



India's maritime diplomacy in Southeast Asia: Exploring synergies

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ABSTRACT

India–Southeast Asia defence cooperation has not been highlighted much, primarily to not give out wrong signals about India's power projection outlook. With India steadfastly maintaining that it is a benign nation and not a revisionist power, engagement in the defence domain with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been attempted in five ways. The first includes India's engagement in ASEAN defence mechanisms, such as ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus; and the participation of ASEAN nations in the Milan series of biennial meetings and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). The second dimension is India's legitimate interest in the security of the Malacca Strait as a funnel state. The third dimension is developing synergies between the defence industries in Southeast Asia with the Indian defence industrial complex. The fourth angle of engagement is India's position as the net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The fifth critical aspect is developing maritime cooperative mechanism and developing a counter to the Chinese "string of pearls" strategy.

KEYWORDS

Lines of credit; defence industry; joint exercises; Milan; IONS; defence research; ASEAN; action plan; Indian Ocean strategy; Indo-Pacific

Under the India–Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plan of action for the year 2021–2025, it has been clearly remarked that in terms of political and security cooperation, the two sides would work towards realising the ASEAN–India Strategic Partnership (signed in 2012). It also outlines that under security cooperation, the two sides would promote areas such as maritime security, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, peace operations and military medicine.¹ Compared with the earlier plans of action, maritime security and cooperation in the maritime domain have been given relatively more attention in the latest one.² Likewise, a separate section on defence cooperation has been highlighted in the new action plan.

In 2018, India tried to build consensus on India–ASEAN maritime cooperation when the 10 Southeast Asian political leaders were chief guests at the Republic Day Parade at New Delhi.³ Later, a dialogue on maritime security was held during an interaction between Prime Minister Modi and the ASEAN leaders. Few other areas which have seen convergence between the two sides include demining activities and research in

retrieving land mines avoiding any harm to military personnel. In this regard, technical and financial support have been explored between the two sides.

India has been looking to ASEAN in terms of building synergies, while complimenting the defence industrial complex in select Southeast Asian countries through joint ventures, cooperative mechanisms in technical aspects and helping the ASEAN nations to build maritime capacities.⁴ It has been seen during exercises with major ASEAN countries that the problem is the lack of coastal security capacities and undertaking anti-piracy operations in maritime Southeast Asia. Therefore, time and again, India has supported ASEAN nations in maritime search and rescue operations (exemplified during search missions for MH-370 aircraft of Malaysian airlines), information sharing and reinforcing institutional mechanisms, such as the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus as well as enlarging the mandate of an expanded ASEAN maritime forum.⁵

Southeast Asia is one of the critical areas where India has invested a lot in terms of political capital, economic integration and building complementarities and convergence in areas such as connectivity, particularly in the field of physical and digital connectivity.⁶ In the defence sector, India has memorandums of understanding (MoUs) or defence cooperation agreements with nine out of 10 countries in Southeast Asia. One of the major objectives of India under the Look East Policy – as well as its successor, the Act East Policy – has been built to build defence relations with the countries of Southeast Asia⁷ through defence diplomacy.⁸ This has been addressed through the sale and supply of non-lethal weapon systems, communication devices, military trucks, parachutes, etc. Another dimension of the relationship is through the lines of credit (LoC) that India has extended to select countries, under which the country can utilise the LoC for purchasing defence equipment and weapon systems from India, thereby building their capacities. This has been offered to Vietnam; and the possibility of providing the same to the Philippines is being explored. The Philippines is keen to import Brahmos supersonic missiles and India has offered to provide LoC, but the Philippines' President Duterte has declined the offer⁹ and is looking for domestic mobilisation of resources.

Another element of India's maritime engagement with Southeast Asia has been to project itself as a legitimate stakeholder in maritime security in the Malacca Strait and seek the three ASEAN countries – Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia – approval so that India can participate in the Malacca Strait Security Initiative (MSSI). Further, the conduct of biennial Milan series of exercises is meant to promote interoperability and cooperation between the navies of the region.¹⁰ One more element of interaction between India and ASEAN countries has been primarily in terms of utilising the capacities of countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, in developing joint projects as well as outsourcing very limited shipbuilding activities or maintenance of platforms of the Indian Navy.

