

General Studies-2; Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

ASEAN's role in Regional Peace and Security

1) Introduction

- Southeast Asia is a diverse and complex region where every major culture and civilisation of the world finds a place.
- Modern Southeast Asia presents an example of varied cultures living together and thriving, despite the region experiencing decades of conflicts.
- The year 2017 marks the 50th year of the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

2) ASEAN's Role

- The group acted as a platform for the member nations to resolve disputes from economic aspects to strategic and security aspects.
- Regional and extra-regional multilateral platforms engage ASEAN with its dialogue partners were created.
- These include the Annual Ministerial Meeting (AMM), Asia-Pacific Economic Partnership (APEC) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) among others.
- Through these multilateral initiatives, ASEAN has maintained stable relations with the great powers in Asia.
- ASEAN is now important in the region. It has helped shape regional interactions with the great powers including China, India, Japan and the US.
- The contribution towards regional peace, stability and prosperity goes beyond Southeast Asia to the wider Asia-Pacific region.
- ASEAN has declared itself as a nuclear weapon free zone.

3) ASEAN's strength

- ASEAN's strength lies in its great sense of community despite its diversity.
- The adoption of the ASEAN Charter in 2007 reinforces the sense of community
- The neutral role played by ASEAN in its external relations has helped ASEAN to "retain its centrality in the region"
- ASEAN is seen as the most successful regional organisation next only to the EU
- The centrality of Asia and ASEAN in global politics adds to the opportunities ASEAN has
- ASEAN has a major role in providing peace and stability in the region.

4) Weaknesses of ASEAN

- Lack of natural custodian, accepting a common responsibility of ownership to keep the organisation moving.
- Indonesia is capable of such responsibility but is still unable to perform such a role.
- Geopolitical conflicts and rivalries, weak leadership and the failure to deal with both
- Intra-ASEAN security issues like Rohingya crisis, migration, human trafficking, pandemics, climate change, South China Sea and piracy.

5) Concerns / Challenges

- China's territorial claims in the oil and gas-rich South China Sea, and building up of artificial islands can prove to be a threat for freedom of navigation in region.
- The South-China sea dispute has resulted into many ASEAN nations aligning with China.
- Growing threat posed by Islamic State in Southeast Asia.
- ASEAN was largely unsuccessful in containing the Rohingya refugee crisis
- Cross country organised crime like drug trafficking between Myanmar, Thailand and Laos forming the Golden Triangle could not be contained by ASEAN.

6) India-ASEAN Relations

- ASEAN and India commemorate 25 years of their partnership, 15 years of summit-level interaction and five years of strategic partnership.
- India's Act East Policy puts ASEAN at the centre of India's regional engagement
- India's Northeast acts as key to linking up with Southeast Asia.
- 3 Cs—Culture, Connectivity and Commerce— will shape India's ties with the ASEAN bloc.
- The importance New Delhi attaches to ASEAN is evident from the fact that leaders of ASEAN nations will attend India's next Republic Day celebrations
- India currently is working with ASEAN on multiple connectivity projects, through land, water, and air.
- To develop connectivity through water, ASEAN and India are working on the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project
- ASEAN nations are also important trade partners for India. Asean-India trade in 2016-17 was \$70 billion.
- A growing partnership with ASEAN nations might help India counter the growing presence of Beijing.
- India needs to evolve into a robust security provider in the region.
- Maintaining cordiality with ASEAN as an organisation and with the individual Southeast Asian countries remains crucial for India.

7) Way Forward

- Ownership of the organization must shift from the governments to the people
- Promote ASEAN as a new beacon of hope for humanity
- At a time when western internationalism is in retreat, ASEAN can lead the way in building peace and progress.
- ASEAN needs to engage more at the security and political level among themselves and with other countries to ensure peace and security
- Terrorism, religious extremism and the ISIS are dangers to the region and both India and ASEAN should work closer to check these menaces.
- ASEAN will need to balance the influence of the two major powers - US and China- in order to safeguard its own interests