



RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND ASEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF A SHIFTING GLOBAL ORDER

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Abstract:

The shifting order of things in international politics will have repercussions for the ASEAN area, and those repercussions will take many different shapes. As the state of international politics continues to shift swiftly, it is beginning to exert its influence in other places as well. It is a reflection of the intricate interdependence that exists between India and ASEAN in terms of their interactions. The geopolitics of South and Southeast Asia provide the area a significant role in the politics of the wider world. The area became the battleground for great power competition during the time of the Cold War. But the year 1991 was a turning point in international politics, marking the beginning of significant shifts in the political landscape; in response to these new conditions, India began the process of liberalising its economy at that time. During this same time period, New Delhi finally implemented its long-awaited policy to accord the ASEAN area a greater priority. But since there has been a shift in the power structure in the area, the region is becoming significant once again. This power structure is under danger as a result of China's rise, and some nations, like Vietnam, the Philippines, and Brunei, are already in conflict with China over territorial claims to islands. The dynamic in the Asia-Pacific region is shifting quickly, and nations in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) cannot afford to be resistant to these shifts. India is looking to achieve a great game equilibrium in the region, one in which its fundamental economic and geopolitical interests are neither threatened nor limited. The United States has shifted its strategic stance in order to maintain its hegemonic order, which required them to do so. Insofar as India's interests are concerned in the Asia-Pacific region, ensuring the free flow of commerce and maintaining respect for the laws of the sea, in addition to challenging China's preeminent position, are important realities. Because of the shift in the regional power structure, ties between India and ASEAN might become quite significant.

Key Words: ASEAN Investment Area, ASEAN, QUAD, Look- East Policy, Global Politics.

Introduction:

The globalised world of today is linked and reliant on one another in many different ways. Today's states are not just economically but also politically interdependent, and this interdependence contributes to the international system's complexity while also fostering cooperation. Because of their intricate interdependence¹, states are in a class of their own when it comes to international politics. The profound interdependence that exists between India and South East Asia² is reflected in their interactions with one another. The geopolitical situation in South East Asia makes the area very relevant in the context of world politics. Because of the geopolitical circumstances during the time of the Cold War, the area was considered to be particularly vital. The area became the battleground for the competition between major world powers. In the realm of India's foreign policy, the South East Asian area has always been considered an essential issue. This has been the case for quite some time. The connections between the two parties date back hundreds of years. Many countries in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, have been influenced culturally by India. One of these countries is Indonesia. It is also crucial to highlight that despite the robust partnership that exists between India and ASEAN, the expanding influence of China in South East Asia causes worries for the Indian security aspects. This is something that should not be overlooked. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is quickly becoming a focal point in India's understanding of Asia and its future, as well as an essential component in the formation of a security order that will serve India's best interests. As a result of the continuous power competition in the area, the South East Asian region has once again emerged as a subject at the forefront of discussion and debate in academic circles. The rising influence of China in the South China Sea, along with the expansion of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) into the Indo-Pacific, has transformed the area into a theatre for competition between major world powers.

South East Asia in India's Foreign Policy:

During the time of the Cold War, India's foreign policy was heavily influenced by the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). On the other hand, South East Asia evolved as the battleground for major power competition. Consequently, New Delhi was warily forging links with the nations of South East Asia despite the historic linkages between the two regions.

The nations that make up the South East Asia area have formed their diplomatic ties with one another in their own unique ways. Burma, Indonesia, Laos, and Cambodia all built their relationships with one another

while maintaining a distance from both of the other groups. While Thailand and South Vietnam supported the American bloc, North Vietnam was a supporter of the Soviet Union bloc.³ When the military of Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978, the situation became more problematic than it had been before. Heng Samrin took over as leader of the country when the Khmer Rouge government fell. India acknowledged the government that Vietnam had imposed in Cambodia. The United States, Japan, and the European Union all voiced their disagreement with India's decision. Some of the most significant shifts in history took occurred in the 1990s, including the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, which led to the birth of globalisation; the ascent of the United States, which led to the opening of the Indian economy; and other similar events.⁴

The issue has evolved quite a bit since we last spoke. India now appears differently in ASEAN's eyes. In addition, India launched its "Look East" strategy with the purpose of strengthening its ties to the ASEAN area. Additionally, it was considered as a way to compete with the influence that China had in the area. India is actively working to revitalise economic, cultural, and security relations via a variety of different programmes. In the current situation, India has also taken certain preventative actions, and the effects can be seen in the fact that India is looking farther afield than South East Asia with its newly enhanced "Act East" strategy. India has also strengthened its footprint in the area as a direct result of this strategy. Additionally, New Delhi is working along with ASEAN countries on a variety of projects, including the BIMSTEC Summit, the East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Regional Forum.

