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AIC
ASEAN-India Centre at RIS

AIC COMMENTARY

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43rd ASEAN Summit: Key Takeaways

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Abstract: *The 43rd ASEAN Summit and related meetings were held in the first week of September 2023. This commentary highlights ASEAN's commitment to enhancing its health architecture, climate resilience, food security, energy transition, and supply chain connectivity as convened through the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on ASEAN as an Epicentrum of Growth, released at the Summit, held in Indonesia. Additionally, it will also emphasize ASEAN-India joint efforts in strengthening maritime cooperation, particularly focusing on safety, disaster relief, sustainable resource usage, and combating environmental issues. The maritime cooperation between both the partners will immensely add to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between ASEAN and India.*

Introduction

ASEAN Summits and related meetings are regular events and considered important to understand ASEAN's global and regional approaches. The 43rd ASEAN Summit, convened in Indonesia during the initial week of September 2023, marked a pivotal moment for the region in various aspects. Notably, Indonesia passed on the ASEAN Chairmanship to Lao PDR, signifying a transition in regional leadership. Furthermore, ASEAN took a major step forward by granting Timor Leste membership in-principle, expanding the organization's geographic and strategic reach. Amid these developments, the ongoing internal political unrest in Myanmar remained a cause for concern among ASEAN member states.

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During the summit, Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's visit to Indonesia, just before the G20 Summit in New Delhi, underscored the importance India places on its partnership with ASEAN. In November 2022, ASEAN and India had elevated their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, suggesting a deepening of their cooperation. Against this backdrop, this commentary looks into the finer nuances of the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on ASEAN as an Epicentrum of Growth and the ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Maritime Cooperation that were released at the 43rd ASEAN Summit in September 2023 along with several other documents. The first document reflects the optimism around the ASEAN's growth and its outlook towards the regional development. The second document notes the relevance of ASEAN-India partnership, showcasing their shared commitment to regional growth and stability, especially in the maritime domain.

“Strengthening ASEAN Resilience against Future Shocks”

In response to the pressing challenges posed by various diseases, climate change, disasters, and economic uncertainties, ASEAN nations are coming together to strengthen their resilience across diverse sectors. ASEAN's comprehensive strategy encompasses several key areas aimed at ensuring a sustainable future and fostering cooperation and resilience across the region. Firstly, ASEAN is committed to enhancing the region's health infrastructure, focusing on both emerging and non-emerging diseases. This initiative emphasizes collaboration between the health and finance sectors, improving healthcare access, and eliminating diseases such as Tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS. Secondly, climate change adaptation takes center stage, with ASEAN integrating climate resilience into all aspects of cooperation. Disaster resilience and management efforts will be integrated into sustainable development initiatives, emphasizing cross-sectoral coordination and initiatives. Thirdly, ensuring regional food security involves enhancing agricultural productivity, adopting sustainable practices, and improving access to safe and nutritious food. Early warning systems and rapid response mechanisms will be in place to address food availability during crises. Fourthly, ASEAN nations are committed to accelerating a just and inclusive energy transition, focusing on sustainable energy security and synergy between regional and national efforts for energy connectivity. Fifthly, recognizing the crucial role of macroeconomic stability, ASEAN nations will strengthen economic policies, deepen regional financial integration, and enhance their capacity to manage financial stability risks. Sixthly, collaborative efforts will ensure resilient supply chains, emphasizing productivity, connectivity, and minimizing future disruptions. This includes timely information sharing and trade-related measures to bolster industry competitiveness. Seventhly, ASEAN aims to maintain its institutional relevance amidst geopolitical uncertainties, upholding rules-based, transparent, and inclusive multilateral trading systems. This resilience agenda, integral to ASEAN Vision

2045, involves concrete steps such as enhancing ASEAN's vaccine and drug security, strengthening regional health emergency resources, integrating disaster risk management into economic development, developing seamless logistics for food supply, and promoting regional payment connectivity. Through these initiatives, ASEAN nations are dedicated to building a resilient and prosperous future for the entire region.