The last but most important element of India's defence engagement with the Southeast Asian countries has been in terms of looking into prospective cooperation between India and the ASEAN defence industry, which might materialise in the future. India has been interacting with countries, such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia, through defence dialogue mechanisms, which address core concerns of the two sides while taking cognisance of emerging challenges in the geopolitical spaces and strategic structures.

It is a known fact that with the growth of trade and investment between India and ASEAN, it is critical to protect maritime trade and commerce through the vital sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Hence, close defence cooperation between India and Southeast Asia is the need of the hour. Defence cooperation with many of the Southeast Asian countries has been premised on the exchange of high-level visits, deputation of officers in each other's training institutes, training of armed forces personnel on different naval platforms as well as providing support in terms of supply of defence equipment and a few patrol boats in times of need. Hence, close defence cooperation between India and Southeast Asia is the need of the hour.

Developing synergies

The development of defence facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands from the late 1980s onwards was seen with apprehension by many Southeast Asian countries. They believed that the development of these islands would not only provide a jumping board to the erstwhile Soviet Union to expand its operations in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), but also help India fulfil its expansionist aspirations. It has taken India nearly four decades to dispel this notion and reinforce its benign power intentions.

For building positive constituency and confidence among the armed forces of India and Myanmar, in 2020, India leased one of its refurbished Kilo-class submarine to Myanmar.¹¹ This is the first submarine for Myanmar and is seen to be ushering a new phase of defence ties between the two countries in terms of defence exports, maintenance and training of submariners.¹² The submarine has been refurbished in one of India's shipyards (Hindustan Shipyard Limited, Vishakhapatnam) and the same facility will be used in future for its maintenance. India will also undertake training of Myanmar's naval personnel for operating the submarine as it has wide experience in maintaining and supporting Kilo-class submarine operations. India wants to strengthen the maritime capabilities of Myanmar as it would benefit its own efforts in and around the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Bay of Bengal, countering any Chinese defence domination in the region. Further, cooperation among countries within the Bay of Bengal is critical for countering piracy, illegal migration as well as scavenging of sea cucumbers and other marine resources.

Maritime security has been one of the important elements of India's interaction with Southeast Asia. Therefore, cooperation between India and Indonesia with regard to the development of the Sabang deep-sea port, which lies close to the India's southernmost territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, clearly outlines that India wants to develop its own maritime hub which can cater to both civilian and military objectives. India's "double fishhook strategy" encapsulates Sabang Port as an important vantage point.

Also, the Philippines – with which India signed the defence cooperation agreement in 2006 during the visit of Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the then President of India – has been seeking India's help and assistance for counterterrorism operations and for undertaking surveillance and reconnaissance activities, particularly in the South China Sea. The latest Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation meeting between India and the Philippines, held online on 6 November 2020, highlighted the need for enhanced defence cooperation between the two sides. In the last five years (2015–2020), the Philippines has been importing second-hand equipment from the United States (U.S.), but it lacks critical

coast guard capacities to protect its islands in the South China Sea. India has been undertaking port calls to friendly countries in the periphery of the South China Sea, including the Philippines. In the past, Indian Navy ships have been warned by China multiple times when passing through these critical SLOCs; and warning call signs on the radio too have been received by Indian ships.¹³

India's interests in the South China Sea, though indirect, have brought India into a major powers' interplay in this strategic SLOC because many countries, such as the U.S., Japan and Australia, have been undertaking group sails for protecting "freedom of navigation operations" (FONOPs). China has been making illegal claims about the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around those islands which are under its control in the contested region, even though the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), in 2016, completely rejected the Chinese claims on the EEZs in this sea in its ruling.¹⁴

Apart from the aforementioned, India has been providing training to armed forces personnel of a few Southeast Asian countries. This includes training technicians for the maintenance of platforms, particularly naval ships and submarines. India also provides training to United Nations (UN) peacekeepers from some Southeast Asian countries to help them to understand the nuances of mediation and peaceful intervention in conflict zones.

