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Exploring India's Maritime Foreign Policy in Southeast Asia: The SAGAR Initiative

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Abstract

The present article is the project of ongoing research project on Indian foreign policy sanctioned by ICSSR and academic collaboration with Dr. Dahiya. The Maritime Territory of India consists of a vast stretch of 7517 km of coastline and more than 1200 islands. That's why Indian foreign policy is heavily reliant on matters related to maritime security. Indian foreign policy prioritizes humanistic values drawn from ancient Indian texts, traditions, and culture i.e. everything is part of the same existence spectrum; there are differences amongst creations in terms of consciousness. The Indian government published the country's first maritime doctrine in 2004 and later in 2007 and revised in 2009. The maritime cooperation framework within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is fundamentally shaped by the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) doctrine notably delivered by the PM Narendra Modi in 2015. Accordingly, India has redesigned its current policies to deal with coastline security, piracy, climate change, human trafficking, drugs smuggling, seaborne economic activities, blue economy and maritime terrorism as issues of critical strategic importance in response to China. The goal of SAGAR strategy is to advance economic development and security for all of the Southeast Asian region's countries. It also aims to establishing a trusting and transparent atmosphere, addressing regional concerns, increasing marine collaboration and decreasing international marine disputes in the IOR. The present article purposes to examine several maritime events and projects that are credited to SAGAR, as well as to provide a list of related Indian initiatives. The paper also explains the five fundamental facts Samvad, Samman, Sahyog, Samridhi and Shanti articulated by the PM Modi in his keynote address in 2015, with the goal of elucidating the components of SAGAR.

Keywords

India's foreign policy, Maritime security, Strategic environment, Southeast Asia.

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1. Introduction

Southeast Asia is a region in the southeastern part of Asia, positioned between China, the Indian subcontinent, and Oceania. The Maritime Southeast Asia mostly lies in the Northern Hemisphere, which is the only Asian subregion that extends into the Southern Hemisphere (Southeast Asia - Rainforest, Mangroves, Flora | Britannica, 2025). Geographically, these states are classified into two groups: mainland and island states. Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia are Mainland States, whereas Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines are Island States. Southeast Asia includes the regions of East Timor and southern Indonesia. It encompasses around 4,500,000 km² (1,700,000 sq miles), or 3% of Earth's total surface area, and 8% of Eurasia. With about 675 million people living there, it makes up around 8.5% of the global population (Ahmadzai *et al.*, 2022). After East and South Asia, it is the third most populated area in Asia. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a regional organization formed to foster economic, cultural integration, political, educational, and military among its members. The economies of ASEAN members are among the fastest-growing in the world. The phrase "South-east Asia" was first used during the World War II, when the Allies established "South-east Asia Command" in an effort to free the region of Asia's southeast from Japanese rule. Since then, the region that lies south of China and east of India has been designated as a Southeast Asian country (Gotô, 2003).

India-ASEAN ties improved dramatically in 2022, moving from a dialogue partnership formed in the 1990s to a multifaceted strategic alliance. In June, the ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers met specially to commemorate their 30th anniversary, with a focus on digital connectivity, commerce, investments, security, military, and climate sustainability. India's extending focus on security became evident through its inclusion in ASEAN-led forums such as the ARF and ADMM+. The evolution from the Look East to the Act East policy

further strengthened maritime cooperation, driven not only by past humanitarian efforts but also by strategic considerations, particularly in response to China's expanding influence. Examples of this include its relief mission for the 2004 tsunami and its continued naval training with ASEAN nations since 2002. Concerns over China's increasing power are shared by ASEAN and India, especially with regard to its broad "open seas protection" policy in the Indo-Pacific area (Manhas, 2024). Due to security concerns, this has resulted in increasing collaboration between India and the nations of Southeast Asia. Beyond opposing China, though, India and ASEAN work together on a number of topics, including defense, cyber security, transnational crime, and sustainable development. The necessity of collaboration has been even more highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in fields like healthcare, disaster relief, and vaccine delivery. The evolving discourse encircling the Indo-Pacific presents new possibilities to deepen maritime collaboration between India and ASEAN.

