India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit - Delhi Declaration

Why in news?

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- India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit was held recently, marking 25 years of India-ASEAN ties.
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- The ‘Delhi Declaration’ was released after the summit.
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What are the key mentions?

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- **MARITIME** - ASEAN-India **cooperation in the maritime domain** was one of the key focus areas.
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- Growth and development for the **Indo-Pacific region** was the prime objective behind this agenda.
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- Shared vision for peace and prosperity through a **rules-based order for the oceans and seas** was emphasized.
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- Respect for international law, notably **UNCLOS** (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) was stressed as critical.
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- The reference to **freedom of navigation** and UNCLOS came in the backdrop of China’s position on the disputed South China Sea.
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- Humanitarian and disaster relief, and security cooperation were also agreed as areas of cooperation.
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- Support for the implementation of Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the **South China Sea** (DOC) was expressed.
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- **TERRORISM** - Close cooperation among countries for combating terrorism,

especially **cross border movement** of terrorists found mention.
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- **ECONOMY** - The declaration called upon the states to intensify efforts towards finalising the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.
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- India proposed a framework to ASEAN for cooperation in the **blue economy** sector.
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- It offered to set up **digital villages** in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.
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- This would be by utilising the $1 billion line of credit for connectivity.
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- **Besides**, 2019 will be marked as the **year of India-ASEAN tourism** by both the sides.
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Why is India-ASEAN partnership so essential?

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- **Economic** - The demand for goods in Western economies is coming down.
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- Also, there could be alterations in employment structures and even loss of jobs in the coming future.
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- Digital technologies and the impending Fourth Industrial Revolution could largely drive these changes.
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- These call for the south-east Asian region to look deeper within, to develop markets and increase trade for mutual benefits.
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- **China** - Maritime rivalry with China is another challenge which calls for India to develop a strong regional cooperation.
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- It includes its territorial claim on the resource-rich South China Sea, OBOR initiative and power struggle in the Indian Ocean.
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- **Terrorism** - ASEAN countries have, in the past few years, been victims of terrorist attacks; Indonesia and Thailand in particular.
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- The mention of cross-border terrorism also assumes significance with India's concerns in regards with Pakistan.

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- Other non-traditional challenges such as human trafficking, cybercrime and piracy also demands regional cooperation.
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- **Besides** these, India’s cultural and trade ties with Southeast Asia go back 2,000 years.
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- India and ASEAN also have a unique opportunity to reap the potential of geographic proximity.
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- The presence of the **Indian diaspora** in almost all ASEAN nations is another factor requiring partnerships.
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- Given all these, India-ASEAN partnership is more an economic and strategic necessity than a choice.
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What is the way forward?

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- Several commitments to trade and maritime security made in earlier summits remain unfulfilled.
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- Some of them are:
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i. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
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ii. connectivity between ASEAN countries and India
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iii. India’s connectivity through its Northeast to Myanmar and beyond
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iv. extension of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway
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v. Kaladan multimodal highway
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vi. Tamu-Kalay rail link to Myanmar
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- Speeding up efforts on these fronts is essential to make 'Act East Policy' meaningful.
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Source: The Wire, The Hindu

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