of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1995/96 [Ministry...]. After becoming a dialogue partner, India graduated to the informal summit meeting known as the East Asia Summit way back in 2005. The East Asia Summit along with vital defence forums such as ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus were also aimed at addressing the regional security issues in a nuanced way.

ASEAN and India have also worked on informal dialogue mechanisms such as Delhi Dialogue, and India has participated (even though the Prime Minister attended only once) in Shangri La dialogue⁴ to look into various facets of the relationship and work with other stakeholders in the region to bring about peace and harmony as well as maintenance of the international law and order at seas. Unvaryingly, it has been seen that the Indo-Pacific construct [Pan, 2014] and India's strategic outlook [Jha, 2019] are in the form of an arc which starts from Japan and ends at Australia, covering the Southeast Asian region [Auslin, 2010]. The relationship between India and ASEAN has been more structured because of political interactions at different levels, regular and joint secretarial level meetings as well as periodic senior officials' consultative meetings with ASEAN members countries.

Historical backdrop

Before 1992 there was no formal relationship between India and ASEAN. India's relations with Southeast Asia have been more historical and civilizational, which showcased the interactions between traders, religious preachers and people of both regions. India's policy towards Southeast Asia was staggered and centred on primarily those countries which have been under British subjugation. However, it also looked into relationship from the point of view of a larger imprint in the Southeast Asian region. Its ties with Indochina were seen from the point of view of International Control Commission (ICC), in which India mediated to bring peace in Cambodia.

During the Nehru era, primarily between the phase, when India became independent in 1947 till 1964, the Indian scholars were rather conservative in looking into cooperation with ASEAN. Since 1967 when ASEAN came into existence and Indira Gandhi formed her new government, there were certain instances when interactive process between India and ASEAN started. However, Indira Gandhi's foreign policy was lacking in terms of institutional approach to a new kind of regional organisations, which were mostly driven by the ideological priorities. India also looked

³ India, ASEAN cooperation will be key facilitator for growth of Indo-Pacific region. The Times of India. July 18, 2018. URL: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-asean-cooperation-will-be-key-facilitator-for-growth-of-indo-pacific-region/articleshow/65045055.cms> (accessed: 05.06.2022).

⁴ Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue. 01.06.2018. URL: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018> (accessed: 05.06.2022).

into ASEAN as a manifestation of Southeast Asia's organisational setup. However, India's approach towards ASEAN was prejudiced as it was seen more as a counter ideology against communist influence in Southeast Asia. Therefore, India tried to maintain a distance from this organisation, primarily because of its relationship with the USSR, which was thriving under the leadership of Indira Gandhi.

One must also look into the post 1970s developments under which the emergence of Islamic Republic of Iran brought to the fore the possibility of Iranian influence permeating into South Asian region. However, once the Shah of Iran was removed from power, the relationship with India became much more on the basis of *quid pro quo*. India's relationship with ASEAN states can be a manifestation of benign neglect and also lack of understanding of the larger security dynamics, given the fact that all the major powers in the region — the US, Japan, China, and the erstwhile Soviet Union, were trying to influence these developing economies.

In the politico-security dimension, India's interest in Southeast Asia before 1992 was rather indirect. Japan, which has grown its stature in Southeast Asia, had a direct interest in preserving security and had been interacting with the Southeast Asian states. Japanese forces influx in parts of Southeast Asia meant that it was a strategic periphery for Japan. China also embarked on building its relationship with Southeast Asia to secure its periphery. Since 1970s there has been relative ignorance towards each other between India and ASEAN states, but both sides were concerned with regard to adverse security developments.

As Barry Buzan [Buzan] states, the two regions are situated in two different security complexes. In the context of India-ASEAN interactions, the core issues such as regional security, peace, and prosperity were more prominent in the past. Economic interactions were subdued till the 1990s when the ASEAN countries were seen as one of the important export-oriented economies. The World Bank described them as an economic miracle and as 'new tiger' economies. The differences between China and the erstwhile Soviet Union (later Russia) and also subsequent rapprochement between China and Russia brought about a new role that these two countries were playing in Southeast Asia at that point of time. Even though it is evident, many strategic commentators in India do not acknowledge the fact that India's prime concern was to counter Chinese influence in Indochina as well as in the larger Southeast Asian region. This manifestation came because of India's inimical relationship with China after the war in 1962.