The SAGAR, a strategic marine doctrine launched by the PM Narendra Modi in 2015, attempts to strengthen cooperation with maritime neighbors, particularly within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), to maintain collective security and Sustainable growth. The SAGAR stresses a comprehensive strategy that includes marine security, trade, infrastructure development, disaster management, and environmental conservation (Bajpae, 2022). It aims to strengthen economic integration, address security concerns, prosperity, stability, and peace within the region (Sarangi, 2019). Modi's speech on March 12, 2015 at the hiring function of Mauritius National Coast Guard's Ship Barracuda serves as commencement of outlining the SAGAR vision. This was later reinforced by two key speeches delivered by Sushma Swaraj, former Minister of External Affairs, at the second and third Indian Ocean Conferences.

2. India's Maritime Policy in Modi Regime

India has become extremely aware of the potential of terrorist attacks by sea ever since the Mumbai terror assault at the end of November 2008. The importance of maritime security, commons, and collaboration has increased in the current geopolitical environment. India has been a passive participant within the Indian Ocean for quite some time, without a robust and visible maritime policy. In recent years, India's maritime policy and strategy have

increasingly embraced a more pragmatic and adaptive approach, aligning with the evolving geopolitical dynamics of the region. India needs to safeguard its maritime frontiers, realize its economic ambitions, and transition from a potential regional power to a single, dominant force in the Indian Ocean Rim. That is feasible, but only with a daring, adaptable, creative, and cooperative marine policy. In March 2015, during his trip to the Mauritius and Seychelles, The Prime Minister Modi made it clear that India's top strategic priority is the IOR. Our goal for the Indian Ocean Region is centered on strengthening regional collaboration and utilizing our resources to benefit everyone who lives in our shared marine home. On June 1, 2018, speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted SAGAR as the guiding principle behind India's intensified engagement with the East, facilitated by the Act East Policy. This vision is expressed for the IOR; of course, the reason for using "our" so frequently is to emphasize how inclusive the Indian perspective is. "The benefit of all" is the clear end objective for the collaboration. The PM Modi outlined a five-point plan for India's maritime cooperation within the IOR in his address in Mauritius (Upadhyaya, 2020). At the core of Prime Minister Modi's policies lies a steadfast commitment to safeguarding India's maritime interests and ensuring the security of both its mainland and island territories. Additionally, India remains highly attuned to the Indian Ocean's growing strategic significance in global affairs. According to Modi, New Delhi *"will work to ensure a safe, secure and stable Indian Ocean Region that delivers us all to the shores of prosperity"*, even though the countries own interests come first. The subsequent feature of Modi's plan concentrates on strengthening security collaboration with partners in the region, notably Seychelles and Mauritius. In Seychelles, Modi promised an additional Dornier plane for maritime monitoring, secured agreements for hydrographic research and started a radar project for shoreline surveillance. The goal of this project is to set up surveillance radars in the Indian Ocean at several points, for instance, in Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, as well as Seychelles, and connect them to an analytic center close to Delhi. While in Mauritius, Modi signed agreements for the construction of infrastructure in key places and commissioned an offshore patrol boat built in India. India hopes to gain strategic footholds in the South Western Indian Ocean through these programs, which also aim to strengthen defensive capabilities in the area. The third stage of

Modi's strategy focuses on establishing collaborative multilateralism marine security in the IOR. The Prime Minister Modi emphasized India's commitment to supporting and strengthening regional mechanisms to combat terrorism, counter-piracy, and respond effectively to natural disasters. He also expressed optimism that the existing trilateral security cooperation with the Maldives and Sri Lanka would expand to include Mauritius, Seychelles, and other regional partners. With India at its core, this vision lays the foundation for robust and inclusive multilateral maritime security collaboration in the IOR. Furthermore, 4th key concept of his maritime policy is the pursuit of sustainable economic growth. The PM Modi declared the establishment of a cooperative working group in Seychelles to enhance collaboration on the blue economy, aiming to deepen the understanding of marine ecology and resources among littoral states while promoting the sustainable use of oceanic wealth. He also demonstrated a decisive commitment to addressing the concerns of island nations regarding climate change.

