



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## EAST ASIA EXPLORER NOVEMBER 2023

### *Authors*

Pradeep Taneja

Prabir De

Biren Nanda



Volume I, Issue 11

**Delhi Policy Group**

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

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## East Asia Explorer

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### Authors

**Pradeep Taneja**, Non-Resident International Fellow, Delhi Policy Group

**Prabir De**, Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)

**Ambassador Biren Nanda**, Senior Fellow for Act East Diplomacy, Delhi Policy Group

*The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

### Cover Image:

*Chinese President Xi Jinping meeting Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, who was in China for an official visit on November 6, 2023. Source: [The State Council, The People's Republic of China](#)*

*Thailand hosted the inaugural BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Bangkok on July 17, 2023. Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand](#)*

*The 20th ASEAN-India Summit was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, with the attendance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and all the member states of ASEAN on September 7, 2023. Source: [X/@narendramodi](#)*

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## Albanese's visit to China marks a thaw in Sino-Australian relations, but obstacles remain

by

Pradeep Taneja

When Anthony Albanese landed in Shanghai on 4<sup>th</sup> November, it marked the first visit by an Australian prime minister to China since 2016. While the Australian business community welcomed the visit as it meant China lifting sanctions on Australian products such as wine, barley and lobsters, Albanese's predecessor, Scott Morrison, warned him that "keenness to restore relations with China would be interpreted in Beijing as Australia being concessional and acquiescent".<sup>1</sup>

Under Albanese's two predecessors, Malcolm Turnbull and Morrison, Australia-China relations had plumbed to their lowest level since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1972, with Australia accusing China of interfering in its internal affairs and legislating against it, banning Huawei from participating in Australia's 5G network, and calling for an international investigation into the origins of Covid-19.

China, on its part, imposed bans or punitive tariffs on several Australian products and arrested two Australians, including a female journalist, Cheng Lei, working for the state-owned China Global Television Network and Dr Yang Hengjun, a male academic – both Chinese born but naturalized Australian citizens – and charged them with national security-related crimes. Journalists working with Australian media were also forced to withdraw from China under dramatic circumstances as detailed by two of them in their separate books.<sup>2</sup>

In the lead-up to the Albanese visit, China released Cheng Lei after more than three years in custody, saying it was deporting her back to Australia "in accordance with the law after serving her sentence".<sup>3</sup> But it was clear that her

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<sup>1</sup> Greene, A., 'Scott Morrison says Anthony Albanese shouldn't rush to visit Beijing this year', ABC, 8 September 2023. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-09-08/morrison-warns-albanese-shouldnt-go-to-china/102827738>

<sup>2</sup> Birtles, B., *The Truth About China: Propaganda, patriotism and the search for answers*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2021; Smith, M., *The Last Correspondent: Dispatches from the frontline of Xi's new China*, Sydney: Ultimo Press, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Doherty, B. et al, 'Tight hugs, teary screams': Cheng Lei releases first statement after release from detention in China', *The Guardian*, 11 October 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/11/cheng-lei-jail-released-australian-journalist-china-albanese-returned-home>

release was part of a deal to make way for the Albanese visit. China had also gradually lifted some of the sanctions against Australian products as Australia agreed to suspend or withdraw the actions it had initiated against China at the World Trade Organization.

The expectations from the visit were carefully managed by the Australian government. Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Albanese himself had repeatedly said the goal was to “stabilize” relations, not to take them back to the golden era of a decade or so ago. Albanese told the Australian [media](#) that his approach to the relationship with China was “patient, deliberate and measured”. He said Australia will “cooperate with China where we can, disagree where we must and engage in our national interest,” a framing that echoes the United States’ new mantra on China as outlined by the Secretary of State, Antony Blinken: “we’ll compete with confidence; we’ll cooperate wherever we can; we’ll contest where we must.”<sup>4</sup>

The Albanese visit to Shanghai and Beijing was also a commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first visit to China by an Australian Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, in November 1973. It yielded positive results for both nations. The visit also marked the recommencement of the Annual Leaders’ Meeting between the two premiers. The two sides agreed to reactivate almost all the bilateral dialogue mechanisms between the two countries, but there was no mention of military-to-military ties in the statement on joint outcomes issued by the two governments.<sup>5</sup>

In his opening remarks, President Xi Jinping said that the relationship had now “embarked on the right path of improvement” and the visit reflected the joint efforts by the two sides to “work out some problems.”<sup>6</sup> The Australian PM also revealed that Xi had raised the issue of China’s interest in joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) free-trade agreement, for which China has sought Australia’s support.

