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CONFERENCE ON

# STRENGTHENING INDIA-ASEAN MARITIME COOPERATION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

**30 SEPTEMBER 2026**

Jacaranda Hall, India Habitat Centre,  
New Delhi



## CONCEPT NOTE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared the year 2026 as 'ASEAN-India Year of Maritime Cooperation' at the 22nd ASEAN-India Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in October 2025. This announcement builds on more than three decades of steady engagement between India and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states through regular diplomatic engagements, trade links, cultural exchanges, and emerging initiatives. What began as a sectoral partnership in 1992 evolved into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership by 2022, spanning political, security, economic, and cultural domains. Within this broad relationship, the maritime domain has emerged as one of the most consequential pillars linking security, prosperity, and shared commitment to a rules-based Indo-Pacific order.

This deepening engagement has been driven primarily by geography. The shared maritime expanse of the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman Sea, and Southeast Asian waters has always served as a powerful thread binding the two regions, carrying energy commodities, goods, people, ideas, and, in more recent times, undersea data cables. Building on this natural proximity, India and ASEAN began forging structured institutional ties from the late 20th century. India's 'Look East Policy', launched in 1991, and its subsequent transformation into Act East Policy in 2014 provided the framework through which New Delhi steadily elevated its engagement with ASEAN member states at bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels.

As India and ASEAN ties matured in the 21st century, collaboration in the maritime domain expanded through coordinated patrols, bilateral and multilateral exercises, humanitarian assistance, and capacity-building initiatives. Key recent milestones include the ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Maritime Cooperation (2023), which provided a formal roadmap for collaboration on maritime security, information-sharing, capacity building, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), search-and-rescue operations, and sustainable use of the oceans. In addition to this, the inaugural ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise in 2023 further enhanced operational interoperability. These efforts have been reinforced by a growing set of bilateral and regional mechanisms, including India-Thailand Coordinated Patrols (CORPATs), Samudra Shakti (the India-Indonesia bilateral exercise), long-running Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX) exercise with Singapore, white-shipping information-sharing arrangements, and the placement of liaison officers.

Although the maritime domain had long been central to India-ASEAN relations, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz in February 2026, within months of the announcement of the ASEAN-India Year of Maritime Cooperation, brought questions of maritime order, security, and commerce firmly back to the forefront. While the Strait of Hormuz lies outside India or ASEAN territory, the disruptions in the maritime chokepoint exposed how deeply both India and several ASEAN economies depend on distant energy routes. The impact was not confined to West Asia alone. Many countries worldwide continue to face immediate pressure on basic fuel and food supplies as well as overall macroeconomic stability. In response, many countries accelerated efforts to diversify energy sources, strengthen supply-chain resilience, and reassess the security of their own critical sea lanes.

This urgency was also echoed at the regional level – the 48th ASEAN Summit in Cebu (May 2026) under the Philippines' chairmanship. Leaders issued a dedicated statement on the Middle East crisis, underscoring the need to keep maritime and air transport routes open, reaffirming full compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982, and calling for safe, continuous passage through the Strait of Hormuz and other international straits. The statement highlighted a

basic but critical reality: even a distant chokepoint can expose vulnerabilities much closer to home, such as the Strait of Malacca.

ASEAN member states tackled the closure of Strait of Hormuz in diverse ways – at the national level, by engaging with countries outside the region to secure energy access, and at the regional level, by discussing the resilience of supply chains at the Cebu Summit. These responses reflect concerns over the Strait of Malacca's susceptibility to future disruptions and whether existing regional frameworks and cooperative mechanisms are sufficiently robust to counter maritime threats and strengthen the resilience of global supply chains.

Beyond sea-lane security, the economic relationship itself offers a more reassuring picture, though a complicated one. Trade is what gives the India-ASEAN maritime partnership its material weight: bilateral commerce reached approximately USD 128 billion in 2025-26, with ASEAN accounting for nearly 11 per cent of India's global trade, almost all of it carried by sea – particularly through the Strait of Malacca. The Hormuz crisis underscores the strategic vulnerability of maritime energy supply routes and the broader supply chains linked to them. Simultaneously, it serves as a catalyst for strengthening the India-ASEAN Energy Partnership by encouraging greater investment in clean energy cooperation, regional grid connectivity, and alternative energy-sharing mechanisms that can enhance resilience against future disruptions

Although the two straits differ politically, they are closely linked in physical, legal, and economic terms: both are governed by the same UNCLOS provisions, much of the energy that transits Hormuz is destined for Asian markets, and both sit within the same wider trade networks. The disruptions affected India-ASEAN trade and brought sea-lane security into sharper focus. When the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) Joint Committee met in New Delhi in July 2026, negotiators were directed to expedite the outstanding chapters of the review, with supply-chain resilience featuring explicitly in its framing.

