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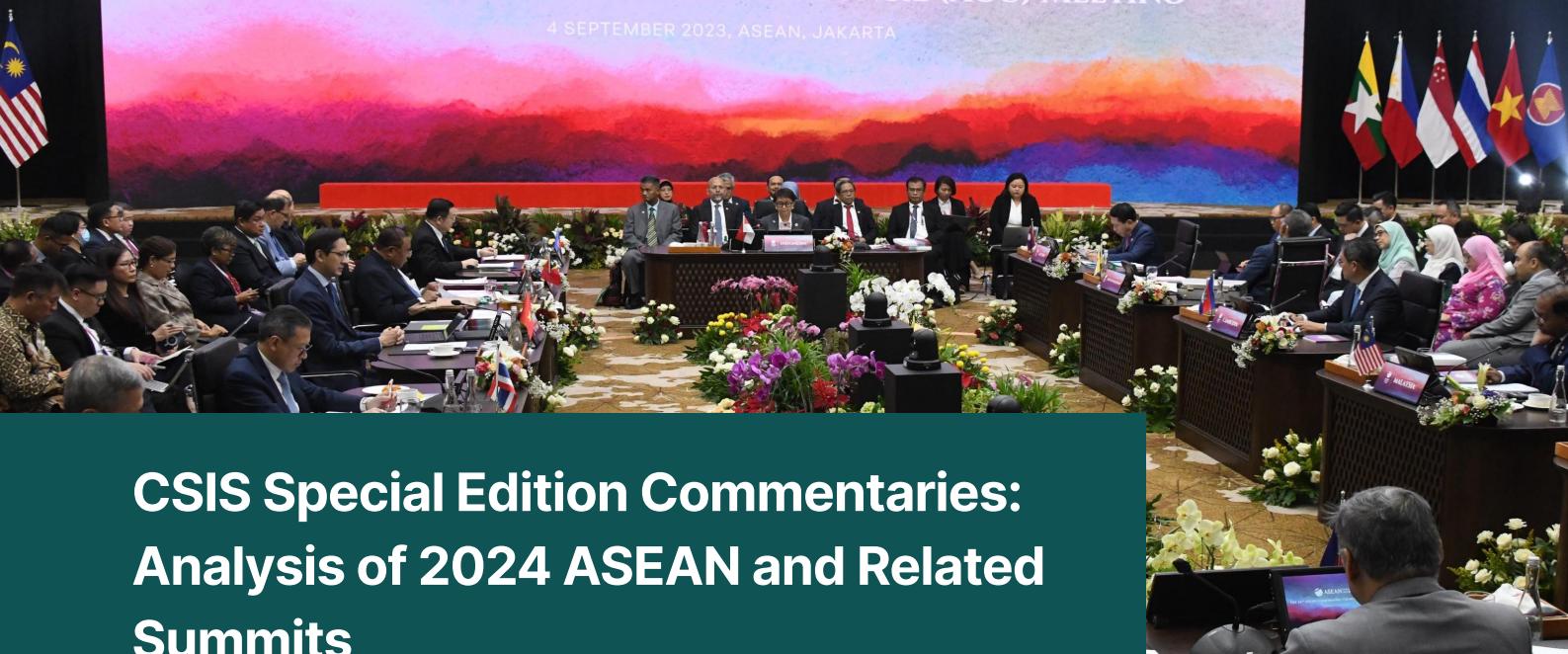
CSIS Special Edition Commentaries: Analysis of 2024 ASEAN and Related Summits





THE 34TH ASEAN COORDINATING COUNCIL (ACC) MEETING

4 SEPTEMBER 2023, ASEAN, JAKARTA



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About the Publication

CSIS Special Edition Commentaries

CSIS Special Edition Commentaries: Analysis of 2024 ASEAN and Related Summits serves as a platform to provide insightful articles and op-eds from regional experts and diplomats from ASEAN and Dialogue Partners. This initiative aims to cater to diverse stakeholders to ASEAN cooperation, including diplomats, scholars, international relations students, and the wider public, fostering a deeper, practical, and timely understanding of ASEAN's regional affairs.

CSIS Indonesia

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta is an independent, non-profit organisation focusing on policy-oriented studies on domestic and international issues. It was established in 1971. CSIS undertakes research in economics, politics and social change, and international relations, with topics selected on the basis of their relevance to public policy. Interdisciplinary studies are encouraged. In the area of foreign policy, CSIS research is complemented and strengthened by its relations with an extensive network of research, academic, and other organizations worldwide.