In terms of India–Southeast Asia maritime cooperation, there are a few countries, such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia and Myanmar, which are seen as priority for India in the long run. The reasons for this are rather strategic in nature. In August 2021, under its chairmanship, India also hosted the dialogue on maritime security in UN Security Council, reflecting its concerns at the global level. China's increasing assertion in South China Sea, claim of EEZs for islands under its control, and threatening freedom of navigation in South China Sea and a unilateral declaration of the fishing ban season, are issues of concern. China's inroads into the Indian Ocean, the building of bases on some islands in the Indian Ocean (for example, in Maldives) and harassing Indonesian fishing boats in Natuna Islands are also of concern. The U.S. has not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) while China claims that UNCLOS is not applicable in the South China Sea: these are reasons for India to seek to build consensus in accepting international law and UNCLOS 1982 as foundations for global maritime security protocols.

Dimensions of defence and maritime cooperation

India has been supplying defence equipment and non-lethal platforms to countries in Southeast Asia. For instance, it has been supplying communication equipment, pyrotechnical signalling devices and other non-lethal equipment to Myanmar. In fact, India's interaction with Myanmar's military generals has been going on since 1995.¹⁵ For a long time, Myanmar has been looking for items, such as helicopters, medium transport aircraft and heavy earth-moving equipment, to aid its defence personnel in deployment and logistical support. India can help fulfil this requirement. Indeed, in 2019, in order to enhance overall defence cooperation, India and Myanmar signed an agreement to the effect.¹⁶ For India, the critical importance of Myanmar lies in the fact that its support is required for countering insurgency in India's north-eastern states.

In the last few years (2016–2018), India has also undertaken hot pursuit and decimated a few of the North-East insurgents' military camps inside Myanmar.¹⁷ These insurgent groups are believed to be hobnobbing with China regarding military equipment, lethal weapon systems and even communication devices.¹⁸ Additionally, for India, Myanmar is critical for its security and stability in the Bay of Bengal. The last few editions of the Malabar exercise, conducted by India in the Bay of Bengal, clearly show the importance of the region both for the maritime economy and exploring marine resources in the EEZ of India.

Among other countries of Southeast Asia, Laos and Cambodia have been benefiting from exclusive training modules that have been prepared for the two countries' armies by the Indian Army. India has also been providing Laos with necessary equipment, such as parachutes and other non-lethal equipment, in times of need. Cambodia, meanwhile, has been seeking India's help for training its military personnel for its UN peace-keeping operations. It has also requested India's assistance for undertaking programmes for demining of many of its areas.

India's defence cooperation with Thailand is less than a decade old. In the last meeting held in 2019 between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, it was agreed that in the wake of growing engagement in defence and maritime security-related fields, the two countries should explore the potential of bilateral cooperation between the defence industries. India–Thailand defence relations would help in countering sea migration, information exchange and disaster relief¹⁹ as well as aid in better coordinated patrols and countering sea smugglers. Furthermore, the two countries have explored cooperation in defence industrial sector. India regularly conducts bilateral military exercises with Thailand and it has been an observer in ex-Cobra Gold exercises which Thailand conducts with the U.S..

The landmark achievements of bilateral defence cooperation between the two sides are: regular conduct of joint maritime patrolling; critical dialogue on defence issues; and deputation of officers at each other's higher command institutions. Thailand has also hosted national security dialogues between India and Pakistan in the past. Further, India requires Bangkok's support for countering supply of weapons to the North-East insurgent groups through the illegal arms market in the country. In 2012, India and Thailand signed an MoU on defence cooperation, which helped in structuring defence interactions, exchange of personnel, training, and coordinated maritime patrols. Thailand, one of the very few countries in Southeast Asia which has been operating helicopter carriers.²⁰ The joint patrols conducted by India and Thailand near Andaman and Nicobar Islands have been primarily to address non-traditional security threats, particularly piracy and transnational criminal groups.