On the whole, there were no big-bang announcements but both sides expressed satisfaction that the bilateral relationship was back on the right track. At a press conference in Beijing, Albanese [said](#), “I am very pleased to be

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<sup>4</sup> Antony J Blinken, ‘The Administration’s Approach to the People’s Republic of China’, speech at the George Washington University, 26 May 2022. <https://www.state.gov/the-administrations-approach-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/statement-joint-outcomes-china-australia-annual-leaders-meeting>

<sup>6</sup> Murphy, K., ‘Albanese China trip: PM meets Xi Jinping in Beijing and hails diplomatic thaw’, The Guardian, 6 November 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/nov/06/albanese-china-visit-xi-jinping-trust-china-australia-relationship>

concluding a very successful visit to China.”

In the intervening seven years since the last visit by an Australian PM to China, Australia lost some export revenue, but it has held steadfast on some fundamental issues. It has not compromised its stance on the South China Sea issue, nor has it rolled back its laws against foreign interference or a ban on Huawei from participating in its key telecommunication infrastructure. It has also not recoiled from closer scrutiny of Chinese inward foreign investment. But Australia remains open to China’s membership of the CPTPP if it can meet the agreement’s “high standards” of entry.

Australia has also vowed to press ahead with its new AUKUS security partnership with the United States and the United Kingdom, which has been under relentless attack from China. Despite reservations by some members of the United States Congress, Australian leaders remain confident that the new partnership will allow the country to acquire nuclear-powered submarines and other cutting-edge military technologies. It will also make Australia more secure and capable of defending its security interests in the Indo-Pacific and of contributing to collective security with its allies and partners in the Quad.

The resumption of high-level visits and dialogue between Australia and China without any significant concessions from Australia demonstrates that China’s strategy of economic coercion has its limits. It does not, however, mean that the bilateral relationship will no longer face any obstacles. A stark reminder of this ground reality came when a group of divers from the Royal Australian Navy were injured in an incident on 14 November (just over a week after the Albanese-Xi meeting), involving the Australian warship HMAS Toowoomba and a Chinese PLAN destroyer – Ningbo - in the East China Sea where the Australian warship was enforcing UN Security Council sanctions on North Korea. The Australian divers were working underwater to clear fishing nets that had fouled the ship’s propellers when they sustained minor injuries caused by deliberate sonic blasts from the Chinese destroyer’s sonar system. Australia lodged a formal protest, with Albanese describing the incident as “dangerous and reckless” and the former Prime Minister and current Australian Ambassador to the US, Kevin Rudd, describing it as “outrageous”.<sup>7</sup> China denied the incident as “completely untrue”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Tillet, A., ‘Chinese sonar incident leaves Albanese all at sea’, The Australian Financial Review, 24 November 2023. <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/chinese-sonar-incident-leaves-albanese-all-at-sea-20231121-p5ellu>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/naval/13168-china-rebuffs-reckless-and-irresponsible-accusations-of-hmas-toowoomba-incident>

Despite recent improvements, including a visit to Australia in late November by the Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Liu Jianchao, it would be a mistake to assume that the relations between the two countries have normalized. Australia's bipartisan commitment to the Quad and AUKUS will guarantee that the road ahead will remain rough for the foreseeable future.

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## Scaling up BIMSTEC

by

Prabir De

BIMSTEC or the "Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation" was set up in 1997 to foster economic and social development among member countries, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Its significance lies in the fact that it serves as the bridge between South Asian and South East Asian countries through the fostering of intra-regional collaboration between Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and five South Asian countries. The BIMSTEC is a viable alternative to SAARC, which has been in a state of deadlock for quite some time.