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Foreword

Engaging with ASEAN's Evolving Role in the Indo-Pacific

In the dynamic landscape of the Indo-Pacific, where geopolitical shifts and global challenges intersect, ASEAN stands as a pivotal force for stability and cooperation. As the region navigates through complex strategic competitions among major powers, ASEAN's role becomes increasingly critical, not only in fostering regional peace but also in shaping multilateral responses to transnational issues like climate change and technological advancements. The annual ASEAN Chairmanship and its related summits have thus become focal points of scrutiny and expectation, embodying the region's collective aspirations for unity, preparedness, adaptability, and agility.

The "CSIS Special Edition Commentaries: Analysis of 2024 ASEAN and Related Summits" emerges at a juncture where insightful and timely analysis of ASEAN-led initiatives is more imperative than ever. This publication serves as a platform for scholars, diplomats, policymakers, and the broader public seeking nuanced perspectives on ASEAN's regional architecture, its mechanisms, and the interplay among its diverse member states and dialogue partners. Unlike traditional publications that often lean towards technical solutions or academic discourse, this compilation offers practical insights aimed at bridging the gap between theory and policy implementation.

By bringing together contributions from esteemed regional experts and diplomats, this publication not only enriches the understanding of ASEAN's complex dynamics but also enhances the visibility and influence of critical regional discussions. It is through such collaborations that the depth and breadth of ASEAN's impact on global affairs can be comprehensively explored and understood.

Our objective is clear: to foster strategic thinking and analysis that goes beyond surface-level observations, delving into the nuanced workings of ASEAN Chairmanship and its summits. By facilitating these discussions, CSIS and its partners aim to catalyze informed decision-making among policymakers and stakeholders, advocating for policies that are both pragmatic and forward-thinking. The commentary format chosen for this publication ensures accessibility without sacrificing depth, maintaining a balance between immediacy and substance which is crucial in today's fast-paced policy environment.

As we embark on this journey of exploration and analysis, we invite readers to engage deeply with the insights presented here. The diverse viewpoints captured within these pages reflect the rich tapestry of perspectives on ASEAN's trajectory and its potential to shape regional and global outcomes. Through rigorous analysis and thoughtful commentary, we aim not only to inform but also to inspire actionable dialogue and collaborative efforts that contribute to ASEAN's continued evolution as a cornerstone of regional stability and prosperity.

The "CSIS Special Edition Commentaries: Analysis of 2024 ASEAN and Related Summits" stands as a testament to the enduring importance of multilateralism and the pivotal role of ASEAN in navigating the complexities of the Indo-Pacific region. We hope this publication serves as a catalyst for deeper engagement, informed decision-making, and meaningful partnerships that advance peace, security, and development across ASEAN and beyond.

We would like to thank the Mission of the Republic of Korea to ASEAN, whose central support to this initiative has not only allowed its realization but also ultimately underscored the collaborative spirit essential for robust regional discourse. I would also like to congratulate and thank the contribution from all distinguished authors, H.E. Bovonethat Douangchak, H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, H.E. M. I. Derry Aman, H.E. Lee Jang-keun, H.E. Tiffany McDonald, Su-Yin Lew, Bhanubhatra Jittieng, Julia Tijaja, Albert Sanghoon Park, and Joanne Lin who have taken their time to write and share their insights through this commentary piece.

Jakarta, June 2024

Lina A. Alexandra
Head of Department of International Relations
CSIS Indonesia



ASEAN
INDONESIA
2023

ASEAN-INDO-PACIFIC FORUM (AIPF)



AIPF
ASEAN-INDO-PACIFIC FORUM

ASEAN
INDONESIA
2023

ASEAN
INDONESIA
2023

AIPF
ASEAN-INDO-PACIFIC FORUM

Photo: President of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo opened the ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum (AIPF) which was held at the Mulia Hotel, Jakarta, Tuesday (5 September 2023)

Introductory Note

A Special Edition on ASEAN: What to Expect from ASEAN in 2024

Andrew W. Mantong
CSIS Indonesia

ASEAN would have concluded a summit as the first half of the year has passed. This year, Lao PDR as the 2024 ASEAN Chair decided to merge the two annual ASEAN summits towards the second half of the year. However, despite not following the usual path, there have been great expectations that Lao PDR could ensure continuity in navigating ASEAN, especially at a time when great power rivalry increasingly shapes strategic discourse in the region.