India has also been supporting Thailand in anti-submarine warfare and has provided high-frequency communication equipment as well as military electronics platforms which have been developed by Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL).²¹ Thailand, along with many countries in Southeast Asia, has been participating in the Milan series of exercises. In fact, in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), initiated by India in 2008, Thailand was seen as one of the legitimate stakeholders. In addition, both Thailand and Singapore are seen as littoral countries which have projected their stake in the security and stability of the IOR.

Singapore is one of the countries which has had assured defence engagement with India from as far back as the 1980s. India had procured two fast attack crafts from Singapore, while other two were supposed to be built in India primarily for Coast Guard operations. The project got derailed subsequently.²² India has been servicing many of its Sea King helicopters and other defence platforms through Singapore Technologies military infrastructure.²³ India and Singapore have also been conducting one of the longest regular exercises, SIMBEX, since 1994.²⁴ In 2017, India and Singapore signed a new agreement for promoting maritime security and coordination between the two navies, complementing the earlier defence cooperation agreement of 2015.²⁵ The burgeoning defence relationship between India and Singapore has been hampered by the blacklisting of ST Kinetics, which is embroiled in alleged kickbacks with the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) since 2006–2007. There was a proposal in 2018 to remove ST Kinetics from blacklisting, but this has not been done as of December 2021.

Singapore's ports have a quick turnaround time and exhibit high quality, efficiency and competitiveness in servicing. Given the fact that many Indian shipyards have been overbooked and Singapore has been providing quick maintenance, repair and overhaul of the Indian ships in the past, the Indian Navy has been utilising these ports for the maintenance and servicing of its ships. Singapore has also been trying hard to sell its light weight howitzer, Pegasus; however, this deal could not go through owing to ST Kinetics still being on the blacklist. Therefore, India has purchased the U.S.' M77 light howitzers, a towed 155 mm artillery gun,²⁶ primarily aimed at countering China in the Himalayan terrain. India also entered into a five-year agreement with Singapore to station its land systems at Babina and Deolali, while at the same time providing facility for basing Singapore Air Force aircrafts at Kalaikunda Air Base.²⁷

India's defence ties with Vietnam have been on an upswing. It is one of the countries which has benefited from the sale and supply of spare equipment by India in the past.²⁸ The maritime ties between the two countries have also become more profound with time. Hanoi even sought India's assistance in zeroing in on the variant of the Kilo-class submarine being offered by Russia to Vietnam.²⁹ The regular meetings between Indian and Vietnamese defence ministers in the past as well as the National Security Advisor's visit to Vietnam in 2015, clearly showcase the importance of Vietnam in India's security architecture, particularly in protecting India's interests in South China Sea as well as developing theatre awareness in that critical conflict zone.

Malaysia and India's signed a defence cooperation agreement in 1993 and ties between the two countries have grown over the years. Dialogues between the higher defence establishments of India and Malaysia have been not very frequent, but have outlined the areas where the two countries can collaborate and cooperate. Both India and Malaysia use the MiG-29 fighter aircraft and have been sharing spares as well other necessary technical details for regular maintenance of the aircraft.³⁰

India and Malaysia are also known as the Scorpene Club countries as the two nations have been operating these French submarines. Interestingly, Malaysia was the first to get the Scorpene-class submarine, much earlier than India received its first submarine from France. Malaysia had given some exposure to Indian submariners on its first Scorpene submarine.³¹ Meanwhile, India has trained Malaysian pilots at Kedak military base for operating the Sukhoi series of aircraft.³² India can explore Malaysia's defence industrial

complex to look for synergies between Indian and Malaysian shipyards for developing fast attack craft and other naval equipment in the near future.

An important element of promoting cooperation with Southeast Asian nations has been counterterrorism and maritime security. There have been synergies which can be explored under the ASEAN outlook on Indo-Pacific and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). The primary convergence could be in areas such as information sharing, marine technology and protecting maritime resources.

