

## Book Review

*India-ASEAN Engagements: Economic and Social Dimensions*. Edited by Faisal Ahmed and Mohd. Faheem. New Delhi: New Century Publications, 2019. pp.158. Price: INR 745/-. (Hardbound)The book edited by Faisal Ahmed and Mohd. Faheem entitled: “India-ASEAN Engagements: Economic and Social Dimension” has been published by New Century Publications, New Delhi in 2019. Introduction apart, the book - consists of eight (8) articles/papers, contributed by reputed scholars/experts from ASEAN countries and India - runs through 158 pages. The beauty of the volume is that it is written in a very lucid style mainly useful to policy makers, researchers and post-graduate students.

ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), one of the most vibrant regional organisations across the globe, came into being in the 1960s with certain specific aims and objectives, focusing mainly on economic growth and development of the region. At present, ASEAN is represented by ten member countries – Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam - having geo-graphical proximity and socio-cultural diversity. Over the years, ASEAN as a regional organisation has thrived to benefit of all the members as well as to the international community as a whole.

As far as India’s association with the ASEAN is concerned, the two sides share strong economic, civilizational and cultural ties which have evolved in recent years within the framework of ‘Look East Policy’ that started in the early 1990s in the backdrop of massive economic reforms introduced/initiated by New Delhi. India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992, and full dialogue partner in 1996. Thereafter, in 2001, ASEAN-India relations were upgraded to the summit level. The crux of the volume is that bilateral relations between India and ASEAN are mutually exclusive and indispensable for each other in terms of resources, sea routes, security, trade and commerce, investments, global value chains, culture and connectivity. Bilateral engagement between the two sides got a major boost in 2014 when India’s ‘Look East’ policy was converted into ‘Act East’ policy. All the eight

papers in the present volume focus on different aspects of India-ASEAN relations and engagements. Some of the papers in the volume also deal with bilateral relations between India on the one hand and individual ASEAN countries on the other.

The paper entitled: “India’s Act East Policy Through Blue Economy Cooperation” by Dedi Dinarto sheds light on India’s relationship with Indonesia, and assesses the prospects and challenges of cooperation between the two with special reference to blue economy. The author argues that India and Indonesia should invigorate their bilateral relationship through the blue economy cooperation that would in turn strengthen the pillars of New Delhi’s Act East Policy.

The paper by Maya Dania entitled: “Women’s Rights in India and Indonesia” makes a comparative analysis in respect of the rights and privileges enjoyed by women in India and Indonesia. The core focus of this paper has been that the issue of human rights for women cannot be isolated from the discourse of violation against women.

Rajan Sudesh Ratna and Jing Huang in their paper “ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement: Reducing Non-tariff Trade Cost” applies the gravity model of trade to assess the impact of elimination of non-tariff related trade costs in respect of trade between India and ASEAN. The authors argue that non-tariff measures are much stronger determining factors in bilateral trade between India and ASEAN than the traditional tariff measures.

The next paper entitled: “Education System in ASEAN and South Asia Region: A Comparison” by Reni Juwitasari makes a comparative analysis on gender-based education between ASEAN and South Asia with special reference to India and Indonesia. The key argument in the paper has been that education plays an important role to empower people, particularly girls.

The following paper titled: “India-ASEAN Physical Linkages” by Mohd. Faheem - who happens to be one of the joint editors of the volume - deals with the opportunities and challenges of physical connectivity between India and ASEAN. The author argues that there exist numerous constraints in the field of regional connectivity which needs to be address in order to exploit full potential of India-ASEAN relations.

The next article by A. N. Sarkar titled: “A Perspective on India-ASE-

AN Economic Engagements” presents a perspective on India-ASEAN economic engagements and focuses on various aspects relating to the role played by service sectors.

M. Absar Alam and Sarfaraaj Nasir in their paper titled “India-ASEAN Transport Connectivity” focuses on the way ahead for enhancing transport connectivity between the two sides.

The final paper in the volume entitled: “Geo-economics of India’s Engagements with Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV)” by Faisal Ahmed – first editor of the volume - and Farhan Alam identify six areas namely, defence and security cooperation, exclusive economic zones, global value chains, cyber security, small and medium enterprises, and service sectors that deepen New Delhi’s engagements with the CLMV countries in the backdrop of changing geo-political architecture and politico-economic alignments in the Indo-Pacific region.

The volume truly focuses on India and ASEAN countries, but could have incorporated the China factor as well. For instance, it could have addressed the concerns like: how far or to what extent China’s political and economic rise has affected or shaped India’s engagement with the ASEAN countries? Otherwise, the book has been very timely especially in the backdrop of the beginning of the second tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi since the end of May 2019. The editors have done a remarkable job by incorporating articles on most important and relevant areas that shape India-ASEAN relations. In fact, the volume makes a very significant contribution to the field of international relations and world politics.

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