Examining the Hormuz crisis and the broader maritime order through an India-ASEAN lens offers a useful way to understand both the vulnerabilities and the opportunities inherent to Indo-Pacific interdependence. With India and ASEAN set to commemorate 35 years of dialogue partnership in 2027, this is a timely moment to consider how the maritime domain can be more secure, more resilient, and more mutually beneficial for both sides.

Against this backdrop, this conference seeks to examine broader economic and maritime security and cooperation in the India-ASEAN context. Its main objectives are:

- To examine how the 2026 Strait of Hormuz disruption has reshaped India-ASEAN assessments of commercial linkages, bilateral trade dependence on critical sea lanes (especially the Strait of Malacca), and the broader resilience of maritime supply chains.
- To assess how the Hormuz crisis has altered India and ASEAN perceptions of energy transportation routes, energy-security vulnerabilities, and the need to diversify sources while strengthening the resilience of energy supply chains.
- To understand how the Hormuz disruption has reframed India-ASEAN views on maritime security, the protection of critical sea lanes, and the adequacy of existing regional and bilateral frameworks (ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific [AOIP], ASEAN-India Maritime Cooperation, Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative [IPOI], Mutual Assistance and Holistic Advancement for Sustainable and Growth-Oriented Regional Security [MAHASAGAR], exercises, and related mechanisms) in responding to such crises.

- To identify practical policy steps and cooperative pathways that India and ASEAN should prioritise to strengthen collective preparedness, reinforce existing frameworks, and make the maritime domain more secure, resilient, and mutually beneficial.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE CONFERENCE**

### **Session 1: Malacca After Hormuz: Energy, Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), and Economics in India-ASEAN Ties**

Since late 2023, successive disruptions at critical chokepoints – first the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and, more significantly, the Strait of Hormuz in 2026 – have forced the rerouting of commercial shipping, reshaped trade flows, accelerated efforts to diversify energy suppliers and transit routes, and realigned regional security and diplomatic partnerships. These developments exposed anew the vulnerabilities of supply chains dependent on narrow maritime passages. In this context, speakers will examine key lessons from these crises and their implications for the resilience of supply chains linked to the Strait of Malacca and the wider Indo-Pacific.

### **Session 2: Navigating the Maritime Security, Governance, and Regional Frameworks in the India-ASEAN Partnership**

Building directly on the lessons of Session 1, this session examines existing maritime security arrangements and regional frameworks in the India-ASEAN partnership. While mechanisms such as the AOIP, the ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Maritime Cooperation, bilateral and multilateral maritime exercises, and India's engagement through the Act East Policy, IPOI, and MAHASAGAR have strengthened cooperation over the years, the Hormuz crisis has tested their capacity to respond to sudden disruptions in critical sea lanes. Thus, speakers will examine the strengths and limitations of these frameworks in addressing maritime security challenges, governance gaps, and institutional coordination. The discussion will explore how India and ASEAN can strengthen cooperation, enhance crisis preparedness, uphold UNCLOS, and reinforce a rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific.

## SCHEDULE

| Schedule             | Time        | Particulars                                                                                        |
|----------------------|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Registration and Tea | 10:00-10:30 |                                                                                                    |
| Inaugural Session    | 10:30-10:45 | Welcome Address: Shri Shishir Priyadarshi,<br>President, CRF                                       |
|                      | 10:45-11:00 | Keynote Address: TBD                                                                               |
|                      | 11:00-11:15 | Special Address: TBD                                                                               |
| Session 1            | 11:15-12:15 | Malacca After Hormuz: Energy, Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and Economics in India-ASEAN Ties |
| Lunch                | 12:15-13:00 |                                                                                                    |
| Session 2            | 13:00-14:00 | Navigating Maritime Security, Governance & Regional Frameworks in India-ASEAN Partnership          |
| Closing Remarks      | 14:00-14:15 |                                                                                                    |
| Tea Break            | 14:15-14:30 |                                                                                                    |

Event Coordinators: Lakshmi Kusuma Kotha and Dr Cchavi Vasisht

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