India-South East Asia Relations:

The link between India and Southeast Asia dates back hundreds of years. There were several South Indian emperors who reigned over some of the kingdoms in Southeast Asia. Throughout its history, India has had a strong connection with the nations of Southeast Asia in terms of their religious practises, cultural practises, and linguistic practises. After the Asian Relation Conference in March 1946 and the special conference on Indonesia that was held in January 1946 to assist the liberation fight of Southeast Asian Countries, India's position became politically prominent. These conferences were held to help Southeast Asian Countries. At the meeting that took place in Bandung in 1965, India played an important part at the summit to demonstrate its sympathy with the nations that had just gained their independence. In spite of this, India's sphere of influence shrank throughout this decade as a direct result of their loss in the border conflicts with China in 1962.⁵

After a period in which the globe saw a great deal of change on the international stage as a result of the advent of globalisation, the relations began to gain speed in the year 1991. The years that have gone have resulted in India and ASEAN elevating their relationship to that of a strategic partnership. The 'Look East' policy has been updated by the Modi government to the 'Act East' strategy in order to have a deeper and more widespread interaction with the area.

India-South East Asia Economic Engagement:

The foundation of ties between India and South East Asian countries may be said to be commerce and investment. At the time that India began implementing its strategy of trade liberalisation in 1991–1992, ASEAN nations accounted for six percent of India's overall commerce. However, given that it accounted for barely one percent of ASEAN's overall commerce, the sum in question was not very large. After the end of the Cold War, India placed a greater emphasis on developing its position as a global leader in the information and technology area.⁶ In recent years, economic ties between India and ASEAN have reached unprecedented heights, as shown by the fact that ASEAN has just surpassed China to become India's fourth biggest trade partner. In the fiscal year 2017–18, the total value of commerce between India and ASEAN nations was 81.33 billion dollars. In the 2017–18 fiscal year, India's exports to the ASEAN area were 34.20 billion US dollars, while its imports from the region during the same time period totaled 47.13 billion US dollars. The area has a negative trade balance of \$12.93 billion US dollars.⁷ India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) signed a free trade agreement in 2005 to facilitate increased commercial activity. It was reported by the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry that India's exports to ASEAN in the year 2019-20 were US\$ 31.49 billion, while the country's imports from the region reached US\$ 55.37 billion. This information was found in the study. On the other hand, India's trade imbalance with ASEAN nations is now 24 billion US dollars. In 2019-20, the total value of commerce between the two countries was 86.92 billion US dollars.⁸

Commerce and investment interaction between ASEAN and India has developed over the course of time, resulting in a manifold growth in the amount of commerce that occurs bilaterally between the two parties. India also has opportunities in the ASEAN Investment Area (AIA), which allows the country to expand its spectrum of manufacturing products into other ASEAN nations. This might be a significant potential for India in the ASEAN region. In 2016, the leaders of ASEAN unanimously agreed to develop a master plan on ASEAN connectivity 2025 in an effort to increase the amount of money invested in the ASEAN area.⁹

But as compared to commerce between China and ASEAN countries, India's participation is substantially less. According to the findings of a report. In 2018, the total value of commerce between China and ASEAN reached a new all-time high of 587.87 billion US dollars. The total amount of investment in both directions is 205.71 billion dollars, according to the Chinese Department of Asian Affairs.¹⁰ In the year of 2003

India and ASEAN signed an agreement called "Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation".