“Leveraging New Growth Drivers”

Recognizing the essential role of trade in driving economic growth and employment, ASEAN nations are steadfast in their commitment to global supply chains. Their focus lies on developing industries with higher value-added products and ensuring seamless cross-border trade, with a paramount emphasis on supply chain resilience and sustainability. ASEAN underscores the enduring advantages of open, inclusive, and non-discriminatory global supply chains. ASEAN has made a resolute commitment to accelerating digital transformation, aiming to bridge the regional digital divide and establish an inclusive and accessible digital ecosystem. This initiative serves as a stepping stone toward the creation of the ASEAN Digital Economic Community by 2045. In the pursuit of environmental sustainability, ASEAN nations are dedicated to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by the middle of the century. This endeavor will be realized through responsible consumption, the adoption of green technologies, just and inclusive energy transitions, and practices aligning with the circular economy. The active involvement of the private sector and resource mobilization are regarded as indispensable components of this initiative. ASEAN knows the immense value of the region's oceans, seas, and freshwater resources, and therefore, is elevating collaborative efforts to advance the Blue Economy. The focus is on promoting sustainable practices and creating value-added resources in an inclusive and sustainable manner, thereby fueling the region's economic growth. Furthermore, ASEAN embraces the rich cultural diversity within the region, recognizing the potential of its cultural and creative industries. Through strengthening people-to-people exchanges and fostering partnerships, ASEAN is championing the creative economy as a key driver of economic growth. This approach emphasizes creativity, innovation, digitalization, inclusivity, and the safeguarding of traditional knowledge and intellectual property rights. In the pursuit of inclusive, equitable, and sustainable growth, ASEAN is directing its efforts toward empowering micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Strategies include capacity building, fostering partnerships with larger enterprises, and cultivating a dynamic business environment that supports robust trade and investment. To coordinate the implementation of these initiatives, ASEAN Economic Community Council Ministers will finalize the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement, develop the electric vehicle industry, and implement the ASEAN Strategy on Carbon Neutrality. Economic Ministers are

tasked with expanding regional industrial cooperation, fully implementing RCEP, upgrading ASEAN trade agreements, and optimizing digital transformation for trade activities through the ASEAN Single Windows. Additionally, Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, Transport Ministers, and Culture and Arts Ministers play crucial roles in other thematic areas, ensuring a comprehensive and integrated approach to ASEAN's economic resilience and growth.

“Towards a Forward-Looking, Future-Proofed ASEAN”

Recognizing the shifting geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics, ASEAN nations are unwavering in their obligation to the swift implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). This commitment is crucial for fostering peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. Emphasizing the importance of cooperation and collaboration, ASEAN affirms its openness to dialogue and engagement with external partners while upholding ASEAN Centrality and unity. To achieve these goals, ASEAN has outlined key strategies:

ASEAN will operationalize AOIP through regional mechanisms. Efforts will be intensified to expedite AOIP projects and activities, engaging external partners as appropriate. The aim is to create an outward-looking community that supports regional growth and resilience through inclusive cooperation. ASEAN recognizes the need for economic transformation to thrive globally. Efforts will focus on enhancing ASEAN's attractiveness as an investment destination, stimulating innovation, responding to changing labor markets, and revitalizing skills development. This proactive approach aims to create job opportunities and boost sustainable economic growth. Building Future-ready ASEAN Institutions are imperative for ASEAN. Adapting to global challenges, ASEAN commits to updating its institutions and work methods. Acknowledging the inter-linkages between political, security, and economic issues, ASEAN will adopt a Whole-of-Community approach towards ASEAN Vision 2045. This approach ensures the capacity of ASEAN institutions to respond effectively to the new geopolitical and geo-economic landscape. ASEAN reaffirms its commitment to achieving a healthy, inclusive society and sustainable ecosystems. Collective efforts will be scaled up to work towards the SDGs, emphasizing healthy societies and environmentally sustainable practices. Strategic Initiatives in this priority area are identified as noted in Table 1.