Great power competition is not new to ASEAN. ASEAN in fact was established to keep conflict among great powers at bay so that ASEAN could focus on development tasks that governments must undertake in the majority of post-colonial states in the Southeast Asia region. The Association chose initially to focus on practical socio-economic cooperation among its members to foster resilience as an answer to security challenges in the region. For ASEAN, security may be achieved not solely through military measures, but with comprehensive dimensions from economic to socio-cultural measures. Such belief persists in ASEAN throughout times even after ASEAN has developed various political-security cooperation and extended its institutional habits and modalities using the principle of ASEAN centrality in convening major and even competing powers into various ASEAN-led mechanisms such as ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, or ASEAN Defence Ministerial Meeting (ADMM) Plus.

To deal with increasing rivalry among super and major powers in the region, ASEAN as an organization seems to believe in such a repertoire of action: practical cooperation, comprehensive security, and ASEAN centrality. As ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific acknowledges strategic competition in the newly constructed Indo-Pacific region, yet it reasserts ASEAN to continue the existing path toward progress. Among ASEAN countries' officials and diplomats, there is a strong conviction that ASEAN will continue to show relevance in the current geostrategic landscape. Various pieces in this Special Edition may demonstrate such belief.

Launching the theme "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience," as written in this Edition by H.E. Bovenethat Douangchak, Permanent Representative of the Lao PDR to ASEAN, Lao PDR seeks to repeat its success 2004-2005 as ASEAN Chair by lining up nine priorities to continue achievements made by ASEAN in the previous years. H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, the current Secretary-General of ASEAN, emphasizes that ASEAN may continue to strive in the process of community building despite challenges from major power dynamics, post-pandemic recovery, and supply chain disruption since there have been great numbers of practical cooperation and deliverables that can be secured by ASEAN this year under Lao Chairmanship.

H.E. M.I. Derry Aman, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia to ASEAN, lays out crucial tasks that need to be carried out by ASEAN under Lao Chairmanship, including the making of the new ASEAN Community Vision and continuous implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN may also find more support and robust frameworks of cooperation from Dialogue Partners such as Australia and the Republic of Korea. Australian Ambassador to ASEAN, H.E. Tiffany McDonald, and Second Secretary of the Australian Mission to ASEAN, Su-Yin Lew, in this edition, demonstrate extensive and coherent policies and engagement that Australia has established for ASEAN, especially with the launch of the Aus4ASEAN package. Meanwhile, H.E. Lee Jang-keun outlines the new administration policy of KASI – Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiatives as proof that ROK has developed a more comprehensive engagement platform with ASEAN, especially with more explicit initiatives of political-security cooperation such as maritime security, cyber security, and addressing transnational crimes issues.

The highlight of ASEAN's promises this year is the making of the new ASEAN Community vision. The existing vision will finish in 2025, and ASEAN has in principle endorsed the draft of ASEAN Community Vision 2045: Resilient, Innovative, Dynamic, and People-Centered ASEAN. Lao PDR's role as ASEAN Chair will be instrumental in ensuring that the vision will be adopted next year in Malaysia and that ASEAN has completed the development of strategic plans that will become an annex of next year's document, which may become another yet new version of the existing Vientiane Action Plan. How ASEAN works towards the future and how to foster and maintain relevance in the changing world will be clearer with these documents.

However, the relevance and centrality of ASEAN are by no means without challenge. Various ASEAN observers who contributed to this Special Edition demonstrate ASEAN and ASEAN Dialogue Partner tasks to allow relevance and centrality of ASEAN. Bhanubatra Jittiarg argues that ASEAN needs a more implementable institutional framework to ensure action in problems like disunity among members as well as crises in member countries. Julia Tijaja and Albert Sanghoon Park argue that realizing connectivity, as Lao PDR Chairmanship theme this year, in ASEAN requires ASEAN to enhance connectivity among ASEAN countries and boost up collective bargaining power of ASEAN vis-à-vis external power.

They also emphasize that ASEAN must improve cross-pillar coordination in ASEAN to enable better monitoring and early warning capacity within ASEAN. Joanne Lin emphasizes that ASEAN and ROK have different sets of priorities, which makes security cooperation even more important to ensure mutual ground between the two parties. Lina Alexandra reminds us that slow progress made by ASEAN on dealing with the Myanmar Crisis must be overcome, especially knowing that circumstances on the ground of Myanmar may fall into greater uncertainty and that ASEAN must continue to work more diligently and more coherently in enhancing previous initiatives made either by ASEAN as an organization or by Indonesia as the previous chair.

