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INDIA–ASEAN AND EAST ASIA SUMMIT

Strengthening Maritime Security

1. Latest News

At the 21st East Asia Summit (EAS) and 23rd ASEAN-India Summit in Manila, the Indian PM announced several initiatives to deepen India's strategic, economic and maritime engagement with Southeast Asia.

The initiatives focus on maritime security, freedom of navigation, cybersecurity, critical minerals, disaster management and people-to-people connectivity.

The announcements reflect India's commitment to a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific and its broader Act East Policy.

2. Seafarers' Safety and Maritime Security

Seafarers' Safety Initiative

India launched an initiative among EAS members (11 ASEAN countries + 8 dialogue partners = ASEAN Plus) to strengthen cooperation in joint training and emergency response for seafarers.

Growing Maritime Threats

- Commercial ships carrying Indian nationals have faced attacks amid conflicts in the Strait of Hormuz and Black Sea.
- At least 22 Indian nationals have reportedly been killed since the US-Israel war against Iran began in February 2026.

Maritime Cooperation

The Indian PM proposed a long-term ASEAN-India maritime cooperation plan covering:

- Maritime connectivity and scientific research.
- Disaster management and Coast Guard cooperation.
- Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).
- Seafarers' safety and security.

Significance: The initiative seeks to protect maritime trade routes, ensure freedom of navigation and strengthen collective responses to emerging maritime threats.

3. East Asia Summit – Addressing Emerging Security Challenges

The PM highlighted multiple challenges affecting regional stability:

- Geopolitical conflicts: Conflicts are disrupting global supplies of food, fuel and fertilisers.

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- Maritime insecurity: Ships and seafarers are increasingly vulnerable to attacks on international waterways.
- Terrorism and transnational crime: Cyber fraud, online scams and other forms of cross-border crime are emerging security threats.

He emphasised that the world needs peace, stability and predictability, with dialogue, mutual respect and cooperation forming the foundation of international relations.

India reiterated its support for peaceful resolution of conflicts, including those in Ukraine and West Asia.

4. Digital Security and Cybercrime Cooperation

Recognising the growing threats in the digital domain, India proposed:

- EAS cyber crime conference: To be hosted at India's National Forensic Sciences University for regional cooperation and capacity building.
- Joint cyber forensics training: To strengthen investigative capabilities and facilitate knowledge-sharing among ASEAN countries.
- Combating online scams: EAS leaders issued a joint statement on addressing online scams and cyber-enabled criminal activities.
- Responsible AI: India advocated human-centric, inclusive and safe Artificial Intelligence.
- Digital watermarking: Promoted as a technological tool to counter deepfakes and misinformation.

Significance: These initiatives seek to strengthen regional digital trust, cyber resilience and cooperation against transnational cybercrime.

5. Strengthening India-ASEAN Strategic Partnership

The Indian PM reiterated that ASEAN unity and centrality are at the heart of India's Act East Policy.

- India-ASEAN relations have expanded beyond historical and cultural connections into digital technology, defence and space.
- The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership will be further strengthened to promote a secure, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and Viksit Bharat 2047 offer opportunities for aligning regional development priorities.
- India and ASEAN together represent nearly one-fourth of the global population, highlighting the importance of cooperation over competition.

New Areas of Cooperation

- Tourism: Free e-visas for ASEAN tourists visiting India.
- Nuclear energy: Technical exchanges and cooperation.

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- Critical minerals: Cooperation in mining and critical mineral supply chains.
- Space: Joint space hackathon.
- Youth engagement: Youth summit, young parliamentarian exchanges and start-up hackathons.
- Education: Enhanced scholarships for ASEAN students at Nalanda University.
- Disaster management: Adoption of an ASEAN-India joint statement on disaster management.

6. Strengthening Cultural and Regional Engagement

India emphasised its shared civilisational heritage with Southeast Asia.

- National Maritime Heritage Complex, Lothal: Being developed to showcase India's maritime history and its historical connections with the region.
- EAS University Heads Conclave: To be organised at Nalanda to promote cooperation in education and research.

Progress in India-ASEAN Relations

Since 2014, India has undertaken several initiatives to strengthen regional engagement, for example, nearly 250 Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), over 10,000 skill-development scholarships, etc.

The adoption of the ASEAN-India joint statement on disaster management further reinforces cooperation in regional resilience.

7. Way Forward

- Rules-based order: Uphold UNCLOS principles, freedom of navigation and peaceful settlement of maritime disputes.
- Economic integration: Enhance trade, investment, connectivity and resilient critical-mineral supply chains.
- Digital resilience: Develop common frameworks for cybercrime investigation, AI governance and digital trust.
- Institutional cooperation: Translate summit-level commitments into time-bound projects with measurable outcomes.
- People-to-people ties: Expand educational exchanges, tourism, youth engagement and cultural diplomacy.

8. Conclusion

India's expanding engagement with ASEAN and EAS reflects its ambition to emerge as a reliable regional partner and a key pillar of Indo-Pacific stability.

Source: Indian Express (IE)