India subsequently tried to forge ties with Southeast Asian states on a bilateral basis because it felt that by dominating Southeast Asia, China could also come to dominate the South Asian region. India's interaction with the Southeast Asian states was primarily to secure the Malacca Straits and the overlapping interest in the Indian Ocean. The political security sphere of the two regions was manifested repeatedly from 1967 to early 1990s, and India was increasingly seen as a middle power and was subsequently also acknowledged as a 'swing state' which could influence things in the Southeast Asia as well as in the Indian Ocean region.

Indian approach to Southeast Asia was aimed at protecting the strategic sea lines of communication in the Indian Ocean as well as building ties with the Indian Ocean littoral countries. The evolution of IOR-ARC (in 1997) was meant to engage the periphery and build the Indian Ocean community. For India, one of the important lessons in the Second World War was when Japan was closer to Northeast India along the Imphal Kohima front. It showed that its eastern sea board was also vulnerable. Therefore, India thought that it would be better to engage the Indochina countries and Myanmar so as to secure its border in the North East. In the past India did not display

enthusiasm towards Vietnamese struggle against French occupation. This was because of the fact that India was wary of the Vietnamese communist influence which promoted a new kind of nationalism. The creation of SEATO in August 1954 after the signing of the Manila treaty also created concerns within India that this treaty would pave the way for the domination of the West over the ASEAN countries.

India's approach to non-alignment, anti-colonial struggle and its own foreign policy of non-interference and *Panchsheel* (five principles of peaceful coexistence) were seen as an insurance against the Cold War politics in late 1960s and 1970s. The unbridgeable chasm between Nehru and Sukarno on the issue of peaceful coexistence brought to the fore the challenges of leadership within developing countries when the two leaders clashed on the Cairo conference in 1964. Further in 1965 during the Afro-Asian conference India tried hard for admission of Malaysia to the conference. At that point of time there was a *Konfrontasi* going on between Malaysia and Indonesia [Pollard, 1979] and this agitated president Sukarno. During the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965, Indonesia supported Pakistan and condemned India as the aggressive side. It was also reported that Indonesia offered to attack Andaman and Nicobar chain of islands through Rando Island.

After the formation of ASEAN Prime Minister Indira Gandhi clearly remarked that India's interest in Southeast Asia should not be viewed from the academic purview and India was equally interested in developments in the Southeast Asian region. In 1967, then foreign minister of India M.C. Chagla visited Malaysia [Jha, 2017] and Singapore primarily to explore the new idea of ASEAN. While visiting Singapore, he clearly remarked that India would like to have a bilateral arrangement with Singapore and in case Singapore joined any regional cooperative organisations, India would be happy to join such a nascent grouping. However, he also added this could only happen after other members approve India's candidature to join the grouping. In the initial formation years India was not invited to join, which was not appreciated by the Indian establishment. However, from the Southeast Asian side, there is another narrative, according to which India refused to join ASEAN when it was invited to. During the period 1967-1968 American role in Vietnam and the British government decision to withdraw its operations from the East of Suez highlighted security concerns in India and Southeast Asia as well.

Within Southeast Asia this meant that Chinese influence will grow in stature and they will have to address Chinese concerns. In fact, India was apprehensive that Thailand and Philippines, which were the members of SEATO, were also invited to join the organisation, and it was seen that the influence of youth alliance partners would be paramount in it. The policymakers were wary of the neutral objective of this organisation. In the joint communique, which was released by India and Indonesia in 1993, the reference to ASEAN was made, and following the disbanding of SEATO, India started looking at ASEAN from a new perspective.

One of the major bedrocks of India's interaction with Southeast Asia, primarily Malaysia, Indonesia, and other likeminded countries, was the Non-Aligned Movement. It was also stated that India could have developed better synergies with such countries as Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia, if it had not signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in 1971. The peaceful nuclear explosion conducted by India in 1974 was seen to be in contradiction with India's resolve to promote international peace and security. The leaders of the ASEAN countries saw India's approach as an ambition to be a prospective hegemon.

India's recognition of unified Vietnam and the Kampuchean government in 1980 were few of the instances when it was seen that India was acting against peace and security in the Southeast

Asian region. During 1977-1979 India faced the first non-Congress government, and this coalition government did not pay any heed to the developments in Southeast Asia. With the resolution of the Cambodian crisis in 1991 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India was in a way compelled to liberalise its economy. The Southeast Asian countries, which were primarily export oriented economies, posed a wonderful example of efficient utilization of resources and harnessing the global market through promotion of trade and investment. The then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China, Indonesia, Australia, and few other countries in late 1980s. These visits were repeated by his successor P.V. Narasimha Rao, and it was acknowledged that Southeast Asia could be an example for India to liberalise its economy and develop its constituencies in this region. During the same time the closed economies such as Vietnam also adopted *Doi Moi* program in 1986 [Jha, Vinh, 2020].