The geographical contiguity, abundant natural and human resources, rich historical linkages and shared cultural heritage are some of the unique advantages that BIMSTEC enjoys. BIMSTEC shares high trade potential and economic complementarities. BIMSTEC is not only an energy hotspot, BIMSTEC's strategic location is its' great asset in Indo-Pacific.

BIMSTEC becomes highly relevant in the following ways. First, BIMSTEC with its unique geographic location can play the role of acting as a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia through trade and connectivity. Second, BIMSTEC member states surround the Bay of Bengal, which is not only a space to support regional trade and transport connectivity, but it also connects international maritime trade routes between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Maritime connectivity is the key to trade and security. Third, BIMSTEC member states are a powerhouse in the trade of some global products such as garments (Bangladesh), digital services (India), maritime services (Sri Lanka), consumer durables (Thailand) and tourism (Nepal and Bhutan). Therefore, greater intra- and inter- regional cooperation may pave the way for higher trade and growth.

At the outset it is worthy to note that out of seven members of BIMSTEC, six countries have established democratic governments and/or rules-based democratic practices. There have been some interesting developments in BIMSTEC. The period between the 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit (March 30, 2022) till date appears to be a phase of energetic engagements. It is pertinent to discuss some of the major outcomes of BIMSTEC deliberations over the years. Regional programmes are followed in BIMSTEC based on need and supported by



democratic values and governance. Toward that end, BIMSTEC nations introduced the BIMSTEC Charter in 2022. Following the 19<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok in early 2023, a number of new areas of cooperation emerged. During the Meeting, the Ministers considered and approved several key documents emanating from decisions of BIMSTEC Summits, including the Rules of Procedure for Core BIMSTEC Mechanisms (i.e. the Summit; the Ministerial Meeting; the Senior Officials' Meeting; and the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee); BIMSTEC Sectoral Mechanisms; and BIMSTEC's External Relations. The Rules of Procedure will be submitted to the 6<sup>th</sup> Summit for adoption. The Ministers also approved the Terms of Reference for an Eminent Persons Group (EPG), which is mandated to make recommendations on the future direction of BIMSTEC; the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation, which is expected to be signed during the sixth Summit; and the BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030, which is to be launched during the 6<sup>th</sup> Summit. BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers had their first retreat in Bangkok in July 2023.

BIMSTEC leaders have tasked the 'Working Group on Rules of Origin' to build upon the progress made during its 21st Meeting to finalise the Rules for Determination of Origin of Goods and Operational Certification Procedures and Product Specific Rules as a priority in order to finalise the Agreement on Trade in Goods of the BIMSTEC FTA. Besides, the BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Working Group (BTCWG) has been instructed to expedite implementation of the agreed activities under the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity. BIMSTEC leaders have asked to initiate the process of drafting the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) according to the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation for discussion in the Joint Shipping Committee. They have also urged the BTCWG to finalise the Concept Note of the BIMSTEC Framework Agreement on Transit, Transshipment and Movement of Vehicular Traffic between and among BIMSTEC Member Countries in order to facilitate the formulation of the draft Framework Agreement. BIMSTEC leaders have emphasised simultaneous negotiation and finalisation of the BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between and among BIMSTEC Member States.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Maritime Security Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal took place in New Delhi on 12 October 2023. The series of issues discussed by the Expert Group included consideration of the Draft Guiding Principles for Law Enforcement Agencies for Interaction at Sea, and the Draft BIMSTEC Guidelines for the Maritime Component of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. A Special Meeting of the BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee convened in Paro on 5-6 October

2023. The Meeting, among others, considered and finalised the Memoranda of Understanding between BIMSTEC and several international organisations, namely, UNESCAP, UNOPS, the World Bank, UNODC, and IORA for submission to the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting for consideration. At the end of November 2023, BIMSTEC formed an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to provide future direction to the regional body.

While these developments are certainly strengthening the foundation of BIMSTEC, institutions can only sustain if we promote strong governance in them. Strengthening governance is only possible through the protection and promotion of a vibrant and constructive space for civil society.