Table 1: Strategic Initiatives and Responsible Ministries/Agencies

Foreign Ministers: Operationalize AOIP, foster cooperation with Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, and support concrete projects for ASEAN's growth.	Connectivity Coordinating Committee: Complete MPAC 2025 initiatives and develop the ASEAN Connectivity Post-2025 Agenda, emphasizing a Whole-of-Community and Connecting the Connectivities approach.
Economic Ministers: Future-proof the ASEAN Economic Community, enhance investment policies, ensure transparency, and promote competition convergence, tailored to each member state's development level.	Labour and Education Ministers: Strengthen labor market responses, considering challenges from technological advancements, to build a competitive, resilient, and inclusive workforce.
Digital Ministers: Improve digital literacy, skills, and talent, expedite ASEAN Digital Masterplan (ADM) 2025 initiatives, and position ASEAN as a leading digital community.	Science, Technology, and Innovation Ministers: Enhance cooperation and integration in science, technology, and innovation to support digital transformation.
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council: Identify synergies and collaborate across sectors to accelerate progress in achieving SDGs and Universal Health Coverage.	ASEAN Coordinating Council and Community Council Ministers: Monitor progress and undertake cross-pillar collaboration towards the realization of ASEAN Vision 2045 and the vision of ASEAN as an epicenter of growth.
<i>Source:</i> ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on ASEAN as an Epicentrum of Growth	

Initiatives with India

The recent ASEAN Summit marked a significant milestone with the declaration of the ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Maritime Cooperation. This initiative stands as a testament to the commitment of ASEAN and India in enhancing collaboration in various maritime domains. Key areas of cooperation include maritime safety, emergency response, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, and combating issues such as piracy, armed robbery, trafficking, and Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. The collaboration extends to sharing best practices, implementing early warning systems, and strengthening information exchange and capabilities within the maritime sector. Moreover, specialized regional bodies will be instrumental in fostering

expertise and collaboration concerning sustainable ocean usage. Dialogue and expertise exchange between maritime authorities and law enforcement agencies are set to enhance, focusing on sustainable utilization of marine resources and oceans for mutual benefits. The commitment to align the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 with India's initiatives underscores the resolve to establish seamless connectivity in the Indo-Pacific region. The collaboration also addresses crucial environmental concerns, aligning efforts with the ASEAN Regional Action Plan for Combating Marine Debris. To ensure comprehensive engagement, stakeholders from various sectors, including the private sector, tourism, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), coastal communities, financial institutions, youth, scientific communities, and academia, will be actively involved. Furthermore, a significant focus is placed on promoting the Blue Economy, developing maritime infrastructure, fisheries, and shipbuilding. Ensuring food security remains a top priority, with a concentrated effort on sustainable fisheries and combatting Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Conclusion

The latest round of ASEAN Summit reminds us of ASEAN's comprehensive strategies and collaborative initiatives to address evolving challenges in areas such as health, climate change, economic stability, and maritime cooperation. ASEAN's keenness to enhancing its health architecture, climate resilience, food security, energy transition, and supply chain connectivity was highlighted in this commentary. Additionally, the dialogue emphasized ASEAN-India joint efforts in strengthening maritime cooperation. The discussions underscored the dedication of these nations to fostering regional resilience, sustainable development, and mutual prosperity through cooperative, inclusive, and innovative strategies.

About AIC



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Considering the work of the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (AIEPG), and its Report with recommendations for forging a closer partnership for peace, progress and shared prosperity, the Heads of the State/Government of ASEAN and India at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit 2012, held at New Delhi on 19-20 December 2012, recommended the establishment of ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), which was formally inaugurated by the Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of the Government of India on 21 June 2013 at RIS. AIC serves as a resource centre for ASEAN Member States and India to fill the knowledge gaps that currently limit the opportunities for cooperation. AIC works with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India and undertakes evidence-based policy research and provide policy recommendations.

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