The Indian political establishment appreciated the rise of ASEAN, even though initially it was based on ideological grounds, but subsequently tried to manifest itself as a promising regional organisation. The success of ASEAN also contributed to the formation of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985 [Jha, Vinh, 2020]. However, SAARC did not raise up to the standards because of political disharmony [Fernando, Jha, 2020] and differences of opinion with regard to the opening of trade as well as other related issues.

Within the Indian parliament there was also a lot of discourse related to ASEAN's development and the possibilities of engaging Southeast Asian countries through bilateral trade agreements and attracting investment from them. However, the discussion mostly related to connectivity and promotion of India in the ASEAN economic lobby and not to peace and security within the Southeast Asian region.

In the 1990s then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao visited Singapore with the purpose of expanding cooperation with Southeast Asian countries. The genesis of Look East Policy (LEP) also took shape during the same time when India became ASEAN's sectoral direct partner, then the full dialogue partner and joined ASEAN regional forum in 1996. At around the same time the ASEAN core was also expanding and the four Indochina countries — Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam joined the organisation, making it a comprehensive ten-member institution. Since early 1990s India signed the defence cooperation agreement with the selected ASEAN countries like Malaysia, Vietnam and few others later.

Strategic and economic underpinnings

India's eastern seaboard states such as Andaman and Nicobar Islands are critical for safeguarding its strategic periphery in the Indian Ocean region, therefore it began to pay special attention to Southeast Asian countries, particularly Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia [Brewster, 2012]. A large number of scholars have stated that India is changing strategic outlook from Act East policy to the larger Indo-Pacific strategic outlook, primarily encompassing Southeast Asia, East Asia and Oceania. K. M. Panikkar in his work also suggested creating a steel ring around India's periphery in order to protect the country [Panikkar]. In that context, India needs to reconfigure its approach towards Southeast Asia. K. Subramanyam has also stated that India's natural strategic factor happens to be Indochina and therefore it should engage the strategically relevant countries such as Vietnam so as to put the pressure on China and maintain it for its own security [Subrahmanyam].

India's naval modernisation program also promoted the concept that India was trying to project power beyond the Indian Ocean region. Even though no intimidating tactics were adopted by India in the past, it gave rise to the just concern that a hegemonic India in this region would be detrimental to the interests of smaller states, which were at that time aligned with the US interests. As discussed, K. M. Panikkar proposed that India needed an oceanic policy, which could be seen as a 'steel ring around India' [Panikkar]. It could be protected through strong navy and ties with littoral countries, which were vital for India's security and prosperity. He talked about the steel ring starting from the island of Socotra (Yemen) till Singapore [Ibid]. In order to assuage the concerns of the Southeast Asian countries India has tried to sign defence cooperation agreements with them, as well as MoU on defence cooperation. The India-ASEAN Action Plan 2021-2025⁵ outlines security cooperation and maritime security as major focus areas. The document proposes that two sides would look into maritime security, search and rescue (SAR) operations, defence cooperation, security dialogue, and appropriate coordination mechanisms⁶.

The active engagement with ASEAN as an organisation after 1992 also opened possibilities for India as a dialogue partner and subsequently ASEAN-India summit, which was held in 2002. India has tried to maintain its strategic autonomy so as to protect its interests, while at the same time engaging with the United States and China. Since 2002 India has entered into strategic partnership agreements with the UK, China, Russia, the United States, and Iran. The strategic partnership agreements with Southeast Asian countries were very selective starting from Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore, clearly defining the priority frontiers for India's oceanic outreach. India has tried to prioritise its ties in 'SVIMM mode', which meant Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar and Malaysia.

In terms of economic engagement India's commitment to peace, progress, and shared prosperity in Southeast Asia was articulated in the document released in 2003, which suggested the implementation of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area by 2011. It also focused on the implementation of the early harvest program for facilitating free movement of goods, services and related economic areas. India also acknowledged the ASEAN community comprising security community, economic community and social-cultural community, that would be the major pillars for taking ASEAN forward in future.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi creatively stated that regional security in Southeast Asian region is critical for India's interests particularly in the framework of traditional and non-traditional challenges⁷. He also stated that the export of terror and increasing Islamic radicalisation through ideology of hatred and extreme violence also define the common security challenges that the two regions face. India has always acknowledged that China's assertive military behaviour in the South China Sea and the East China Sea needs to be toned down and there is a need for greater involvement of the dialogue partners in maintaining peace, tranquillity and dialogue between the claimant parties.

