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"India-ASEAN Partnership: Advancing Cooperation and Shared Futures"

This article covers "Daily Current Affairs" and topic details of the "India-ASEAN Partnership: Advancing Cooperation and Shared Futures"

Syllabus mapping:

GS-2: International Relations: India and its Act East Policy

For Prelims:

What is ASEAN? India- ASEAN relationship facts, RECEP, BIMSTEC, and Ganga Mekong Cooperation members.

For Mains:

How did the India Look East Policy transform into the Act East Policy? What are the major driving areas of the India- ASEAN relationship, Issues of divergence, and suggestions for future engagement?

Why in the News?

India's Prime Minister recently made headlines with two landmark visits to ASEAN countries: Brunei and Singapore. His trip to Brunei was historic, marking the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister in over 40 years, reflecting a renewed commitment to strengthening ties with this key Southeast Asian nation. Meanwhile, the visit to Singapore heralded a new chapter in bilateral relations, elevating them to a



Strategic Comprehensive Partnership.



INDIA- ASEAN RELATIONSHIP

Historical Context and Policy Evolution:

Look East Policy (1992):

Origins: Initiated by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, focusing on strengthening ties with Southeast Asia. Later extended to East Asia and Oceania.

Act East Policy (2011-2014):

Revised Focus: Encouraged by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to transition from "Look East" to "Act East."

Adoption: Formalized by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, emphasizing proactive engagement in the Asia-Pacific region.

India - ASEAN Engagement:

Early Engagement: India became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1992, a Full Dialogue Partner in 1996, and achieved Summit Partnership status in 2002.

East Asia Summit (2005): India became a founder member of the East Asia Summit, broadening its engagement with ASEAN and other regional powers.

ADMM Plus (2010): India joined the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus, including key regional and global players.

BIMSTEC: India promotes sub-regional groups like BIMSTEC, encompassing Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, with Nepal and Bhutan joining later.

Ganga-Mekong Cooperation: Focuses on connectivity and cooperation with countries like Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar.

History of ASEAN:

Formation (1967): ASEAN was founded by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand to foster regional peace and economic cooperation.

Expansion: Brunei (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos, Myanmar (1997) and Cambodia (1999).

Forum Expansions:

ASEAN Plus Three (1997): Expanded to include China, South Korea, and Japan. **East Asia**

Summit (2005): Further expanded to include India, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, and the United States.

ASEAN Charter (2008): Adopted on December 15, this Charter granted ASEAN a formal legal identity and enhanced its role in regional community-building.

ADMM Plus (2010): India joined the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus, including key regional and global players.



Key Areas of Cooperation

- 1. Political and Security Cooperation:** India actively participates in key regional forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). These engagements reinforce collaborative efforts on security issues and contribute to regional stability.
- 2. Economic Cooperation:** ASEAN, India's fourth-largest trading partner, saw trade rise from \$65 billion in 2015-16 to \$70 billion in 2016-17. The ASEAN-India Free Trade Area agreements, operational since July 2015, have significantly boosted trade and investment.
- 3. Socio-Cultural Cooperation:** People-to-people initiatives, including Youth summits and cultural programs, further deepen socio-cultural ties between the regions.
- 4. Connectivity Projects:** Infrastructure projects like the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multimodal Project aim to enhance regional connectivity. The 2017 Connectivity Summit highlighted the importance of improving both physical and digital infrastructure.

5. **Environment and climate change:** The ASEAN-India S&T Development Fund and the ASEAN-India Green Fund provide vital resources for science, technology, and environmental initiatives.
6. **Functional Areas:** This includes establishing space tracking stations and upgrading facilities for space collaboration. Educational initiatives, such as the Centers of Excellence and the e-Network for telemedicine, underscore ongoing cooperation in research and development.
7. **1.5 Track diplomacy:** The Delhi Dialogue is an annual Track 1.5 event that facilitates discussions on politico-security and economic issues between ASEAN and India.
8. **Institutional Mechanism:** Established in 2013, the ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) supports the implementation of connectivity initiatives and organizes events and workshops to foster deeper engagement between ASEAN and India.

