International Relations · GS - II

Analyse the significance of ASEAN centrality for India's strategic and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific. How can India deepen its engagement with ASEAN amid intensifying geopolitical competition?

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MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

ASEAN centrality, Act East Policy, Indo-Pacific, maritime security, trade integration, regional supply chains, connectivity, strategic autonomy, institutional cooperation.

Model Answer

Introduction

ASEAN occupies a central position in the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical and economic architecture. India's engagement with ASEAN is a key pillar of its Act East Policy and supports regional stability, connectivity and economic integration.

Significance for India

1. **Strategic stability:** ASEAN-led platforms provide India with opportunities to engage major powers and contribute to an inclusive, rules-based regional order.

2. **Maritime security:** Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific strengthens freedom of navigation, maritime domain awareness and security in vital sea lanes.

3. **Economic integration:** ASEAN is an important trade and investment partner, offering opportunities in manufacturing, services and regional supply chains.

4. **Connectivity:** Projects linking India's Northeast with Southeast Asia can promote trade, tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

5. **Multilateral engagement:** Forums such as the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum strengthen India's diplomatic presence.

Challenges

Trade imbalances, delays in connectivity projects, differences among ASEAN members and intensifying US-China competition complicate deeper cooperation.

Way Forward

India should improve implementation of connectivity projects, strengthen the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement, expand digital and maritime cooperation, and support ASEAN unity and centrality through consistent diplomatic engagement.

Conclusion

ASEAN centrality complements India's strategic autonomy and its vision of an inclusive Indo-Pacific. A sustained partnership based on mutual respect, economic cooperation and regional stability can strengthen India's position in Southeast Asia.

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