Notably, Modi has moved beyond India's traditional hesitancy in engaging with major powers in the Indian Ocean, signaling a more open and cooperative approach to regional maritime governance. Modi made an oblique allusion to the involvement of the USA in the region through conversation, economic ties, military exercises and capacity development initiatives, even as he insisted that governments in the IOR have primary accountability for maintaining peace, stability, security, and prosperity in those seas. In Mauritius, Modi solidified this plan by declaring that *"our goal is to seek a climate of trust and transparency; respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries; sensitivity to each other's interests; peaceful resolution of maritime issues; and increase in maritime cooperation."* Modi has, meanwhile, kept the door open for China even as he suggests a different strategy toward the United States. His open communication with the USA may actually strengthen New Delhi's negotiating position with Beijing (Mohan, 2015).

In Singapore on 1st June, 2018, PM Modi gave a keynote speech at the IISS (International Institute for Strategic Studies). He presented an overview of India's Indo-Pacific policy using the five Hindi words starts with S's: *Samvad* (discussion), *Samman* (respect), *Sahyog* (cooperation), *Samridhi* (prosperity), and *Shanti* (peace), therefore prepared the groundwork for us to take on a more significant role in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean area (IOR). Speaking on August 31,

2017, during the 2nd Indian Ocean Conference in Sri Lanka, former EAM Sushma Swaraj listed the following components as a vision of SAGAR. Firstly, strengthening the ability to protect interests and areas on the land and in the sea. Secondly, strengthening security and economic cooperation throughout the region. Thirdly, encouraging cooperation in the fight against terrorism, natural disasters, and rising non-state actors in the maritime domain. Fourthly, working to improve cooperation in order to achieve sustainable regional development. Finally, engaging with international partners to promote mutual respect for maritime laws, uphold established customs, and encourage the peaceful resolution of disputes remains a key priority. *“The EAM spoke at the Third Indian Ocean Conference in Vietnam on August 27, 2018, where she went into further detail about infrastructure development and connectivity through SAGAR Projects. She outlines in her speech SAGAR is aiming to promote hinterland linkages and strengthen regional connectivity, Connecting South Asia to South East Asia; actively and constructively contributing to the improvement of marine security in the region”* (Sarangi, 2019).

In November 2014, “Look East Policy” was revitalized and redefined with the introduction of “Act East Policy”, signaling a more proactive and engagement-driven approach. It is a diplomatic endeavor to advance, on several fronts, strategic, commercial, and cultural ties with the enormous “Asia-Pacific region”. It entails extensive and ongoing bilateral, regional, and international involvement with nations in Southeast Asia concerning connectivity, trade, culture, defense, and people-to-people interaction. *“The objective behind this move is to strengthen economic cooperation, deepen cultural connections, and cultivate strategic partnerships with nations across the Indo-Pacific region through a dynamic and action-oriented approach, India’s Act East Policy aims to strengthen its political, economic, and security ties with Southeast Asia and Indo-Pacific nations while countering China’s ascent to prominence”* (Rajagopalan, 2020).

3. India’s Maritime Relations with ASEAN

India has long maintained ties with its neighbors in the East, “Act East policy”, simply a fresh expression of long-standing relationship with neighboring nations. India launched its “Look East Policy” in the aftermath of the ‘Cold War’, seeking to navigate the shifting global landscape following the collapse of bipolar world politics with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As a result of abrupt changes in the political landscape of the world, India reestablished its links with