The gap between belief and challenges come regional disunity, lack of action and coherence, different priorities with external partners, as well as internal problems with regional consequences will continue to shape the conversation about ASEAN that frequently become debates between those who see a half-empty glass of ASEAN and those who see a half-full glass of ASEAN. Nevertheless, an open and thorough conversation between officials, scholars, and the broader public must be continued since ideas and discussion will always be essential in finding innovative and responsive action to navigate in a more uncertain world.



Photo: President Joko Widodo (left) hands over the gavel to Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone after his closing speech of the 43rd ASEAN Summit 2023 in Jakarta, Thursday (7 September 2023). ASEAN Summit 2023 Media Center/Zabur Karuru/foc.

2024 ASEAN Chairmanship Deliverables: Expected Outcome and Goals to Achieve at the 2024 ASEAN Summit and the Related Summits: Lao PDR's Perspective

H.E. Bovonethat Douangchak

Permanent Representative of the Lao PDR to ASEAN

Priorities for Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship 2024

ASEAN was established in 1967 and it currently comprises of 10 ASEAN Member States (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam). ASEAN has agreed in principle to admit Timor-Leste as the 11th Member of ASEAN and is expecting to welcome Timor-Leste as an ASEAN Member State in the near future.

The Lao PDR became a Member State of ASEAN on July 23, 1997. Throughout the course of its membership in ASEAN, the Lao PDR has actively contributed to the common cause of the ASEAN community-building process as well as maintained and promoted peace, stability, and development in the region and beyond.

The Lao PDR successfully chaired ASEAN twice. The first chairmanship was in 2004-2005, under the theme "Advancing a Secure and Dynamic ASEAN Family through Greater Solidarity, Economic Integration and Social Progress," and the second chairmanship was in 2016, under the theme "Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic ASEAN Community."

In 2024, the Lao PDR is honored to assume the ASEAN Chairmanship for the third time under the theme: "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience."

On Enhancing Connectivity, there are four priorities, namely (1) Integrating and Connecting Economies, (2) Forging an Inclusive and Sustainable Future, (3) Transforming for the Digital Future, and (4) Culture and Arts: Promoting the Role of ASEAN Culture and the Arts for Inclusion and Sustainability.

On Enhancing Resilience, there are five priorities, namely (1) Development of strategic plans to implement the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, (2) Enhancing ASEAN Centrality, (3) Promoting Environmental Cooperation: Climate Change Resilience, (4) Women and Children: Promoting the role of Women and Children towards the transformation of behaviorism in ASEAN, and (5) Health: Transforming ASEAN Health Development Resilience in a New Context.

ASEAN Community is an ongoing process, we thus would build upon the achievements made under previous chairs.

Currently, the Lao PDR, as the ASEAN Chair, is working closely with all ASEAN Member States, External Partners, and ASEAN Secretariat in maximizing these priorities to transform ASEAN into a more connected and resilient community in line with our Chairmanship theme.



Priorities for Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship 2024

The 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits are scheduled from 8-11 October 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR with the following Deliverables, Expected Outcomes, and Goals of Achievement:

Deliverables Under Enhancing Connectivity

1. Integrating and Connecting Economics:

- Adopt the ASEAN Declaration on Enhancing Supply Chain Connectivity
- Complete the Review of the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Intellectual Property Cooperation) To upgrade the Agreement
- Achieve Substantial conclusion of Upgraded ASEAN-China FTA “3.0”
- Achieve Entry-into-Force of the 2nd Protocol on the Agreement Establishing the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand FTA (AANZFTA)

2. Forging an inclusive and sustainable future

- Endorse the Reframed strategies for narrowing development gaps and promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the ASEAN region
- Achieve substantive progress in finalizing the successor agreement on the ASEAN Power Grid and multilateral power trade in the region
- Adopt the ASEAN Ecotourism Standards for Activities, Facilities and Services

3. Transforming for the Digital Future

- Complete the Study on the New Generation of ASEAN Single Window
- Adopt the Roadmap on Digital Trade Standards in ASEAN
- Adoption of an Implementation Roadmap to Establish Regionally Comparable and Recognized Unique Business Identification Numbers (UBIN) in ASEAN

4. Culture and Arts: Promoting the Role of ASEAN Culture and the Arts for Inclusion and Sustainability:

- Declaration on Promoting the Small and Medium-sized Cultural Enterprises aligned with the Green Growth for Sustainable Development