Trade is one of the priority areas of the BIMSTEC. However, BIMSTEC is yet to make substantial progress in the reduction of non-tariff barriers; streamlining regulatory frameworks and harmonisation of standards. Trade and transit facilitation must be given top priority along with energy and digital connectivity. BIMSTEC leaders have urged the Trade Negotiating Committee and its Working Groups to accelerate the finalisation of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area and its constituent agreements including their annexures. They have also tasked the Working Group on Rules of Origin to build upon the progress made during its 21st Meeting to finalise the Rules for Determination of Origin of Goods and Operational Certification Procedures and Product Specific Rules as a priority in order to finalise the Agreement on Trade in Goods of the BIMSTEC FTA.

Although the BIMSTEC has made some tangible progress during the period 2021 to 2023, the region requires an additional push to scale up to a higher level. Global uncertainties are still there, and the BIMSTEC faces several challenges both in economic and non-economic areas. Deeper regional understanding on global challenges provides sustainable solutions. BIMSTEC countries need to work on governance, connectivity and trade facilitation, disaster management, climate issues particularly green financing, counter-terrorism, global value chains, digitalization, UPI-based payment, foreign direct investment, implementation of the BIMSTEC master plan.

The 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 2024 will be busy due mainly to the forthcoming general elections in Bhutan, Bangladesh and India. It looks like the BIMSTEC Summit may take place towards the end of 2024. If member countries agree, the signing of the pending agreements and protocols may be taken up before even the 6<sup>th</sup> Summit.

Bangladesh is going to take over the chairmanship of BIMSTEC from Thailand once the 6<sup>th</sup> summit is over. BIMSTEC's third Secretary General is going to be from India (Amb. Indra Moni Pandey) till 2026. These are some supportive developments that have the potential for imparting further momentum to the BIMSTEC process - although the postponement of the 6<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit has slowed down the BIMSTEC's progress, it looks like a temporary pause before embarking upon a long haul.

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## India-ASEAN Cooperation in Perspective

by  
Biren Nanda

### India's Engagement with the ASEAN

The imperative of bringing in India, to balance the overwhelming weight of China, in regional affairs, has been a significant strand of strategic thinking amongst some ASEAN countries. It was no surprise therefore, that way back in 2005, on the eve of India's participation in the inaugural East Asia Summit, Singapore Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong said<sup>9</sup>:

"I like to think of new Asia as a mega jumbo jet that is being constructed. Northeast Asia, comprising China, Japan and South Korea, forms one wing with a powerful engine. India, the second wing, will also have a powerful engine. The Southeast Asian countries form the fuselage. Even if we lack a powerful engine for growth among the 10 countries, we will be lifted by the two wings."

The importance ASEAN nations have begun to attach to relations with India is reflective of their collective search for ways to balance China's aggressive behavior and territorial assertions in the South China Sea.

The India- ASEAN Dialogue Partnership has progressed steadily over the years. At the third India-ASEAN Summit in 2004<sup>10</sup>, India and the ASEAN countries signed the 'Partnership for Peace Progress and Shared Prosperity', which laid down the agreed roadmap for the India-ASEAN Partnership. This was later elaborated in 'Plans of Action'. When the ASEAN Charter came into force in 2008, India accredited an Ambassador to the ASEAN (2009). India announced the accreditation of a resident Ambassador to ASEAN at the 10<sup>th</sup> India-ASEAN Summit in Brunei in 2013.

An India-ASEAN Special Commemorative Summit was held in December 2012<sup>11</sup> in New Delhi to mark 20 years of the Dialogue Partnership. During that

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<sup>9</sup> (March 15, 2005) Keynote Address by Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Ball Room Millenium Mayfair London. Singapore Government Media Release.  
<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/20050315991.htm>

<sup>10</sup> (November 30, 2004) Chairman's Statement of the 3rd ASEAN + India Summit Vientiane, 30 November 2004. ASEAN.org  
<https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-3rd-asean-india-summit-vientiane-30-november-2004/>

<sup>11</sup> (December 21, 2012) Celebrating 20 Years of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations. ASEAN.org  
<https://asean.org/celebrating-20-years-of-asean-india-dialogue-relations/>

Summit the leaders adopted the 'Vision Statement' prepared by the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group and elevated the relations between India and ASEAN to a 'Strategic Partnership'. Amidst growing tensions between China and ASEAN countries over territorial and maritime claims in the South China Sea the leaders stressed the need for cooperation in the area of maritime security through greater security cooperation, information sharing and high level security dialogue.

