

# INDIA SUPPORTS ASEAN-CENTRALITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: DHANKHAR

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Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh with Jagdeep Dhankhar at a meeting during the ASEAN Summit on Saturday. AFP/NHAC NGUYEN

India supports ASEAN-centrality in the evolving regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific region, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar said at the 19th ASEAN-India summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia which is commemorating the 30th anniversary of the India-ASEAN dialogue.

During the summit, the delegations declared the establishment of the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and reaffirmed the importance of "freedom of navigation and overflight" in the strategically important region.

"The cultural, economic and civilisational ties that have existed between India and Southeast Asia since time immemorial provided the strong foundation to build our partnership in modern times from a sectoral partnership in 1992 to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2022," said Vice-President Dhankhar.

A Joint Statement issued on the occasion recognised the importance of "unimpeded lawful maritime commerce" saying that disputes should be resolved by following "universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and the relevant standards and recommended practices by the International Aviation Organisation (ICAO), and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

Both sides also agreed to intensify maritime cooperation including anti-piracy operations, armed robbery against ships, maritime safety, search and rescue (SAR) operations, humanitarian assistance, and emergency response and relief.

## Enhanced collaboration

Among other security measures, both sides announced plans to enhance collaboration against "terrorism and transnational crimes including international economic crimes and money laundering, cybercrime, drugs and human trafficking and arms smuggling." "Military medicine" is also an area that drew attention during the deliberation.

Both sides agreed to enhance cooperation in the space sector including "through the

establishment of Tracking, Data reception and Processing Stations in Vietnam and Indonesia". India and ASEAN agreed to expedite the review of the ASEAN-India Trade In Goods Agreement (AITIGA) to render it "trade-facilitative".

As part of maintaining "ASEAN-centrality", the two sides reaffirmed the importance of deepening dialogue and coordination through ASEAN-led mechanisms including the ASEAN-India Summit, the East Asia Summit, the Post-Ministerial Conference with India (PMC+1), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF).

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