Deliverables Under Enhancing Resilience

- 1. The development of strategic plans to implement the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 is in the process. Our aim is for our Leaders to adopt them during the Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2025.**
 - ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Development of Strategic Plans to Implement the ASEAN Community Vision 2045
- 2. Enhancing ASEAN Centrality:**
 - EAS Leaders' Statement 2024 on Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience
 - ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Leaders' Statement on Strengthening the Connectivity of Regional Supply Chain
- 3. Promoting Environmental Cooperation: Climate Change Resilience:**
 - ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change to UNFCCC COP 29
- 4. Women and Children: Promoting the role of Women and Children towards the transformation of behaviorism in ASEAN:**
 - The 3rd ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit: Strengthening Care Economy and Resilience towards ASEAN Community Post-2025
 - Adopt the Declaration on Strengthening Care Economy and Resilience Toward ASEAN Community Post-2025
- 5. Health: Transforming ASEAN Health Development Resilience in a New Context:**
 - ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Biosafety and Biosecurity



Photo: The Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, attended the 30th ASEAN Economic Ministers' Retreat (AEM Retreat), which was held today in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

Expected Outcomes and Goals of Achievement

On the ASEAN Community building, especially the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. We expect to have seamless implementation of the ASEAN Community Blueprints thus far and the effective implementation and realization of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, including the three ASEAN Community Blueprints, Masterplan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 (MPAC) and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan IV.

We highly regard the development of Strategic Plans to implement the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, which comprises the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) strategic plan; ASEAN Economic Community (AEC); ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC); and ASEAN Connectivity by relevant bodies, during the Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2024. The vision and its strategic plans would be adopted in 2025 under Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship, and they would serve as a fundamental document that guides ASEAN in the next 20 years.

We reaffirmed our commitment to providing capacity-building assistance to Timor-Leste and engaging ASEAN's Dialogue Partners and other external partners to support Timor-Leste's path towards the full ASEAN membership.

The Lao PDR would uphold ASEAN's commitment to assisting Myanmar in finding a peaceful, durable, and a Myanmar-Owned and Led comprehensive political resolution to the ongoing crisis, as Myanmar remains an integral part of ASEAN, through the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus, the ASEAN Leaders' Reviews and Decisions on the Implementation of the Five-Point Consensus adopted in 2022 and in 2023. In this regard, H.E. Sonexay Siphandone, Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, as the Chair of ASEAN 2024, has appointed H.E. Mr. Alounkeo KITTIKHOUN, former Minister to Prime Minister's Office of the Lao PDR as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar for 2024.

On ASEAN's External Relations, we underscore the importance of strengthening ASEAN unity and Centrality in our engagement with external partners, including through ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ASEAN Plus One, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), in order to build mutual trust and confidence as well as to reinforce an open, transparent, resilient, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and rules-based regional architecture with ASEAN at the center.

We have successfully convened the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations. We are looking forward to the establishment of the ASEAN and the Republic of Korea (ROK) Comprehensive Strategic Partnership at the 25th ASEAN-ROK Summit.

We are committed to promote the implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as a guide for ASEAN's engagement in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. In this regard, we welcome the support of all ASEAN's partners to the AOIP, among others, through the issuance of joint statements and other forms of collaboration and support.

In conclusion, the ASEAN Community Building and the ASEAN's External Relations are the main Deliverables of the Lao PDR's ASEAN Chair in 2024 that are expected to be the more connected and resilient aspects that require full support and cooperation from all parties.

ASEAN in 2024 and Beyond

H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn
Secretary-General of ASEAN

Introduction

It is now midway into 2024 and six months into Lao PDR's ASEAN chairmanship. Taking over the gavel from a much bigger and resourced Indonesia, Lao PDR has big shoes to fill but it has made all the best efforts to implement its plans and deliverables for ASEAN this year.

Chairing ASEAN for the third time in its history since joining the grouping in 1997, Lao PDR is cognizant of the challenges facing the region and the world at large. Hence, the country's theme for its 2024 chairmanship: "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience," reflecting the links between the regional and the international and the imperative of ensuring ASEAN's adaptability and resilience amid various global disruptions and uncertainties.

The ASEAN region, despite a projected economic growth rate of above 4% this year, continues to face unprecedented challenges in a rapidly changing world. The evolving dynamics between major powers – driven more by competition and de-risking than by cooperation and interdependence – will cause further headwinds to ASEAN. Additionally, climate change, natural disasters, and other non-traditional security issues remain pressing challenges that affect the livelihoods of millions of ASEAN citizens.

It is against this backdrop that the Lao PDR's focus on enhancing connectivity and resilience provides the anchor to ensure that the region's collective efforts in community-building remain on-track, especially to continue our recovery path from the pandemic and effectively deal with stalling global trade and increasingly disrupted global supply chains.

