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Q4(b)

How successful has the 'ASEAN Plus Three' been in addressing regional problems? Support your answer with specific examples

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- Define ASEAN Plus Three (ASEAN + China, Japan, South Korea)
- Show successes after the 1997 crisis (Chiang Mai, **AMRO**, finance, functional cooperation)
- Show limits (South China Sea, Myanmar, **ASEAN way**, great-power rivalry)
- Use specific examples

Revision summary

ASEAN Plus Three is ASEAN plus China, Japan and South Korea, institutionalised after the 1997 financial crisis.

- **Chiang Mai / CMIM and AMRO are the clearest successes:** a regional liquidity net and surveillance.

Functional cooperation on rice, health and convening of a bitter Northeast Asian triangle also count.

Limits are the South China Sea, Myanmar, the **ASEAN way**, and modest money next to the IMF.

APT is a functional regime, not a NATO or a court of last resort for force.

Introduction

ASEAN Plus Three (APT) joins the ten ASEAN states with **China, Japan and South Korea**. It was institutionalised after the **1997-98 Asian financial crisis**, when the region learned that the IMF could be both rescuer and political shock. The question is not whether APT is a NATO. It is whether it has addressed **regional problems** - money, food, health, and some diplomacy - with a success that can be named and limited.

Body

Successes

The **Chiang Mai Initiative**, later **multilateralised (CMIM)**, is a swap network against liquidity crises, watched by **AMRO (ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office)** in **Singapore**. That is a specific answer to 1997: a regional safety net, still small next to IMF resources, but real. APT also hosts functional cooperation on rice reserves, pandemic information, and connectivity talk. It keeps **China-Japan-Korea** in the same room as ASEAN, which matters when bilateral history is poisonous. During COVID-19, APT statements and medical supply coordination were more usable than a frozen Northeast Asian

political triangle. **ASEAN centrality** is the diplomatic method: the weaker ten convene the stronger three.

- **Compared with SAARC, APT looks successful:** it meets, it has a fund, it survived great-power weather. **ASEAN Plus Three** is also a building block toward the **East Asia Summit** and RCEP's political climate, even when membership lists differ.

Limits

APT does not settle the **South China Sea**. Code of Conduct talks crawl; Chinese coast-guard and militia pressure on the Philippines and Vietnam continues. **Myanmar** after the 2021 coup exposed the **ASEAN way** - consensus, non-interference - as paralysis; the Plus Three cannot impose what ASEAN will not. North Korea is a Plus Three neighbourhood problem that APT does not command. U.S. alliance structures (Japan, Korea, Philippines) and the **Quad** handle deterrence that APT will not. Financial firepower remains modest; in a true crash, Washington and the IMF still matter, as does the dollar.

Success is therefore **functional and financial**, not strategic. APT addresses regional problems that can be framed as technical. It ducks problems that require naming a revisionist or a junta. That is both the secret of its survival and the ceiling of its achievement.

Flow diagram

ASEAN centrality Plus Three -> Chiang Mai / AMRO
ASEAN centrality Plus Three -> Food health connectivity
ASEAN centrality Plus Three -> Does not settle SCS or Myanmar
ASEAN centrality centrality -> ASEAN centrality Plus Three

Conclusion

- **ASEAN Plus Three succeeded as a post-1997 money-and-meeting machine:** **CMIM**, **AMRO**, and convening of Northeast Asia through ASEAN. It has not become a security community. Regional problems of force and regime violence remain largely outside its usable toolkit.

Facts & figures

CMIM

Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation: APT currency-swap arrangements as a regional crisis buffer after 1997.

AMRO

ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office, Singapore - surveillance arm of the regional financial safety net.

ASEAN way

Consensus, consultation and non-interference; explains both APT's durability and its Myanmar failure.

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