Areas of Differences

1. **Geopolitical Tensions:** India's strategic alliances and regional rivalries, particularly with China, can create friction with ASEAN countries that may have different geopolitical concerns or alignments.
2. **Economic Imbalances:** Discrepancies in trade balances and investment flows, such as India's withdrawal from the RCEP, can strain economic relations and hinder deeper economic integration.
3. **Different Human Rights Standards:** Divergent approaches to human rights and democratic values between India and ASEAN countries can lead to diplomatic tensions, especially in multilateral forums.
4. **Resource Management Conflicts:** Differences in energy policies, such as India's reliance on coal versus ASEAN's shift toward renewables, can create conflicts in environmental and energy cooperation.
5. ASEAN pursuing immediate carbon reduction and India aiming for net zero by 2070, can complicate collaborative environmental efforts.
6. **Digital Trade Barriers:** India's data localization laws and digital trade regulations may conflict with ASEAN countries' tech operations, creating barriers to seamless digital trade and technology transfer.
7. **Strategic Priorities Misalignment:** India's focus on Indo-Pacific security frameworks and alliances, like the Quad, can sometimes clash with ASEAN's preference for a neutral, inclusive security approach.
8. **Border security:** The recent clashes in Manipur are mainly attributed to the supply of weapons from the groups in Myanmar, complicating the ASEAN engagement with India.

The future course of action to enhance the India- ASEAN relationship:

1. **Enhance Geopolitical Coordination:** Foster better alignment on geopolitical issues and navigate the complexities of regional security dynamics, especially concerning China.
2. **Accelerate Connectivity Projects:** Expedite infrastructure projects and connectivity initiatives to fully integrate Northeast India with Southeast Asia.
3. **Promote Digital and Technological Partnerships:** Leverage technological advancements and digital growth to enhance bilateral economic ties and innovation.
4. **Strengthen Human Security Cooperation:** Address human security challenges through collaborative efforts to manage cross-border crises and natural disasters.
5. **Synergies in Indo-Pacific Visions:** Emphasized the alignment of Indo-Pacific visions between India and ASEAN, with ASEAN as the focal point of the Quad's vision.

6. **Climate Change and Sustainability:** Joint efforts in renewable energy, waste management, and disaster mitigation can address pressing climate challenges. Promote cooperation on the Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative.
7. **Reassess Trade Agreements:** Revisit trade agreements like RCEP to address concerns and explore avenues for deeper economic integration.
8. **Global South Issues:** Advocate for collective action on issues faced by the Global South in multilateral forums.
9. **Counter-Terrorism:** Strengthen collective efforts against terrorism, terror financing, and cyber-disinformation.
10. **Maritime Safety and Security:** Focus on improving maritime safety, security, and domain awareness.

Conclusion

India's historical connections with Southeast Asia and the evolution of its relationship with ASEAN reflect significant progress, but there is ample room for enhancement. By addressing existing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities for growth and cooperation, both India and ASEAN can unlock the full potential of their partnership. Continued engagement and proactive strategies will be essential in shaping a robust and dynamic future for India-ASEAN relations.

PRELIMS QUESTION:

Q. Consider the following countries:

1. India
2. Bangladesh
3. Nepal
4. Cambodia
5. Singapore
6. Thailand
7. Myanmar

How many of the given above countries are members of the Ganga Suvarnabhumi Programme (GSP)?

- A. Only Two
- B. Only Three
- C. Only Four
- D. Only five

ANSWER: C

MAINS QUESTION:

Analyze how India's 'Act East' policy can be adapted to better align with ASEAN's strategic interests and geopolitical concerns, particularly in the context of regional security dynamics and the influence of external powers like the US and China?



[Munde Dhananjay Navnath](#)

INDIA, EU STRENGTHEN DEFENCE TIES IN INDO-PACIFIC INITIATIVE

SYLLABUS MAPPING:

GS-3-Security:India, EU Strengthen Defence Ties in Indo-Pacific Initiative

FOR PRELIMS:

Discuss the significance of the strengthened defense ties between India and the European Union (EU) within the context of the Indo-Pacific region. How do these enhanced relations

impact regional security dynamics, and what are the potential challenges and benefits for both parties involved?