Translating the theme to practical and concrete actions requires intensifying regional cooperation across the three community pillars; advancing infrastructure connectivity, narrowing the development gap, deepening economic integration, and expanding people-to-people exchanges. Ensuring ASEAN centrality in the regional architecture, advancing mutually beneficial partnerships with its 11 Dialogue Partners, and enhancing ASEAN-led mechanisms also continue to feature high on Lao PDR's chairmanship agenda this year.

What has been some of the major work carried out under the three ASEAN community pillars since Lao PDR took over the stewardship of ASEAN? Let me outline here in terms of the three Ps, "Peace, Prosperity, and Partnerships," as follows:



*Photo: ASEAN Foreign Minister Meeting (AMM) Retreat 2024, Luang Prabang, 28-29 January 2024.
MOFA Indonesia.*

Building Peace: The Central Agenda of the ASEAN Political Security Community

The Myanmar issue remains the most pressing political challenge within ASEAN. More than three years since the 2021 military coup, the country is still mired in political instability, internal conflict and economic hardship. ASEAN under the Lao chairmanship remains committed to assisting Myanmar towards achieving a comprehensive, Myanmar-led and Myanmar-owned political solution. To this end, the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) remains the main reference for ASEAN and the work of the current Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar – H.E. Alounkeo Kittikhoun – is critical.

The Special Envoy conducted productive discussions with various stakeholders during his visit to Myanmar in May 2024. Additionally, there has also been progress in Phase 2 of the humanitarian assistance to the displaced and vulnerable people in Myanmar, this time in Southern Shan State, by the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre).

This year, significant progress has been made in advancing Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN. Timor-Leste has implemented various measures to enhance its national capacity, with valuable support from both fellow ASEAN Member States and external partners. A notable example is the ASEAN Travelling Resource Persons Programme (ATRPP), a multi-year initiative aimed at enhancing Timor-Leste's preparedness for its future integration into ASEAN. Timor-Leste now has full access to observe ASEAN Meetings at all levels.

In 2023, Timor-Leste representatives attended 81 per cent of ASEAN meetings. Dili has also appointed a dedicated Ambassador to ASEAN and established its Mission to ASEAN since 2023 to work with the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN and other Missions and Embassies of ASEAN Dialogue Partners and external partners.

In the realm of security, ASEAN is actively pursuing advancements and cooperation across various domains. The defense sector, in particular, is witnessing robust growth in practical cooperation and external engagements. While there are different perspectives on the expansion of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM-Plus), the ASEAN defense sector remains committed to continuing dialogue on this matter in an open-minded and engaging manner to pursue the twin objectives of enabling inclusivity while preserving ASEAN centrality.

Within the domain of law and law enforcement, a primary focus of the ASEAN Law Ministers' Meeting is to conclude the ASEAN Extradition Treaty by this year's end. The Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship also places combating transnational crime at the forefront of its agenda. This year, significant progress is anticipated under the auspices of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime, with a targeted approach towards addressing online job scams, illicit drug trafficking, and precursor chemicals.

Pursuing Prosperity: The Overarching Objective of the ASEAN Economic Community

Over the years of ensuring the region's peace and stability, accelerating integration and building an economic Community, ASEAN has managed to become economically robust. With a combined GDP of USD 3.8 trillion, ASEAN is the fifth largest economy, but is poised to become the fourth largest by 2030. Growth in the region is forecasted to reach 4.6 per cent this year, outpacing the estimated global average of 3.2 per cent.

Furthermore, during this global economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions and power rivalries, ASEAN has emerged as a major player in global trade, sitting as the fourth largest with total trade valued at USD 3.8 trillion in 2023. Intra-ASEAN trade, which stood at USD 769.9 billion in 2023, continues to take up the largest portion of the total trade in the region.

ASEAN also maintains its position as a leading investment destination, receiving USD228.9 billion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2023, the highest amongst developing economies.



Photo: 26th ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit in Jakarta, Wednesday (6/9/2023). 2023 ASEAN Summit Media Center/Zabur Karuru/foc.

Digital Economy

With a strategic focus on riding the global wave of digital transformation, ASEAN is aiming to conclude the Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) by 2025, the first of its kind globally. DEFA, upon its conclusion, is poised to catalyse the region's digital economy growth from USD 300 billion today to almost USD 1 trillion by 2030. The anticipated adoption of progressive rules in DEFA will not only enhance the vibrancy of the already dynamic digital ecosystem in the region but also enable ASEAN to become a leading digital economic community.

