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China's Dynamic Relations with ASEAN for Regional Prosperity



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Introduction:

China is sharing its land borders with 14 neighbouring nations while through maritime its shares borders with eight nations. China has a large neighbouring border area with the Southeast Asia that is connected both through land and South China Sea. Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) organisation becomes the community

that brought all South Asian nation together. China is building relations with ASEAN through two ways. China is strengthening bilateral relations with every



ASEAN member as well as collective relations as whole.

In past several years, the economies of China and ASEAN member states integrated, due to emergence of several industrial supply chains in the Asia-Pacific. During Covid-19 various supply chains disrupted, however, at the same time most of these supply chains were reconfigured, initiating new production network among China-ASEAN.

China and ASEAN share a longstanding history of engagement, a relationship that significantly manifests across various aspects, ensuring economic and trade exchanges, this collaboration is expected to yield mutual benefits in the future, particularly in the face of an increasingly complex global landscape.



This article will explore the China-ASEAN engagement and their mutual cooperation in fields of economic, strategic and defence. Further, the impact of China's proposed Belt and Road Initiative in these member states will be observed.

Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN):

ASEAN is a regional organisation consisting of ten member states including Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Myanmar, Malaysia, Laos, Indonesia, Cambodia and Brunei. The purpose of this organisation is to promote economic, strategic and security cooperation between these member states. The Population of these ASEAN nations are about 672 million, and have a total gross domestic product (GDP) of more than \$3.60 trillion.

This organisation is playing a vital role in integration of Asian economies, and forming world's leading free trade agreements through negotiations. Moreover, several free trade agreements are signed with numerous nations in the region.

China's Engagement with ASEAN:

The relations of China with ASEAN is varied and deep, that focuses mostly on strategic, and economic development on both sides. The economic cooperation between China-ASEAN resulted in strong economic performance for ASEAN member states and China.

After becoming the full Dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1996, China has strengthened its regional relations throughout the years. Through these relations both sides have benefited, particularly in the field of economic and people to people Cooperation.

China and ASEAN have cooperated in various fields, with economic engagement, exchange and visits of leadership from both sides has increased people-to-people connectivity. China's leadership shown keen interest to interact with counterparts of ASEAN nations at various levels. Moreover, China has surpassed Japan, USA and European Union and become the number 1 trading partner of ASEAN. China-ASEAN partnership has now passed more than thirty years, and the China's relations with ASEAN member nations are continuously growing. This makes China-ASEAN relations more important not only in terms of economic and trade interests but also in context of regional security and peace.

China-ASEAN Defence Cooperation:

China has actively involved in ASEAN+ activities since early 2000s. In year 2000 China held the fourth meeting of ASEAN regional forum (ARF) to contribute ARF annual security outlook, this meeting includes Heads of Defence colleges. China proposed the establishment of joint security policy conference in 2003 to facilitate



strategic dialogue. Further, in 2010 with the collaboration of China, ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) was formed. China-ASEAN also organized separate meetings of Defence Ministers to further strengthen security cooperation and build confidence and trust among the nations in military domain.



In 2018, China-ASEAN maritime exercises were successfully held in the Southern Zhanjiang city of China, these exercise were consisted of Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) along with search and rescue operations. This exercise was one of the first in which all ASEAN member nations participated with a single country and also first time for China to participate in any maritime exercise with ASEAN.

In November 2021, China-ASEAN relations achieved a milestone when President XI Jinping and the ASEAN leaders officially declares the establishment of China-ASEAN comprehensive strategic partnership. To further strengthen defence cooperation, 13th informal meeting of Defence Minister of China-ASEAN was also held in June 2022.

China also organised several joint multinational military exercises outside of the ASEAN with the Southeast Asian countries, like Aman Youvi (peace and friendship) exercises in 2023. These exercises involved five Southeast Asian nation including Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Laos and Cambodia. Additionally, joint military drills with Singapore and Cambodia were also organized by China in Thailand. These military engagements between Southeast Asian nations and ASEAN indicates positive signs of peace in the region.

China's BRI Projects in ASEAN:

China is also engaged with ASEAN member nations through development of highways, roads and railways under the Belt and Road Initiative. This engagement is not only helping in regional connectivity but also promote economic and trade development in the region.

China has completed high-speed railway project in Indonesia named as Bandung-Jakarta high-speed railway, which is 142 km long project. In Malaysia East Coast Rail link is a 662 km long dual-track project under BRI, helping in infrastructure development of country. Malacca port project is the massive project in Singapore launched two years ago and it will share the burden of Singapore port after completion.



Several railways, roads and dams project were launched in Myanmar during 2021. These project will promote the trade from Yunnan and Guizhou provinces of China to Myanmar and other regions.

Laos, Brunei, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam are also partnered with China under BRI through infrastructure development, environmental protection and legal services. BRI projects in ASEAN countries are providing employment opportunities, promoting education and providing trainings to locals, enhancing their skills. Moreover, these projects are also helping China to become largest trading partner of ASEAN.

Conclusion:

China and ASEAN share a rich history of diplomatic ties, marked by sustained collaboration across various sectors. Over the years, both have deepened their economic engagement, fostering people-to-people connectivity through increased leadership



exchanges and visits. Notably, their cooperation extends to military exercises, reinforcing their relationship in the realms of regional security and peace.

China's commitment to ASEAN is evident in its active involvement in diverse infrastructure projects, such as highways, roads, and railways, under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These initiatives not only contribute to the development of partner nation's infrastructure but also generate employment opportunities and alleviate poverty.

The enduring and robust China-ASEAN relationship is crucial, not only for economic and trade interests but also for regional security and stability. The collaborative efforts between the two sides are poised to create a win-win situation, fostering peace and prosperity in the region.