FOR MAINS:

Evaluate the implications of the strengthened defense ties between India and the European Union (EU) within the Indo-Pacific region. How does this enhanced partnership influence regional security dynamics, and what are the potential challenges and benefits for both India and the EU?

RECENT CONTEXT:

The Indo-Pacific region, a pivotal arena for global trade and geopolitical maneuvering, has seen a notable shift in strategic alliances and defense partnerships in recent years. Among the key developments is the strengthening of defense ties between India and the European Union (EU). This emerging alliance reflects broader geopolitical trends and addresses specific regional challenges. This article delves into the recent context of this strategic partnership, exploring its implications, challenges, and potential benefits for both India and the EU.

OBJECTIVES OF THE VISIT

The EU delegation to India helped arrange this visit. It included officials from India's Defence Ministry and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). The purpose was to understand the EU's security and defence systems, particularly its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The CSDP focuses on the EU's missions, including in important regions like the Indo-Pacific, where both India and the EU have shared interests.

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE INDO-PACIFIC

The Indo-Pacific region, encompassing the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, is pivotal to global trade and security. It is home to vital sea lanes of communication, through which a substantial portion of global trade transits. The region also hosts several key maritime chokepoints and is central to global energy supplies. Its strategic significance is further amplified by the presence of major economies and emerging powers, contributing to a complex and competitive geopolitical environment.

As the region grows in importance, India and the EU have identified it as a focal point for enhancing their strategic and defense collaboration. Both parties recognize the need to address challenges such as maritime security, territorial disputes, and the rise of regional powers like China.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIA-EU DEFENSE COOPERATION

- Joint Statements and Strategic Frameworks:** In recent months, India and the EU have made significant strides in formalizing their defense cooperation through joint statements and strategic frameworks. A key development came in July 2024, when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen issued a joint declaration reaffirming their commitment to a rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific. This declaration emphasized their shared objectives of promoting maritime security, countering illegal activities at sea, and fostering regional stability.
- Enhanced Maritime Security Collaboration:** A significant aspect of the India-EU defense partnership is the enhancement of maritime security cooperation. This includes joint naval

exercises designed to improve interoperability and strategic coordination. In August 2024, India and the EU conducted their largest joint naval exercise to date, involving complex maneuvers and tactical operations aimed at addressing maritime threats such as piracy, trafficking, and territorial disputes. This exercise was a testament to their commitment to maintaining a secure and open maritime domain.

3. **Capacity Building and Technological Exchange:** The EU has also committed to supporting India's maritime capabilities through capacity-building initiatives. This includes providing technical assistance, training, and resources to enhance India's ability to secure its maritime borders and contribute to regional stability. The EU's involvement in technological exchange aims to modernize India's naval assets and improve its maritime surveillance capabilities.
4. **Strategic Dialogues and High-Level Meetings:** High-level strategic dialogues between India and the EU have been instrumental in deepening their defense ties. These dialogues, held on various occasions, have addressed key issues such as regional security dynamics, intelligence sharing, and strategic cooperation. Notable recent meetings include the India-EU Strategic Partnership Summit in June 2024, where leaders from both sides discussed the evolving security landscape and outlined future cooperation areas.

GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT AND MOTIVATIONS

1. **China's Expanding Influence:** One of the primary motivations behind the enhanced India-EU defense partnership is the growing influence of China in the Indo-Pacific. China's assertive policies in the South China Sea, coupled with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), have raised concerns among regional and global players. The EU and India view their collaboration as a strategic counterbalance to China's expanding footprint and a way to uphold international maritime norms.
2. **Regional Rivalries and Security Concerns:** The Indo-Pacific region is characterized by a complex web of regional rivalries and security concerns. Issues such as territorial disputes, maritime boundary conflicts, and the presence of non-state actors contribute to a volatile security environment. India and the EU's defense partnership aims to address these challenges through joint efforts, including maritime patrols, surveillance, and collaborative security measures.
3. **Alignment with the Quad and Broader Partnerships:** The Quad, comprising the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, represents a significant security framework in the Indo-Pacific. India's enhanced defense collaboration with the EU aligns with the Quad's objectives of promoting a rules-based order and ensuring freedom of navigation. Additionally, India and the EU are engaging with other regional partners, such as ASEAN countries, to strengthen collective security arrangements.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. **Navigating Regional Complexities:** The Indo-Pacific is a region with diverse and often conflicting interests. Balancing defense cooperation with the need to maintain diplomatic relations with other major players, including China and ASEAN countries, poses a significant challenge. India and the EU must navigate these complexities while ensuring that their collaboration does not exacerbate regional tensions.
2. **Maritime Security Threats:** Addressing maritime security threats such as piracy, terrorism, and illegal fishing requires effective collaboration and coordination. The India-EU partnership aims to enhance their ability to respond to these threats through joint initiatives and capacity-building efforts. However, managing these threats while respecting international laws and norms remains a critical challenge.

3. **Interoperability and Integration:** Achieving seamless interoperability between Indian and EU forces is essential for effective collaboration. While joint naval exercises and strategic dialogues are important steps, there is a need for continued efforts to integrate their operational capabilities and ensure smooth coordination during joint operations.
4. **Balancing Economic and Strategic Interests:** The EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific is driven by both economic and strategic considerations. While the EU seeks to protect its economic interests and ensure the security of maritime trade routes, it must also navigate its relationship with China, a major trading partner. Balancing these interests while pursuing strategic goals is a complex task.

RECENT NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

1. **EU Naval Presence and Deployments:** In July 2024, the EU announced plans to increase its naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, with deployments aimed at ensuring maritime security and supporting regional stability. This decision reflects the EU's commitment to enhancing its strategic role in the region and aligns with its defense cooperation goals with India.
2. **India-EU Maritime Forum:** The inaugural India-EU Maritime Forum, held in August 2024, was a key platform for discussing collaborative strategies to address maritime security challenges. The forum highlighted the need for greater coordination and joint initiatives to tackle issues such as piracy, illegal fishing, and maritime boundary disputes.
3. **Strategic Partnership Agreements:** Recent agreements between India and the EU have focused on enhancing maritime surveillance and intelligence-sharing capabilities. These agreements are designed to bolster both parties' ability to monitor and respond to security threats in the Indo-Pacific.
4. **Joint Exercises and Training Programs:** The joint naval exercises conducted in August 2024 marked a significant milestone in the India-EU defense collaboration. The exercises involved complex maneuvers and tactical operations, demonstrating the growing interoperability between Indian and EU naval forces. Additionally, training programs aimed at improving maritime security capabilities have been launched as part of this collaboration.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Looking ahead, the future of India-EU defense ties in the Indo-Pacific appears promising but will require ongoing efforts to address regional challenges and adapt to evolving security dynamics. Both parties are likely to continue strengthening their collaboration through joint initiatives, strategic dialogues, and capacity-building efforts. As the geopolitical landscape evolves, the India-EU partnership will play a crucial role in shaping the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region.

CONCLUSION

The recent strengthening of defense ties between India and the EU represents a significant development in the Indo-Pacific's strategic landscape. Their collaborative efforts reflect a shared commitment to promoting a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific while addressing regional security challenges. Despite the complexities and challenges involved, the partnership between India and the EU offers a promising path forward in navigating the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region.



PRELIM QUESTION:

- Q. Which of the following statements best describes the recent strengthening of defense ties between India and the European Union (EU) in the Indo-Pacific region?
- A) The primary goal of the India-EU defense cooperation is to counter the influence of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region.
 - B) The India-EU defense partnership focuses on enhancing maritime security, conducting joint naval exercises, and promoting a rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific.
 - C) India and the EU have primarily strengthened their defense ties in response to regional tensions in the Mediterranean Sea.
 - D) The recent India-EU defense initiatives are solely focused on providing economic aid and trade benefits to the participating countries.

Answer Key: (b)

MAINS QUESTION:

- Q. Analyze how the enhanced defense cooperation between India and the EU reflects their strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. What are the major drivers behind this collaboration?

(150words)

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