2017 marked 25 years of the India-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership<sup>12</sup>. To commemorate the anniversary, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted 10 ASEAN Heads of State/ Government for an India-ASEAN Summit on January 25, 2018. In an unprecedented gesture, the ASEAN Leaders were also invited as Chief Guests on the occasion of India's Republic Day on January 26, 2018.

The 'Delhi Declaration' emanating from the Summit underlined the importance that India and the ASEAN countries attached to strengthening strategic ties across "the whole spectrum of political, security, economic, socio-cultural and development cooperation." The leaders committed themselves to enhancing high-level engagement and cooperation within the existing framework of the India-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership and ASEAN led mechanisms.

They reaffirmed their commitment to work closely on common regional and international security issues including a transparent and rules based regional architecture through existing ASEAN led Frameworks. They reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace, stability, maritime safety and security, the freedom of navigation and over-flights, unimpeded lawful maritime commerce and the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with the principles of the UNCLOS. They agreed to strengthen maritime cooperation through the 'Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum' and to work together to prevent and manage incidents at sea. The 'Delhi Declaration' also called for cooperation in combatting terrorism, de-radicalization and money laundering.

'The ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit<sup>13</sup>' was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on November 12, 2022. The Summit marked the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ASEAN-India dialogue relations, and the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership. During the Summit ASEAN and India

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<sup>12</sup> (January 25, 2018) ASEAN, India celebrate 25th anniversary of dialogue relations. ASEAN.org

<https://asean.org/asean-india-celebrate-25th-anniversary-of-dialogue-relations/>

<sup>13</sup> November 13, 2022. Joint Statement on ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Asean.org <https://asean.org/joint-statement-on-asean-india-comprehensive-strategic-partnership/>

agreed to celebrate 2022 as the 'ASEAN-India Friendship year' and agreed to upgrade their ties and establish a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'.

The Joint Statement issued at the end of the Commemorative Summit laid down the roadmap for the future development of ASEAN-India relations<sup>14</sup>. It was agreed to enhance cooperation in countering terrorism and cyber security, building maritime connectivity, promoting cross cultural exchanges with Southeast Asia, strengthening the digital economy including capacity building in digital skills and innovation, encouraging smart agriculture to ensure future resilient food supply, strengthening the partnership between the ASEAN Smart City Network (ASCN) and India's 'Smart City Mission', strengthening healthcare and promoting ASEAN-India Space cooperation by building ground stations in Vietnam and Indonesia. ASEAN and India acknowledged deep civilizational linkages with each other and resolved to work together for the revival of tourism.

ASEAN and India also agreed to review the 'Trade in Goods Agreement' that came into force in 2010 in order to make it more user friendly and to introduce single window facilitation. India and ASEAN registered a bilateral trade volume of USD 131.5 billion in 2022-23. The trade with ASEAN accounted for 11.3% of India's global trade in 2022-23. A number of issues need to be addressed in the context of trade between India and ASEAN countries. These include non-tariff barriers, inefficient customs procedures, dumping and business visas. India also needs greater market access for services.

India's Connectivity Vision is reinforcing the push towards economic integration with the ASEAN. India presently has three broad policies addressing the theme of connectivity on its periphery: a Domestic Policy with a focus on the North East and Frontier Areas, the 'Act East' Policy and the 'Neighborhood First' Policy. In terms of projects, these policies have a substantial overlap with each other. A number of connectivity initiatives are under implementation or under consideration.