ASEAN, shifting relations with its near neighbors, and a recently opened economy. This started when India started seeking for ways to expand and improve its economy, which led to a drive for closer economic links. The focus of PM Modi's remarks was to emphasize the importance of bilateral as well as multilateral relationships, with a particular emphasis on strategic, defense, counterterrorism, cultural, economic, and interpersonal links. In practical terms, "Act East Policy" became focused on strengthening ties with ASEAN nations, particularly in areas critical to domestic development. This included collaboration on infrastructure, seamless trade, and skill enhancement—both technical and soft—along with key initiatives such as Make in India and smart city projects, among others. Enhancing regional cooperation and integration can be facilitated by connectivity initiatives such as space technology, port development, as well as people-to-people connections. A larger focus was also placed on disaster management and climate change, both because of the potential benefits of the blue economy. As India's gateway to Southeast Asia, the northeastern area has also drawn more attention. *"India's partnership with ASEAN was further reinforced through active engagement in regional organizations such as ASEAN, BIMSTEC, the ARF, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meetings, the East Asia Summit (EAS), the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation framework, and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)"* (S. Singh & Marwah, 2024). With the adoption of the "Act East Policy", the Indo-Pacific region has evolved into a pivotal geostrategic framework. *"Over time, it has gained prominence as a key geopolitical landscape, shaping regional and global dynamics. India believes in an Indo-Pacific region that is safe, prosperous, interconnected, free, equitable, inclusive, open, and resilient, and that is moving toward sustainable development, according to the Ministry of External Affairs of India"* (Baruah, 2020). India has fully integrated the Indo-Pacific framework into its strategic vision, creating a dedicated division within the Ministry of External Affairs to oversee its engagement. Through initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, India continues to champion a free, open, and inclusive regional order.

4. India-ASEAN Naval Exercises

Due to their lengthy coastlines and rich maritime histories, India along with the other nations in ASEAN have natural ties to the water. Also, because of their shared geographic location, all of these

countries are acutely aware of the many opportunities and difficulties that come with living there, which has sparked their interest in forming alliances to guarantee marine security. In recent decades, there has been an increased emphasis on joint humanitarian aid, disaster relief efforts, naval diplomacy, and naval drills. As a result, their fleets have become more closely coordinated, which is still essential for their joint collaboration with the greater Indo-Pacific area. The following are a few of these genres: -

Passage Exercises: As per NATO Maritime Command, they are bilateral exercises in which ships cooperate and move alongside and around one another while practicing communication and navigation skills. Regular bilateral and multilateral PASSEX exercises are conducted by the Indian Navy. These support the maintenance of capabilities that defy international norms and aid in the improvement of operational skills (Indian Navy, 2015). For example, in February and May of 2021, India and Indonesia performed the Passage Exercise (PASSEX). *“In May, the Indonesian Navy, under the command of KRI Sultan Hasanudin, collaborated with the Indian Navy, which deployed INS Sharda along with a Chetak helicopter, to enhance maritime coordination. Similarly, in 2020, India and Vietnam conducted a two-day transit exercise in the South China Sea, further strengthening their maritime cooperation”* (Manhas, 2024).

Exercises that occur on occasion: The Indian Navy actively engages in periodic naval exercises, fostering interoperability and strategic cooperation with various nations, including China. Among these, the Milan and Malabar exercises stand out as some of the most enduring and significant maritime engagements. The more recent naval drills involve the United States, Japan, Australia, and India—the four countries that make up the Quadrilateral Security Framework. The most frequent of these are humanitarian aid-driven drills, which are designed to maintain maritime safety and other small-scale norms on high seas that occasionally may cause unwarranted tensions (Navy I. , 2015). In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, regional navies, including the Indian Navy, prioritized Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations, extending their efforts both domestically and internationally. The Indian Navy is in charge of the twice-yearly Indian Ocean Fleet to support such peacetime activities and projects. The Naval Symposium’s (IONS) HADR Working Group. *“The goal of this is to create an action plan for the warships of the Indian Ocean Region to*

construct a coordinated HADR response and other instances of these bilateral or multilateral drills with ASEAN nations” (Navy I. , n.d.).