Blue Economy

ASEAN is also cognizant of the immense potential of the blue economy as a new engine of the region's future growth. Straddling major shipping lanes and with 66 per cent of its total area covered by oceans and seas, ASEAN is home to 15 per cent of the global fisheries production and employs millions of workers in the commercial fishing industry. This year saw the establishment of the ASEAN Coordinating Task Force on Blue Economy, which will ensure a cross-sectoral and cross-stakeholder approach in the implementation of the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework (ABEF) across such areas of fisheries, maritime transport, renewable energy, minerals extraction, as well as marine and coastal tourism.

Green Economy

ASEAN and its Member States remain steadfast in their efforts to accelerate clean energy transition at the regional, national and local levels. One of the key targets is to increase the share of renewable energy to 23% in the total energy mix and 35% in the total installed power capacity by 2025. The shift towards greener economy in ASEAN not only addresses environmental challenges but also presents significant opportunities for innovation, job creation, and long-term economic resilience. ASEAN has set relevant strategies for clean energy transition, including the ASEAN Strategy for Carbon Neutrality, the ASEAN Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance, and the ASEAN Power Grid. True to the theme of "connectivity and resilience," enhancing regional power grid connectivity is a priority of the Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship so as to enable its electricity exports all the way to Singapore through the Laos-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore Power Integration Project.

Advancing Partnerships: The Backbone of ASEAN Centrality

While ASEAN consolidates and deepens its internal cooperation and integration across the three community pillars, it remains mindful of the importance of cooperation and support from its various partners. Today, we have 11 Dialogue Partners, 8 Sectoral Development Partners and 6 Development Partners. ASEAN has established Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships (CSP) with Australia, China, India, the US and Japan, with the ROK expected to join the ranks this year as well. Alongside the expansion of our external relations, we have continually made efforts to add value and substance to our partnerships, including through initiating more practical cooperation programmes, projects and activities to support ASEAN community-building efforts and address shared security and development challenges.



In terms of norm-building, ASEAN's values and norms have been socialised among our partners particularly those enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). Currently, apart from the 10 ASEAN Member states, 44 external parties have acceded to the TAC, and the list of those seeking to join the Treaty continues to expand. They hail from various parts of the world, including all five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

Another ASEAN document, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), has also gained significant momentum as a reference framework of cooperation between ASEAN and its external partners. Seven Dialogue Partners, i.e., Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, the ROK and the U.S., have adopted joint statements with ASEAN to affirm their respective support for the AOIP principles and cooperation priorities. Concrete projects are being put forth under the AOIP's areas of cooperation, namely maritime cooperation, connectivity, Sustainable Development Goals, economic, and other areas of cooperation.

ASEAN has also emerged as a proactive leader in driving economic integration across the broader region. This role is especially vital amidst mounting concerns about de-globalisation and fragmentation of the global economy along emerging geopolitical fault-lines. Within ASEAN, the upgrade of the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA), to cover emerging issues such as circularity and digitalisation, is currently underway.

At the moment, we have bilateral FTAs with Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Korea and India, and ASEAN is now negotiating a new one with Canada. The Gulf Cooperation Council has expressed interests for a bilateral FTA. An upgrade of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) was also signed off last year.

In addition to its extensive network of bilateral FTAs, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement reaffirms ASEAN's position as the centripetal force of the regional economic architecture. The RCEP boasts a market of 2.3 billion people, 30 per cent of global GDP, 27 per cent of global merchandise trade, over 18 per cent of trade in services, and 19 per cent of foreign direct investment (FDI). It is one of the largest FTAs globally, if not the largest. Having led the RCEP negotiations to its fruition, ASEAN is now in the driving seat in the implementation of this mega trade deal.



Prospects

Looking ahead and building upon the current ASEAN Community Vision towards 2025, ASEAN is working towards its new Community Vision 2045 to make sure that the organisation continues to be a force for good in the next 20 years.

Four strategic plans on the ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community and ASEAN Connectivity are being crafted with a forward-looking and bold vision. These strategic plans will be adopted alongside the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 in Malaysia next year, indeed a critical year in ASEAN's journey.

ASEAN is looking further beyond the horizon to proactively seize the opportunities and address shared global challenges in both the security and development domains. This will be an uphill task, given the current state of flux in the international order, marked by disruptions and uncertainties stemming from great power competition, major conflicts, and transformative technologies.

However, this time around, ASEAN's growing confidence in its ability to think strategically and innovatively adapt to changes gives us hope that we will continue to thrive in the next two decades.