Counterterrorism and maritime security cooperation

Among the maritime Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines is seen as a major pivot which needs better approach from India, both in terms of defence engagement and sharing of intelligence related to the South China Sea. India has shown a keenness, in 2019 and 2020, to engage the Philippines through strategic dialogues and defence cooperation.³³ Recently, a lady called Karen Hamidon, one of the major influencers for recruiting Indians into the Islamic State, was traced to the Philippines.³⁴ As India donated US\$ 500,000 to support Philippines' counter-terrorism initiatives.³⁵ Manila, in turn, shared the details as well as allowed interrogation of the Islamic State operative.³⁶

The maritime strategy document of India, released in 2015, has buttressed the need for collaborative initiative in maritime security with littoral countries. The document suggests that India should deploy naval ships and logistics support platforms. It should consider strengthening defence cooperation with the Indian Ocean littoral countries through high-level security or defence dialogues and official exchanges. The document recommends capacity building of smaller countries, enhancing their personnel training capabilities and conducting hydrography surveys. Further, it emphasises that unique initiatives and collaboration in regional maritime domain awareness and coordinated maritime security operations would improve confidence between countries.³⁷

While indicating the need for capability enhancement and advancing India's maritime force strategy, there is a need for protection of sea lanes, force projection, protecting EEZs and exploring novel technologies for defence modernisation.³⁸ For India, the Sunda, Lombok, Ombai and Wetar Straits are important sea lanes and hence, India has engaged ASEAN countries through maritime dialogues and biennial meetings, such as Milan. In the Milan series of two-yearly meeting of regional navies, the participation of Southeast Asian countries has been increasing. In the previous Milan meetings (2017–2019), Myanmar, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have participated on a regular basis. In Milan 2020, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines and Brunei³⁹ were also invited, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event could not take place. For India, maritime security in and around the Six Degree Channel requires coordinated action with Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries.

Indonesia has been engaged with India since 1947 when Biju Patnaik rescued the future prime minister and vice president of Indonesia in a Dakota plane from the Dutch siege of the country.⁴⁰ India and Indonesia converged through the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the need for South-South cooperation. Both Jawaharlal Nehru and Sukarno had a good understanding of issues such as decolonisation, equality, sovereignty, and non-interference in the internal affairs of a country. The Bandung Conference, held in 1955, was an exposition of the need for uniting the newly independent

countries and envisaged the role of third world countries in the Cold War. However, widening differences between President Sukarno and Prime Minister Nehru because of recognition of the PRC led to the two countries drifting apart. However, India and Indonesia have been slowly discovering the need for developing synergies in the field of maritime security and one of the finest examples is exploring synergies between the IPOI outlined by India and the Global Maritime Fulcrum initiative of Indonesia. The two initiatives rest on seven pillars, out of which four are identical: these are maritime security; marine ecology; capacity building; and disaster risk reduction and management of seabed resources. India has added three other pillars related to knowledge, technology and education to the list, while Indonesia has vested more focus on issues which are of primary interest for its maritime security, particularly in the context of safeguarding its control and sovereignty over more than 17,000 islands scattered between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Regarding MSSI, India has always tried to project itself as a stakeholder by virtue of being a funnel state. It has also offered to join the Eyes in the Sky and other maritime security initiatives, but there has been reluctance on the part of some ASEAN nations – Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia – as they believe that any engagement with India would compel China to seek the same favours from the ASEAN countries. Thus, while Singapore has been accommodative, Malaysia and Indonesia have, at different times, expressed their reservations. As a result of this, to support maritime security, India has joined Singapore and Japan's initiative called "Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia" (ReCAAP).⁴¹ This helped India to get access to real time information. To facilitate seamless information exchange, India has even deputed a Coast Guard official for better coordination.

