# International Relations · GS - II

**“ASEAN centrality is the cornerstone of India’s Act East Policy and its Indo-Pacific vision.” In the light of growing geopolitical uncertainty, discuss the significance of India-ASEAN relations and the challenges they face.**

| EXAM YEAR | PAPER | SUBJECT |
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| MARKS | WORD LIMIT |
|---|---|
| 10 | ~150 words |

## Answer Hint

**Significance: trade, maritime security, Indo-Pacific strategy, connectivity and diaspora/culture. Challenges: trade deficit, slow AITIGA review, India staying out of RCEP, China’s influence, the Myanmar crisis, delayed connectivity projects. Way forward: Plan of Action 2026–30.**

## Model Answer

ASEAN is at the centre of India’s Act East Policy. At the 23rd ASEAN-India Summit, PM Modi said the world needs peace, stability and predictability. That is a sign of how much India values the partnership at a time of global uncertainty.

**Significance:**

- **Economic:** Trade is about $122 billion, and the region offers a way to diversify supply chains.
- **Strategic:** India and ASEAN share an interest in a rules-based Indo-Pacific and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea under UNCLOS. Defence ties are growing, for example the BrahMos sale to the Philippines.
- **Maritime:** 2026 is the Year of Maritime Cooperation, and SAGAR/MAHASAGAR fits with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).
- **Connectivity and culture:** The Northeast can link to Southeast Asia, and the two regions share civilisational ties.

**Challenges:**

- India’s trade deficit with ASEAN keeps widening, and the AITIGA review is slow.
- India stayed out of RCEP, and China’s economic weight in the region keeps growing.
- ASEAN is divided over the South China Sea.
- The Myanmar crisis is holding up the Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan project

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