Political Perspectives:

The political interactions may be seen on a variety of platforms, such as high-level talks between the heads of state and other meetings at the official level. India has thirty different platforms for sectoral conversation, and it has had relations with other South East Asian nations at the ministerial level. During the time of the Cold War, India showed little interest in developing a substantial relationship with the South East Asian area. The geopolitical atmosphere of the time period known as the Cold War kept each other at a remove. The events that took place in the 1990s, such as the fall of the Soviet Union and the growth of regionalization, the establishment of the People's Republic of China, and the assault on the twin towers in the United States, compelled India to consider the significance of regional organisation. The further implementation of India's 'Look East' Policy proved to be a pivotal turning point in India's ties with ASEAN.

The political collaboration can also be observed in the development of the Non-alignment Movement (NAM), which had been organised by Jawahar Lal Nehru, Sukarno, Tito, Nassir, and Nkrumah in order to serve as a deterrent to the antagonistic plan of the two great powers. NAM was established in order to prevent the two great powers from enacting their hostile purpose. The use of peaceful means to resolve conflicts has always been a central tenet of Indian foreign policy, both on the national and the international levels.

During his visit to Singapore on November 14-15, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with other leaders of ASEAN nations and emphasised the importance of bilateral cooperation.¹¹ In October of 2020, there will be a virtual gathering of the 23rd ASEAN-India Senior Official Meetings. During this summit, topics of critical significance, such as political, economic, cultural, and security concerns, as well as their respective developments, were discussed. It has also been explored how the international community may work together more effectively to combat the COVID-19 epidemic.

Security Cooperation in Changing Regional Scenario:

Cooperation on matters of security is another crucial component of the connections that exist between the two parties. During the time of the Second World War, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose established the Indian National Army, which received assistance from a number of countries in Southeast Asia. However, it is also a fact that the INA suffered a setback as a result of Subhash Chandra Bose's disappearance. Following its attainment of independence, India entered into mutual defence pacts with Indonesia and Burma. When it was first established in 1967, ASEAN was seen as an anti-communist organisation; hence, India keeps its distance from any action involving ASEAN. On the other hand, India became a sectoral partner in 1992.¹²

Terrorism and extremism are the new challenges that the ASEAN area must contend with in the modern day. The increasing might of China has also presented a fresh challenge. The presence of China in the Indian Ocean as well as its naval activity created potential dangers in the future. The member nations of ASEAN perceived China as a potential major new threat, and as a result, they have given the United Nations permission to develop bases in the ASEAN area. The United States was interested in acquiring vital facilities from Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Malaysia offered the Lumut Naval Dock-yard. It should also be mentioned that China has engaged in armed conflict with a country from Southeast Asia on many occasions due to a disagreement on the South China Sea. The members of ASEAN are also keeping an eye on New Delhi as a potential heavyweight opponent to China. In 1994, the ASEAN Regional forum, sometimes known as the ARF, was created. Additionally affiliated with the ARF is the nation of India. Since its inception in 1996, India has been an active participant in the forum. Additionally, India is assisting Southeast Asian nations in its military endeavours, and in the year 2000, at a summit between India and Vietnam, the two countries signed a defence cooperation pact in which India committed to provide advanced military helicopters.¹³

India and Singapore agreed on cooperate military drills under an accord. India and ASEAN developed dialogue cooperation in 1995 and resolved regional and global security challenges.¹⁴ A key and highest defence consultation mechanism in ASEAN is the "ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting". The severity of South China Sea confrontations has made surrounding nations susceptible to state-sponsored cyber attacks on government offices. China is conducting at least six ASEAN cyber espionage efforts. China is generating gear among ASEAN nations, and they want an alternative.¹⁵

Strategic Partnership:

India and ASEAN's strategic relationship strengthens connections. India-ASEAN marked 25 years of strategic partnership in 2017. RCEP and TPP were extensively discussed during the sessions. Ten ASEAN countries and Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, China, and India form RCEP. RCEP fructification will treble member trade. The India-ASEAN senior officer summit on April 11-12, 2019, determined to take the strategic alliance to new heights to address rising problems. South East Asia has being terrorised. This threat was shown by the 2002 Bali bombing. India and ASEAN share vital terror intelligence. Trade and investment are also expanded under the strategic relationship.¹⁶ Regional economic cooperation has accelerated growth.