With regard to trade and investment India has taken slow steps in engaging with ASEAN. In terms of trade and commerce, India has always supported better ties with its eastern and western

⁵ New ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2021-2025) was adopted. URL: <https://affairscloud.com/asean-india-ministerial-meeting-held-virtually-new-asean-india-plan-of-action-2021-2025-adopted/> (accessed: 10.06.2022).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ India, ASEAN cooperation will be key facilitator for growth of Indo-Pacific region. The Times of India. July 19, 2018. URL: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-asean-cooperation-will-be-key-facilitator-for-growth-of-indo-pacific-region/articleshow/65045055.cms> (accessed: 05.06.2022).

seaboards. The economic dimension of LEP has been substantive, because India entered into Free Trade Agreement with ASEAN after signing early harvest program with Thailand. India also signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Malaysia and Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with Singapore. However, one must acknowledge the fact that the negative list of items which was agreed between India and ASEAN is too long and it needs to be shortened. While the second review of India-Singapore CECA is due, there are certain problems with regard to the opening of both economies. The second review of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement is also due after it has completed one whole decade after the implementation. However, given the strong lobbies on both sides particularly related to coffee, pepper, and other agricultural products, the two sides have reached a deadlock. The two-way merchandise trade between India and South East Asian countries is now more than 70 billion dollars and is expected to reach 100 billion dollars by 2025. In terms of investment flows the Southeast Asian countries have accounted for nearly 12.5 per cent of investment into India since 2000, while FDI outflows from India to ASEAN countries have been about \$38.67 billion.

In terms of trade basket India has been exporting primarily agricultural products, engineering goods, textiles, readymade garments, and chemical and related products, while ASEAN exports food and processed items, raw materials and intermediaries, and manufacturing goods. However, the two sides need to give a further impetus to the trade relationship, because it is still minuscule in comparison with the larger trade basket that the two sides have with the global community.

India also undertook a special initiative and participated in a new kind of subregional formulations — the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in 1997 and the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (2000). The slight momentum was achieved after the BIMSTEC leaders were invited for the BRICS summit in Goa. India also acknowledged the fact that Mekong Ganga cooperation, which main objective was to promote cultural and tourist interactions, needed an economic backdrop. As a result, the Government of India proposed Mekong India Economic Corridor (MIEC), which was aimed at integrating India into the regional value chains. Under various action plans India has also focused on Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV), because of their low-cost labour, availability of land and possibility to develop manufacturing sector in these areas. The action plan released by the two sides in 2016-2020 stated that India would be working on quick impact projects in CLMV. It has been acknowledged that CLMV countries have enjoyed a certain degree of macroeconomic stability. However, the challenges faced in Myanmar after the military coup in 2021 and subsequent instability in Cambodia have been seen as a matter of concern. Another problem is the Chinese investment in Cambodia's border towns, which might influence Indian initiatives in the country.

In terms of connectivity India is also developing the initiative of connecting India's northeast region with Myanmar, Thailand and other Indochina countries. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee once said that it would be prudent to connect Delhi with Hanoi as it would promote the tourism industry and people to people linkages⁸. One of the important incentives for India to develop its tourism circuit is to promote religious tourism, because many countries in Southeast Asia profess Theravada Buddhism.

⁸ Rail link between New Delhi, Hanoi likely: PM. URL: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/165034.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst (accessed: 15.06.2022).

India-ASEAN partnership — Future Blueprint

India-ASEAN strategic partnership, which started in 2012, has opened new vistas of cooperation between the two sides on different aspects related to politics, diplomacy, economics, cultural interactions, and people to people contacts. It has been seen over a period of time that the relationship has anchored on few of the countries which have been at the cornerstone of negotiating with India on economics, trade and investment.

For the next decade, it is suggested that the two sides should look into defence exercises including maritime exercises, introduction, and anti-piracy patrols. In terms of trade and economic collaborations the two sides should look for an early review of the free trade agreement and expanding the basket of goods while reducing the negative list from both sides. This will create a parallel structure, which has not been achieved, given the fact that India has refused to be a part of RCEP. There is a lot to be done in terms of hybrid education mode and collaborations in areas such as green agriculture, food processing, energy storage facilities, marine resources, unified tourism circuits, health care facilities and sharing diagnostics data. Unlikely much was achieved in financial services, infrastructure, science and innovation. The scope of sports interactions is limited, because the two sides have not taken serious note of involving youth through badminton tests, soccer visits, tennis events and undertaking new sports, which are prevalent in India and Southeast Asia. Other areas, in which both India and ASEAN can benefit, include space assets, cyber communication protocols, encrypted military communications, nanotechnology in healthcare, robotic surgery and developing energy sufficiency through sustainable development of new technologies.