Further, India has entered into white shipping information exchange agreements with few countries in Southeast Asia, such as Myanmar, Singapore and Vietnam, to counter piracy and monitor rogue ships carrying suspicious cargo. India's engagement in ASEAN-related forums is also meant to develop better coordination and information sharing with Southeast Asian countries. In fact, the holding of "Trilateral Maritime Exercise between India, Singapore and Thailand (SITMEX)" was proposed during Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018.⁴²

Institutional mechanisms exist between India and the ASEAN countries for sharing intelligence and information among the coast guards of the countries. The Indian Coast Guard has been conducting maritime exercises with a few Southeast Asian countries – Thailand, Myanmar, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia – on a regular basis. In addition, the Indian Coast Guard has signed an MoU with seven Asian countries for conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.⁴³

ADMM plus and expanded ASEAN maritime forum

The ADMM Plus is one of the important platforms which has brought India and the ASEAN countries together to discuss issues of interest and work on feasible cooperation under its aegis⁴⁴ While ADMM Plus, which involves six dialogue partners, discusses issues of mutual interest and brings different stakeholders into its ambit, it still works on humanitarian and disaster relief, military medicine as well as cooperation in peace-keeping and anti-mining initiatives. These act as the lowest common denominator on

which the two sides can work together. The ADMM Plus has also brought the defence ministers of India and the ASEAN countries together, otherwise in most other forums, it has been the prerogative of the foreign ministers to outline strategic and defence priorities of their respective countries.

Defence industry and research

India and Vietnam have been holding annual dialogues regularly, and there have been 13 editions of the dialogues held till 2021. During the annual dialogue between India and Vietnam held in the year 2020, the stress was on defence research and collaborative projects in defence industry.⁴⁵ Earlier, Thailand too had appreciated India's indigenous research and defence manufacturing,⁴⁶ showing enthusiasm to engage in the defence sector.

The ASEAN countries have been exploring possibilities in terms of Fourth Industrial Revolution and utilising artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and big data to bring about revolution in production and manufacturing. India has also been working towards utilising AI and big data for upgrading its defence industrial complex and facilitating defence research among civilian institutions. This can include 3D printing to creating seamless communications through AI with the contractors of the shipyards so that timely provisions of equipment and other raw materials can be provided in a time-bound manner.

Conclusion

The ties between India and Southeast Asia, particularly in the domain of defence cooperation and maritime security, were limited till the end of the Cold war. Although countries like Singapore and Indonesia did benefit from initial collaboration, overall, the Southeast Asian countries were wary of India's intentions, particularly following the liberation of Bangladesh and strengthening of the Andaman and Nicobar Command. However, with increasing expertise in maintenance and support of erstwhile Soviet-era weapons systems and platforms, countries like Malaysia and Vietnam started cooperating with India for their specific requirements. Myanmar, which was estranged because of India's support to the democratic movement in the country, also developed cordial relations with India. The military junta started sharing information and providing geographic coordinates of insurgent camps along the India–Myanmar border. India reciprocated by supplying pyrotechnical devices to Myanmar. Recently, it even leased a Kilo-class submarine to Myanmar.

Securing its maritime frontiers has been one of the major concerns for India and therefore, it claims to be a funnel state which has a legitimate stake in the security of the Malacca Strait. Further, by participating in different confidence-building initiatives and undertaking coordinated patrols with Indonesia and Thailand, India has helped in countering illegal drugs trade and monitoring illegal undersea scavenging of marine resources. However, the Southeast Asian nations have been cautious about larger collaboration with India on different aspects of maritime security for the basic reason that this would draw China's attention, and may also annoy it.

Southeast Asian countries, in projecting the ASEAN outlook towards the Indo-Pacific, have acknowledged that maritime security is a core area of concern. By 2025, India aims at having a better-equipped navy with two aircraft carriers and the induction of six Scorpene submarines. India has also been coordinating with Quad countries, namely, Australia, Japan and the U.S., in the Indo-Pacific region, which is expected to further enhance maritime diplomacy with Southeast Asia in the near future. Almost all dialogue partners accept ASEAN centrality and, therefore, any initiatives in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the maritime domain, would require the involvement of ASEAN nations. For India, security and stability in the Indian Ocean is very critical. Therefore, India has been forging deeper defence and maritime cooperation with the Southeast Asian countries to make the region safe and secure. Sharing of information related to white shipping, anti-piracy cooperation, regular coordinated patrols and capacity building has been the hallmarks of this relationship. With the growth of blue economy and huge potential of exploitation of marine resources and seabed mining, the maritime security cooperation is going to gain further momentum.

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