As part of their Dialogue Partnership, India and the ASEAN have cooperated in the areas of human resource development and strengthening people to people ties. Ongoing annual training programs for ASEAN in India include the Special Course for ASEAN diplomats and the ASEAN-India Students Exchange

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<sup>14</sup> (November 12, 2022) Joint Statement on ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. ASEAN.org  
[https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dt1%2F35876%2FJoint\\_Statement\\_on\\_ASEANIndia\\_Comprehensive\\_Strategic\\_Partnership](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dt1%2F35876%2FJoint_Statement_on_ASEANIndia_Comprehensive_Strategic_Partnership)

Program. India-ASEAN dialogue forums include the ASEAN-India Delhi Dialogue and the ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks.

India has also made a significant commitment to assisting the Initiative for ASEAN Integration that aims to narrow the development gap between the relatively more developed maritime ASEAN and the less developed continental ASEAN countries, also referred to as the CMLV. Indeed, human resource training, whether in India under the ITEC program or through specialised institutions set up in CMLV countries, has been our strength in our overseas assistance programs.

**To fund these programs**, India has established the ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund (US\$ 50 million), the ASEAN India Green Fund and the ASEAN India S&T Development Fund. To encouraging cooperation in connectivity, India has set up a US\$ 1 billion special facility to assist projects in physical and digital connectivity. India has also contributed US \$ 77 million to develop manufacturing hubs in CLMV countries.

During the Commemorative Summit observing the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of dialogue relations held in Phnom Penh in November 2022, Vice President Mr Jagdeep Dhankhar announced an additional US \$ 5 million as a contribution to the 'ASEAN-India Science and Technology Fund' to expand cooperation in public health, renewable energy and smart agriculture.

As a reflection of the ever widening scope of ASEAN-India Cooperation ASEAN and India adopted the 'ASEAN-India Joint Leaders' Statement on Strengthening Cooperation on Food Security in Times of Crisis'<sup>15</sup> during the 20th ASEAN-India Summit on 5 September 2023. Further more, ASEAN and India welcomed collaboration in the area of FinTech, in order to build financial connectivity between India and ASEAN through digital payments, with a view to encouraging inclusion of local communities and expansion of opportunities for businesses and bridging the divide across these sectors.

India and ASEAN have increasingly convergent views on the situation in the South China Sea. Both India and ASEAN recognize the benefits of having the South China Sea as a sea of peace, stability, friendship, prosperity and cooperation. The ASEAN-India "Joint Statement on Cooperation on the

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<sup>15</sup> (September 7, 2023 ) ASEAN-India Joint Leaders' Statement on Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Response to Crises. ASEAN.org

<https://asean.org/asean-india-joint-leaders-statement-on-strengthening-food-security-and-nutrition-in-response-to-crises/>

'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' for Peace, Stability and Prosperity in the Region", is based on the common elements between the 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)' and India's 'Indo-Pacific Initiative (IPOI)'. Leaders of India and ASEAN have also welcomed the adoption of the 'ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Maritime Cooperation'<sup>16</sup> as a means to explore and promote maritime cooperation between ASEAN and India.

India has strengthened bilateral defense and security cooperation with Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia at a time when these countries are seeing rising tensions and territorial disputes with China. India's bilateral defense cooperation with individual ASEAN countries has been institutionalized through the signing of bilateral defense Cooperation Agreements or MOUs. Three forms of cooperation have gained momentum – cooperation between Navies, the maintenance and supply of equipment and assistance for training.

The India- ASEAN Dialogue Partnership has progressed steadily over the years and promises more equitable outcomes for India and ASEAN in the future. Significant achievements of the Partnership include closer political and security cooperation particularly through dialogue within the ASEAN centric regional architecture, cooperation in maritime security, counter-terrorism, HADR; trade liberalization through the ASEAN-India FTA in goods and services, cooperation in the area of human resource development and through steadily growing people to people links and connectivity.

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<sup>16</sup> September 7, 2023. ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Maritime Cooperation. ASEAN.org <https://asean.org/asean-india-joint-statement-on-maritime-cooperation/>





**Delhi Policy Group**  
Core 5A, 1st Floor,  
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road  
New Delhi - 110003  
India

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