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समुद्री अर्थव्यवस्था व संयोजन केंद्र



Roundtable Discussion

Maritime Security: Building Cooperative Capacity and Capabilities

10:00 AM | Friday, 22 May 2026

G. Parthasarathi Hall, New Delhi (Hybrid)

Concept Note

1. The Indo-Pacific maritime domain has emerged as the foremost theatre of strategic competition, economic interdependence, and evolving security complexity in the twenty-first century. Spanning critical sea lanes that carry more than sixty percent of global trade, the region's oceanic commons are simultaneously an artery of prosperity and a fault line of geopolitical tension. For ASEAN member states and India alike, ensuring a free, open, rules-based maritime order is not merely a strategic preference, it is an existential imperative.

2. Yet the maritime security landscape is shifting in ways that traditional bilateral or multilateral frameworks have struggled to anticipate. Alongside well-documented flashpoints in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, actors across the region now confront a widening spectrum of non-traditional threats: the weaponisation of undersea infrastructure, the proliferation of uncrewed maritime and aerial systems, hybrid grey-zone operations that blur civilian and military conduct, transnational organised crime converging with state-sponsored coercion, and the accelerating effects of climate change on coastal and island communities. These challenges do not respect exclusive

economic zones or alliance boundaries; they demand coordinated, multi-domain, and multi-stakeholder responses.

3. ASEAN and India share a compelling convergence of interests. India's Act East Policy and its SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine align substantively with ASEAN's centrality, its Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and the collective desire of Southeast Asian states to preserve strategic autonomy. However, translating shared vision into operational maritime cooperation — and, critically, into sustainable defence-industrial partnerships — remains an unfinished project.

4. Against this backdrop, this RTD in the form of a conversation will answer a set of questions to assess current mechanisms, map emerging non-traditional maritime threats beyond conventional domains, and identify practical cooperative responses. It will also explore avenues to strengthen ASEAN–India defence industry collaboration, with a focus on state-level and MSME engagement. The conversation will seek to answer the following questions. Questions are sequenced to flow conversationally. Q1–Q3 open the strategic frame; Q4–Q6 address operational and political dimensions; Q7–Q8 focus on defence industry and sub-national engagement; Q9 challenges panellists to surface one actionable recommendation.

Q.1 The concept note describes the Indo-Pacific maritime commons as simultaneously “an artery of prosperity and a fault line of geopolitical tension.” In your assessment, has the balance between those two descriptions shifted in the last three to four years, and if so, which direction, and why?

Q.2 ASEAN-centric forums like the ARF, ADMM+, and the East Asia Summit have long served as the architecture for maritime security dialogue. Are these mechanisms still fit for purpose given the pace and complexity of threats we now face, or are we essentially using twentieth-century instruments to manage twenty-first century problems?

Q.3 The concept note flags a widening threat spectrum, from undersea cable sabotage and uncrewed systems to grey-zone coercion and climate-induced instability. In your view, which of these emerging non-traditional threats is most

underestimated or least prepared for, and what does that gap tell us about collective priorities?

Q.4 Grey-zone operations deliberately exploit the blurring of civilian and military conduct, fishing fleets, coast guards, maritime militias. For states that want to respond without escalating, what practical tools exist, and where do ASEAN members and India need to develop new ones together?

Q.5 Maritime domain awareness is only as good as the information flowing into it. We have the Information Fusion Centre in Singapore, the IFC-IOR in Gurugram, and various bilateral arrangements. Are these nodes actually talking to each other effectively, and what political or institutional barriers are stopping them from doing so?

Q.6 ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific is built on the principle of centrality, but we are also seeing growing minilateral groupings like the Quad and AUKUS, and individual member states deepening bilateral defence ties that bypass the bloc. Is ASEAN centrality in maritime security a reality or increasingly a diplomatic courtesy?

Q.7 India's Act East Policy and SAGAR doctrine are well-articulated at the vision level. But defence-industrial cooperation requires contracts, interoperability standards, and sustained political will beyond summits. What does a realistic pathway for ASEAN-India co-production or co-development in the maritime domain actually look like, and who needs to move first?

Q.8 The concept note specifically highlights the role of MSMEs and state-level engagement as drivers of innovation and supply-chain resilience. This is an unusual emphasis for a strategic security discussion. Can you make the case for why sub-national actors and smaller enterprises should be at the centre of this cooperation, and what structural changes would actually enable that?

Q.9 If this roundtable were to produce one recommendation that could realistically be tabled at the ASEAN-India Summit track, something specific, politically feasible, and implementable within two years, what would you argue it should be, and why does it rise above everything else we've discussed today?

5. Overall, the RTD will seek to:

- Assess the adequacy of existing multilateral maritime security mechanisms and identify structural gaps requiring reform or supplementation.
- Map the emerging landscape of non-traditional maritime threats, including undersea infrastructure risks, uncrewed systems, grey-zone coercion, and climate-induced instability, beyond conventional domain definitions.
- Identify practical, politically feasible cooperative responses across information sharing, capacity building, domain awareness, and rules-based norm development.
- Explore concrete avenues to deepen ASEAN–India defence industry collaboration, with particular attention to state-level engagement and the inclusion of MSMEs as drivers of innovation and supply-chain resilience.
- Generate actionable recommendations suitable for consideration at the ASEAN–India Summit track and relevant ministerial forums.

6. The RTD will be held at GP Hall RIS, New Delhi on 22 May 2026. Capt. Sarabjeet S Parmar, Visiting Fellow, RIS will coordinate the roundtable discussion. The roundtable discussion will be attended by researchers, practitioners, maritime experts, diplomats and business people. One of the outcomes of the roundtable discussion is the policy brief to be published by the RIS.