ASEAN Summit Highlights

Why in news?

The 34th ASEAN Summit was recently held in Thailand's capital Bangkok.

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What is ASEAN?

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional intergovernmental organization of countries in Southeast Asia.
- Its objective is to promote intergovernmental cooperation and facilitate economic, political, security, military, educational, and socio-cultural integration.
- ASEAN was established in 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- It came consequent to the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding members of ASEAN.
- [These are Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.]
- It, now, also includes Vietnam, Brunei, Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, and Laos, totalling to 10 members.
- ASEAN's six FTA partners are India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

What are the key outcomes of the summit?

- **Indo-Pacific Outlook** - Ten leaders of the ASEAN member states have agreed to adopt the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific concept which was led by Indonesia.
- There are 5 main points related to the Outlook - the background and reason behind, the key elements, objectives, principles, and areas of cooperation.
- The outlook reflects the centrality and strength of ASEAN in respecting peace and dialogue culture and strengthening cooperation.
- The outlook on the Indo-Pacific issue has come amidst the current global developments in the region. Click here to know more.
- **BIMSTEC** - With the Indo-Pacific strategy, ASEAN has reserved a special

place for India's BIMSTEC grouping as one to connect with.

- This will be the first sign of acceptance in the region of India's renewed interest in BIMSTEC.
- Notably, India has put in more diplomatic energy into BIMSTEC in recent years.
- This comes as an effort to redefine India’s neighbourhood eastwards, for better connectivity and economic and strategic engagement.
- **Marine debris** - The Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in the region was endorsed at the summit.
- Efforts will be taken to significantly reduce and prevent the amount of marine debris, particularly from land-based activities.
- Leaders also agreed to –
    i. encourage integrated land-to-sea approaches to prevent and reduce marine debris
    ii. strengthen their respective legislation
    iii. intensify regional and international cooperation, including dialogs on policies and exchanges of information
- In this regard, ASEAN will promote inter-sectoral coordination among ASEAN sectoral bodies.
- This is to address the multidimensional negative and far-reaching impact of marine debris.
- Leaders also agreed to promote an innovative solution to raise plastic costs.
- Strengthening research capacities and applications of scientific knowledge to combat marine debris were also discussed.

What is China’s stake in the region?

- China does not like the notion of Indo-Pacific, and prefer calling it Asia-Pacific.
- ASEAN also gave a prominent space to the UN Law of the Sea and freedom of navigation.
- Despite being a signatory to UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), China has built artificial islands in the Spratly Islands.
- It is also on the way to militarising them.
- These seas and islands are heavily contested between China, Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam, etc.
- The US and its allies have been running freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) in these seas for some time now, as a show of resistance to China’s domination.

Source: Times of India

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