It has been found that both India and Southeast Asia could be reluctant in terms of opening up trade and movement of skilled labour. Given the fact that the two regions are developing economies and have to deal with the issues of unemployment, the political establishment is very wary of opening up. Furthermore, when one looks into different aspects enumerated in the India-ASEAN action plan 2021-2025, it is pertinent to note that there are new areas of cooperation including digital innovation, 4th industrial revolution, artificial intelligence, cognitive sciences, modelling and simulation, India-ASEAN scientist conclave, new energy sources, hybrid education, knowledge creation, developing common data sources, alternative medicine, marine resources, addressing ocean pollution and micro plastics, and working on tangible solutions to maritime security issues.

It is a well-known fact that the increased tourism between the two sides has been very effective for people to people contacts and facilitating social and cultural ties. Working on the UN sustainable development goals also requires constant efforts from both sides. In terms of nutrition, food and water security the two sides need to develop a comprehensive plan of action. Further, it has been seen that the ministerial dialogue as well as ASEAN-India summit meetings should be conducted on a regular basis.

India has been working on Quick Impact Projects (QIP) in three Indochina countries including Myanmar, and the expanse and development of these projects require a comprehensive plan of action and cohesive effort. In order to include youth into the larger efforts of integrating the region, there is a need for ASEAN-India youth dialogue which should include school and college students.

While for more than a decade the major agenda items between the two sides have been related to peace, prosperity and stability, their cooperation needs more comprehensive planning. It should be based on a larger trajectory of the relationship which includes regular political interactions at different levels and there is also a need for outlining the new avenues for trade and growth. One of

the elements is reducing the sensitive and negative list with regard to trade between the two sides. Even the review of many of the Free Trade Agreement and comprehensive economic cooperation or partnership agreement requires a little bit of wishful thinking in terms of new sectors such as processed foods, health and medical supplies, developing common data platforms for combating terrorists and their sympathisers, countering radical religious movements, and working with the United Nations on promoting regional security.

Invariably it has come to the notice that many of these initiatives related to maritime security have been ill-considered and therefore there is a need for working on implementing the provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) and regular dialogue between the two sides for protecting the sea lines of communication and securing maritime trade and commerce. India has at one point of time proposed a SAARC satellite, which can be also explored between India and ASEAN given the fact that the space sector is developing very fast between the two regions. This geospatial satellite would be helpful in urban planning, waste management, developing connectivity projects, and helping in tourist circuit.

As it was seen in the past, one of the important areas of cooperation is related to ASEAN convention on counter terrorism and violent extremism. The interaction between the Indian and ASEAN senior officials related to drug trafficking, tracking of transnational criminals, and comprehensive extradition treaty between the two sides would help in finding better avenues for cooperation. Capacity building particularly in vocational training is very instrumental in improving the standards of life in the relatively underdeveloped regions of South Asia. Specific programs, which sustain small scale industries can be important instruments in the resilience of the supply chains across the region.

With the terrorist activity growing in the region the two sides should also envisage common methods to combat terrorism and radicalization. It is expected that this region would be also suffering a new kind of terrorism which will be more ethnic and religion based. India will remain committed to ASEAN's role as the centre of multilateral engagement.

Conclusion

India has acknowledged that ASEAN remains central to its engagement to the region. The number of strategic partnerships, free trade agreements and even strategic dialogues with a number of Southeast Asian nations amplify this approach. The defence cooperation and developing a strategic understanding are also intrinsic to this concept. For India engagement in multilateral institutions has been fulfilling, but at times India has remained as a passive stakeholder and raising voice only when its own critical interests are hampered. India-ASEAN free trade agreement is due to third review and there are chances that the restrictions in trade imposed through negative list would be pruned. Also India has started working on connectivity projects, both physical and digital to bring about synergies with the developing economies. Its Quick Impact Projects (QIP) in the Southeast Asian region enlisted in India-ASEAN action plan 2016-2020 and its successive action plan 2021-2025 highlight the need for working together on maritime security, HADR, defence cooperation, developing road and railways networks and integrating the two regions in regional value chains. However, ASEAN nations have at time lamented India's policy towards Southeast Asia and have asked India to be a responsible active participant in the developments in the region. It can be concluded that the synergies developed between both sides have been growing and new complementarities in economic, defence and security fields are still explored.

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