5. Maritime Security Challenges and the SAGAR

Situated at the intersections of the Indo-Pacific, Southeast Asia hosts some of the world's most critical sea lanes and strategic maritime straits, underscoring its significance in global trade and security. The region's coastal areas are also a major source of income, a vital conduit for intraregional travel, and an integral part of its cultural legacy. Although the focus of most extra-regional attention is on the escalating disputes in the “South China Sea”, the wider marine area of Southeast Asia is a highly complex, perils to environment with several additional hazards lurking that might endanger a variety of marine stake holding groups. Understanding and interpreting this complexity is essential to comprehending the wide range of emerging and persistent dangers that Southeast Asia is currently facing. Security perspectives in Southeast Asia have often diverged from Western frameworks, particularly in how they define and distinguish between conventional and non-traditional security challenges. The immediate challenges of post-colonial state-building within the framework of growing Cold War rivalry were mirrored in Southeast Asian security strategy, which sought to prioritize the strengthening of national resilience. National resilience, which was rather broad, meant that states would react to a variety of risks that may jeopardize the development of powerful, centralized, and industrialized countries.

The maritime risks facing Southeast Asia are diverse in form, but they all affect sea users and undermine resilience by eroding the profitability of licit marine operations. Amid evolving security challenges, resilience is no longer confined to the particular countries as the sole focus of safety concerns. Instead, there is a rising recognition that protecting key institutions and organizations is equally vital to ensuring the safety and stability of maritime regions. While occasionally criticized for its inaction, the 2007 ASEAN charter's trend towards “people-centered, people-oriented communities” has highlighted a general awareness that people need to be safeguarded. The process is being accelerated by extra regional pressure as human security becomes the norm everywhere. Because of their interdependencies, the region's many problems-such as

forced labor, IUU fishing, and environmental degradation-must be addressed holistically. When addressing IUU fishing without taking the human security aspect into account, vessel personnel that have been tricked or coerced might become victims. Furthermore, since millions of people in Southeast Asia rely on fisheries for their food and livelihoods, healthy oceans are essential for the resilience of nations and communities. The idea of the “blue economy” highlights the potential for riches found in the seas, but it also underlines the necessity of sustainability. Cross-border tensions raise the possibility of interstate warfare by adding another level of complexity to maritime security issues, especially in the South China Sea. While classic security risks like piracy have been addressed with some success, other issues like cyber-insecurity and climate change still need to be addressed. For marine security initiatives in the area to be effective, it is imperative that the interconnectedness of these challenges be acknowledged (Bradford, 2023).

China’s growing naval capabilities and assertive stance in the South China Sea present shared strategic challenges for India and ASEAN, underscoring the need for greater regional cooperation. India fears rising Chinese military presence in the Indian Ocean, while ASEAN countries are concerned about China’s presence in the South China Sea, where four states have competing claims. India’s defense cooperation with these countries is significant, even though media attention is frequently directed toward China’s issues with larger ASEAN states like the Philippines and Vietnam (Bekkevold & Kalyanaraman, 2020). But smaller ASEAN nations also look to India for assistance in reducing their reliance on China, which might hinder China’s efforts to expand throughout the Indo-Pacific region. One point of concern between Brunei and China is the Muara port and naval station, from which most of the nation’s gas as well oil is shipped to India. China is become more vocal about its contradictory claims. Due to Brunei’s EEZ, it exposes India’s supply vulnerable to China’s conflicts. Establishing more maritime connection by providing naval escorting between the ports of Brunei and the eastern ports of India, is one method to get over this challenge. Increasing collaboration between two nations outside the realm of oil and gas may also be achieved via partnering across diverse sectors. With a few other ASEAN states, India has recently become a significant defense partner; this relationship may also be extended to

