

INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
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In the backdrop of polarising US-China strategic cooperation, the fragmentation of the global economy by the protracted Ukraine crises, stagnated inflation and supply chain disruptions, world leaders congregated in Southeast Asia across several high-level summits in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand. Though the ASEAN signed a peace accord with Ukraine to express solidarity, behind the scenes most of the Southeast Asian countries appear to have been divided on taking a position on the conflict and refrained from condemning Russia on global platforms. A divided ASEAN is raising concerns among the global community on its ability to respond as a whole to issues of hard security.

ASEAN Summits including ASEAN-India commemorative summit conclude in Cambodia

Cambodia hosted the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) annual summit and a parallel East Asia Summit. Leaders discussed issues ranging from ways of dealing with the fallout of the Russia-Ukraine crises, Myanmar's Junta and contested claims to the South China Sea. The ASEAN summit was followed by the 9th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus which is the formal venue for defence minister meetings in the Asia-Pacific region. Special meetings with nations like the US, India, and Japan were also held in addition to the exclusive ASEAN summit. This ASEAN summit also

saw the upgrading of the ASEAN-India relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership (CSP). India's Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar led the Indian delegation which saw both sides reaffirming the underlying the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, freedom of navigation and overflight in the region, and peaceful resolution of disputes both sides also agreed to advance maritime ties and enhance cooperation against terrorism, transnational crimes and cybercrimes.

RM Rajnath Singh announces two flagship initiatives at ADMM plus special meeting

On the special occasion of 30th Anniversary of India-ASEAN relations at the 9th ADMM (ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting) Plus held at Siem Reap in Cambodia, the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh announced two significant proposals : 'India-ASEAN Initiative for Women in UN Peace Keeping Operations' and 'India-ASEAN Initiative on Marine Plastic Pollution' with the aim of broadening the scope and depth of the defence partnerships between India and ASEAN. By emphasising on ASEAN's centrality as the cornerstone of India's Act East Policy, Shri Rajnath Singh also urged swift and determined international action to combat transnational and cross-border terrorism, describing it as the greatest danger to regional and international security. Amidst the fluctuating geo-strategic rivalries in the region and beyond, the Southeast Asian states are increasingly embracing their role in balancing Indo-Pacific security concerns.

Anwar Ibrahim sworn in as the Prime Minister of Malaysia

Anwar Ibrahim, a veteran leader of Malaysia was sworn in as the nation's new prime minister after several minor blocs agreed to back him for a unity government following tumultuous parliamentary elections that left a hung parliament. In the elections, Anwar's progressive coalition had narrowly defeated his rival Yassin Muhyiddin's primarily conservative ethnic-Malay, Muslim alliance but was short of 30 seats to form the government. King Al-Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah made the final decision about the prime minister after the deadline to ally passed. It would be a daunting task for the Malaysian PM to tackle the divisive issues related to race and religion which were prominent in these polls.

World leaders gathered for G20 Bali Summit in Indonesia, India handed the Chair for next presidency

Under the theme "Recover Together, Recover Stronger," G20 leaders gathered in Bali for a two-day summit hosted by Indonesia and the topics of discussion included the digital revolution, global health architecture, climate change, global economic recovery, and sustainable energy transition. Indian PM Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping also had their first interaction since the Galwan Clash in 2020 on the sidelines of the summit. Other foreign leaders who were present included German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo officially handed over the G20 chair to India after the conclusion of summit. India's theme for G20 Presidency is "One Earth One Family One Future" and will be seen as an important opportunity to position India as leading voice for the development of the global South and also establishing more equitable towards global governance.

Southeast Asian countries extend support to Ukraine through a peace accord

Ukraine inked a peace agreement with Southeast Asian countries under the "Treaty on Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia". The treaty was signed by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. It is a symbolic move and comes as Kyiv seeks to increase international support for its isolation of Russia. While Cambodia's PM Hun Sen, who is currently helming the rotating ASEAN chair, has become more vocal on the Ukraine issue, Singapore so far has taken the harshest stance on the conflict and imposed unilateral sanctions on Russia. Cambodia also backed Ukraine's efforts to join ASEAN as a "Sectoral Dialogue Partner".

Quad nations join India's Malabar Exercise 2022 & India – Malaysia joint military Exercise Harimau Shakti - 2022 commences in Malaysia

India kicked off its annual Malabar exercise along with its Quad partners Japan, US and Australia in seas off the Japanese coast in the 26th edition of the naval Exercise. Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) was

in charge of hosting this exercise that aimed to promote cooperation in the strategically crucial Indo-Pacific region. The Indian Navy was represented by its Eastern Fleet, stealth multirole frigate INS Shivalik and anti-submarine corvette INS Kamorta. The exercise included a variety of high-end tactical training events including anti-submarine warfare training, submarine integration, joint war fighting planning scenarios and multinational replenishment-at-sea operations and maritime interdiction operations. In November, India also joined Malaysia in a two week long joint military exercise "Harimau Shakti 2022". It features combat-trained soldiers from the Garhwal Rifles Regiment of the Indian Army and the Royal Malay Regiment of the Malaysian Army. This exercise focuses on joint field training, improving tactical skills and increasing interoperability between the forces along with fostering relationships between the armies.

Australia donates rifles to Solomon Islands

Australia donated police cars and 60 MK18 rifles to the Royal Solomon Island Police Force (RSIPF). The declaration follows a tumultuous year in the bilateral relationship between Australia and the Solomon Islands, especially when earlier this year, a leaked security pact between the two countries raised alarm about its destabilizing impact in the region. Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sogavare has repeatedly denied that the security partnership will lead to the installation of a Chinese military base in the islands. He insisted that China only offered to help in the training of the local police force. Local media report that as global superpowers vie for influence in the Pacific, the various types of assistance given by Australia and China to the Solomon Islands police have elicited questions and concern about their long-term geopolitical impact. Some citizens are worried that the trend toward "militarization" could turn the Solomon Islands into a "gun state."