The Presence of Indian Diaspora in South East Asia:

Significant Indian Diaspora lives there. Indian diaspora overseas have always been important. In

Malaysia and Singapore, 8-9% of the population is Indian. Indians settle in IT and education. It is also seen in South East Asian cultures, and European researchers named it "Further India". Indian diaspora in South East Asia, mostly Sikhs, Sindhis, and Tamils, spread Indian culture. Indians are also prominent in South East Asian political parties like Malaysia's.¹⁷

The 'Look East' Policy:

The 'Look East' strategy was introduced to boost India's outreach to South East Asia owing to its geopolitical and geostrategic relevance. India's post-Cold War involvement with the area differed from its previous engagement since the world had changed, including the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.¹⁹ India's 'Look East' strategy is strategic and economic. India aimed to increase its commercial reach in ASEAN and is a frequent partner in South East Asian conferences.¹⁸ The 1990s Soviet Union fall, India's economic crisis, and globalisation drove India to change its economy. All India South East Asia estimates were inaccurate. India has to pay heed to South East Asia's 'Asian Tigers' ascent. The 'Look East' Policy gave India a major economic partner in South East Asia. This "Look East" policy's economic part led to the 2003 India-ASEAN "Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement" and 2009 Free Trade Agreement in goods. India maintains cross-border ASEAN ties.

Strategic ambitions are another 'Look East' policy feature. To achieve global status, New Delhi must broaden its strategic outreach beyond South Asia, including South East Asia. As a growing power, India may be crucial globally. ASEAN nations clearly see 'Rising China' as a security concern. ASEAN nations see India as a security supplier who can counterbalance China's military and economy. India, a key partner of South East Asia, has increased her presence in the area via bilateral naval drills and maritime patrols.²⁰

The NDA took power in 2014. New Delhi expanded its Look East strategy to "Act East" under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, emphasising the Asia-Pacific region. Today, Asia-Pacific is a key destination owing to its geostrategic position. However, India enjoys strong connections with Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. India's Asia-Pacific foreign policy promotes economic cooperation, strategic engagement, and cultural connections. New Delhi also has strategic ties with South East Asian and Asia-Pacific nations including Japan, Republic of Korea, and Australia.²¹

Chinese Factor in India-ASEAN Relations:

Rising China threatens India and ASEAN security. The major event of this century is China's growth. China's growth is unprecedented in size, pace, and persistence. China has had many South China Sea conflicts with South East Asian states, notably the Philippines and Vietnam. New Delhi has major ASEAN interests. In 2017-18, India-South East Asia trade was US\$81.33 billion, expanding significantly. India also engages with major nations like the US, Australia, and Japan to further its ASEAN interests.²² ASEAN has taken many South China Sea measures. ASEAN leaders voiced alarm about rising South China Sea tension during the 2014 ASEAN Summit. The leaders proposed a six-point South China Sea concept. ASEAN has made several attempts to integrate its market to facilitate free commerce between nations and internationally. ASEAN is of increased importance to its neighbours and the West due to its strategic position and potential economy.²³

Conclusion:

The level of engagement between India and the nations of Southeast Asia is steadily increasing. The economies of Southeast Asian nations are merging at a quicker rate than in the past. This economic integration has the potential to provide developing powers like India with significant opportunities. The area is also abundant in natural resources, such as those that can fulfil India's ever-increasing need for electricity. The 'Look East' strategy that India adopted in the 1990s started to bear fruit around that time. Greater economic connectivity throughout Asia will play an important part in the development of future prospects. When it comes to addressing the turmoil in India's North-Eastern Region (NER), having the support of Southeast Asian countries would be of great assistance. Both India and ASEAN need to be aware of a new growing danger in the form of a rising China. The most effective strategy for dealing with the Chinese superpowers will be to work together. The level of involvement that India has with the ASEAN nations has to be increased. India is seen as a potential balance to China by the nations that make up ASEAN. The reworked 'Act East' strategy that is part of Prime Minister Modi's 'Act East' programme also lays a significant emphasis on India's relationships with other countries in the region. Through the "Plan of Action (2016-2020) to implement the ASEAN-India partnership for peace, progress, and shared prosperity," the ASEAN-India partnership is now in the process of being put into action.

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