Brunei. The worldwide supply network for hydrogen in Brunei, demonstration facility at Industrial Park of Sungai Liang, demonstrates the enormous potential for India-Brunei energy collaboration (Bhattacharjee, 2018). Similar to this, news of a military complex sponsored by China in Cambodia that confronts the contentious South China Sea has made each of the regional players aware of its potential consequences particularly India. Another Chinese facility near India's periphery, after Djibouti and the Solomon Islands, would raise concerns. China may be able to have perpetual access to the Indian Ocean through this facility. China "signed an undisclosed agreement which permits its military and armed forces to use a part of Ream Naval Base, located on Cambodia's southern coast fronting the Gulf of Thailand", according to a 2019 Washington Post story (SAHA, 2022). There are plenty of chances for India and Cambodia to strengthen their relationship, even if China has a large investment advantage in Cambodia. Digitalization, tourism, the sale of defense equipment, and infrastructure connectivity-particularly with India's northeastern region-are important areas for partnership. India's influence may also be increased via its soft power resources. Cooperation between these industries might be accelerated by implementing fast impact projects. Cambodia seeks India's collaboration as a strategic counterbalance to China's expanding influence in the country's investment landscape. With the recent tensions with China, India has a chance to establish a strategic alliance with Malaysia. In response to Chinese violations of airspace, Malaysia has asserted its sovereignty, which is consistent with India's pledge to uphold UNCLOS and maintain maritime sovereignty. While the ASEAN countries interact with Beijing in different ways, Malaysia has made a strong stand against abuses of sovereignty. Collaboration is based on India's multifaceted links with ASEAN, which are based on mutual respect for maritime borders. ASEAN along with India can work together to offset China's escalating impact in the area, particularly across the Strait of Malacca. In this endeavor, collaborations with neighboring countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands, are vital assets (BBC, 2021). The nine-dash line, which represents China's increasing claims in the South China Sea, has escalated patrols and violated the sovereignty of ASEAN member nations' airspace and marine areas.

Although ASEAN does not have a unified position, individual countries such as Malaysia are strongly against Beijing's invasion of their sovereignty. *"This strengthens ties with ASEAN and is consistent with India's commitment to upholding UNCLOS and preserving maritime sovereignty in the area. When working together, ASEAN along with India can balance off China's increasing influence, especially across the vital Strait of Malacca, India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as well as alliances with countries that border them, such as Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, are essential to this effort"* (Singh et al., 2022).

Myanmar is strategically crucial for India as a gateway to Southeast Asia. India seeks to strengthen its developmental partnership with Myanmar several initiatives such as KMTTP, BIMSTEC etc. Partnership prospects are further enhanced by the SAGAR vision. India's infrastructure projects and defense supplies may help Myanmar, and India also shows that it can work with both democratic and military forces. There is other potential for partnership between India and Myanmar through quick impact initiatives in fields like digitalization, cyber security, and agriculture. Tensions have escalated between the Philippines and China, especially over the Scarborough Shoal, which is why India has sent Manila its BrahMos cruise missiles. This alliance complements India's proactive defense cooperation and Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative, while also strengthening the Philippines' defense capabilities. The purchase of BrahMos missiles strengthens Philippine sovereignty by acting as an eye on China's incursions into its territorial seas. The two countries have also increased their naval drills and training, as well as their collaboration in energy, mutual investments, and maritime security. Vietnam is the only ASEAN member that has engaged in direct heated battles with Beijing. Vietnam wants India to be a powerful partner in order to neutralize, if not overcome, the China threat as it forges strong ties with China (Reena Marwah, 2021).

An Indian Space Research Organization-supported satellite monitoring facility near Ho Chi Minh, gathering intelligence and conducts surveillance on Chinese activity in the region. *"Vietnam may now see photos transmitted by Indian satellites for earth observation that keep an eye on the South China Sea"* (Torode, 2016). This type of high-level partnership is expected to spread to the member of ASEAN, demonstrates that, despite China's comparative advantage in economic cooperation, India continues to be ASEAN's preferred partner when matters related to technology transfer as well as mutual trust.

6. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech on March 12, 2015, at the Commissioning Ceremony

“Our marine forces will work together to share intelligence, support other littoral states with their coastal monitoring, create deep seaports and other facilities, and boost our capabilities through maritime cooperation in the IOR. The SAGAR initiative plays a crucial role in counterbalancing China's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). China has integrated its String of Pearls strategy into the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), steadily increasing its maritime footprint through the development of a Maritime Silk Road. To safeguard its strategic interests and enhance its presence in key littoral states along vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), China continues to make substantial investments and foster deeper cooperation with regional partners.”

China has made significant expenditures on the current maritime silk route, mostly for military and geopolitical purposes in addition to commercial ones. India must counter China's influence by strengthening its ties with its neighbors, updating its navy quickly, and upgrading and modernizing its maritime projects. SAGAR will assist in utilizing our blue economy to further our socioeconomic objectives. The sustainable use of ocean resources for enhanced economic growth, a healthy ecology, and social benefits such as better lives and job possibilities is referred to as the “blue economy”. The Indian Ocean region is rich in resources, especially when it comes to fields like waste management, renewable energy, tourism, seabed mining and minerals, fisheries, aquaculture, and marine transportation. India must thus make the most of its extensive coastline in addition to working with other members of the IORA, be visible and cooperative for the sustainable use of Indian Ocean resources, and utilize “blue diplomacy”. The Ministry of Shipping intends to revitalize the deteriorating maritime infrastructure, particularly the ports and freight processing capacity, as part of the SAGARMALA Project. The project calls for significant investments in infrastructure to modernize key seaports, expand navigable rivers on land, increase capacity, modernize, and support port-led industrial growth. Therefore, it can be said that this project is providing the impetus required for the SAGAR effort to succeed in order to promote commerce and business (Kumar, 2017). Furthermore, assistance with the development of marine infrastructure may be provided to other nations including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Oman, and Iran. During the COVID first wave, Mission SAGAR was

established under Vision SAGAR and offered the nations in the IOR support pertaining to COVID-19. Food supplies, medications, vaccinations, and the dispatch of Medical Assistance Teams were all part of the help. Engaging neighboring nations during times of crises was a wise move (Soumyodeep Deb, 2023). The SAGAR Initiative emphasizes how important ASEAN is in facilitating commerce and managing fisheries. India should take the lead in implementing ASEAN's current and future initiatives, which include developing centers of excellence for maritime safety and security, exchanging data on marine transpiration systems, investigating regional surveillance networks, and conducting training and capacity development programs. This will help to fortify relationships with certain ASEAN members.

7. Conclusion

India and ASEAN have developed a mutually beneficial partnership throughout time. They have established a solid working relationship in the fields of environmental protection, defense cooperation, economic growth, and combating the danger of terrorism. They have also taken steps to challenge China's growing influence in their region. Their marine cooperation is supported by all of these factors, which are represented in it. India's attempts to fortify its bilateral and multilateral ties with ASEAN countries have been driven by its Look East and Act East policies, which have been in place since the 1990s and 2014. The SAGAR and IPOI plans of the PM Narendra Modi attest to India's desire to discuss marine security, maritime commons, collaboration, and capacity building with every country in Southeast Asia. India's constant assertion as the South China Sea as a worldwide mutual underscores its commitment to fostering stability and reducing tensions in the region. Through the SAGAR initiative, India has engaged comprehensively with Southeast Asian nations, spanning key areas such as information exchange, coastal research, infrastructure development, and capacity building, reinforcing its vision for a secure and cooperative maritime domain. By exchanging defense equipment and updating ports, especially in the Andaman and Nicobar region, ASEAN along with India are fortifying their marine cooperation. Ensuring open passage and safeguarding important marine routes such as the Malacca Strait depend heavily on this collaboration. In addition to opposing China, its alliance uses both soft and physical power and cultural affinities to generate positive answers to problems in the area. India is a

regional force that ASEAN needs to assist in light of the rising security risks. India needs ASEAN collaboration in order to offset China's influence. Together, with well-established alliances across several industries, they seek to use possibilities and tackle obstacles, especially those presented by China's ascent. In order to promote mutual confidence and understanding for their developing maritime cooperation, collaboration takes place at both the bilateral and international levels.

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