From 2023 to 2024: Change, yet Continuity in ASEAN

H.E. M.I. Derry Aman

Ambassador/Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia to ASEAN

Amidst the global multidimensional challenges, Indonesia strove to lead ASEAN in navigating the world's dynamics, showcasing to the world that ASEAN matters and it continues to advance as an epicentrum of growth. This futuristic outlook is aligned with the undertakings last year to prepare for ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision. As emphasized by Indonesia, towards ASEAN 2045, ASEAN has to be more adaptive, responsive and competitive, as well as consistent with the spirit of cooperation in carrying out the ASEAN Charter as a whole.

There were notable achievements of ASEAN in 2023 that merit mentioning. First, ASEAN operationalized the ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the Application of Timor-Leste for ASEAN Membership by agreeing on the Guidelines for the Implementation of the Observer Status Granted to Timor-Leste in ASEAN as well as the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's Full Membership in ASEAN, and consequently having Timor-Leste in all ASEAN Meetings up to the Summit level as an observer. Second, ASEAN convened the first-ever ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum during the 43rd ASEAN Summit, a concrete manifestation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which resulted in 93 cooperation projects worth a total of USD 38.2 billion and 73 potential projects worth USD 17.8 billion. Third, for the first time in the history of the East Asia Summit (EAS), last year's EAS Leaders' Statement on Maintaining and Promoting the Region as an Epicentrum of Growth as well as the EAS Plan of Action 2023-2027 affirmed the EAS participating countries' support for ASEAN's efforts in the mainstreaming and implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

Fourth, ASEAN widened its engagement with the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions through the signing of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between ASEAN and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and between ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). Fifth, ASEAN adopted a number of documents on issues of mutual interest that aim to benefit the people of ASEAN, such as the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework, the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on One Health Initiative, the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Developing Regional Electric Vehicle Ecosystem, the ASEAN Leaders Declaration on Advancing Regional Payment Connectivity and Promoting Local Currency Transaction, and the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations.

Change and continuity are inevitable aspects of international relations, and these two aspects are pertinent in light of the handover of ASEAN Chairship from Indonesia to Lao PDR. While one may argue that each Chair of ASEAN brings different priorities based on their national interests, it is also fair to say that continuity in ASEAN is a prevalent aspect since one chairship alone may not suffice to advance the community-building process and address matters of common interest and concern.



Photo: Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi meeting with H.E. Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

As the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia located in the mainland area and one of the main beneficiaries of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), one may expect issues related to IAI, the Mekong region, as well as connectivity, to be of top priority for Lao PDR. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Lao PDR's ASEAN's Chairship theme this year in 2024 is "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience." Seen from another perspective, however, connectivity and resilience are manifestations of the continuity aspect in ASEAN community building as (a) connectivity is one of the priority areas of cooperation of the AOIP and (b) resilience is ASEAN's way of dealing with the perpetual myriads of challenges coming its way to ensure that the ASEAN continues to be strengthened and enabled to bring benefit to its people and the world at large, as well as continue to be an active player at the global stage. In other words, ASEAN continues to matter.

In light of ASEAN's achievements in 2023 under Indonesia's Chairship, there are several pertinent issues expected to be the highlights of Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairship as well as the focus of the ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in October 2024.

First and foremost, accelerating the work on the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. With the in-principle endorsement of the draft ASEAN Community Vision 2045: Resilient, Innovative, Dynamic, and People-Centered ASEAN in 2023, ASEAN continues to work on developing the attendant documents/strategic plans which would be annexed to the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 to be adopted in 2025. Part of the preparatory work for the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 included strengthening ASEAN's capacity and institutional effectiveness.



Photo: Indonesia handed over ASEAN Chairmanship gavel to Lao PDR at the end of the 43rd ASEAN Summit

Last year, some work was done in this regard, such as by adopting the Rules of Procedure to Support Decision-Making Process at the ASEAN Summit and the Rules of Procedure for Conclusion of Non-Legally Binding Agreement (RPCA), revising the Terms of Reference of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR), as well as solidifying Jakarta's position as the diplomatic capital city of ASEAN by convening more meetings at the ASEAN Headquarters. However, ASEAN's efforts to improve the strengthening of its organization and the betterment of its people would be a continuous journey.

It is in this vein that Lao PDR's Chairship of ASEAN is expected to play a vital role and Lao PDR is well-aware of its strategic position, as its chairship priorities include the development of strategic plans to implement the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, the enhancement of ASEAN Centrality, and the forging of an inclusive and sustainable future.

Second, continuing to mainstream and implement the AOIP to ensure that the region remains peaceful, secure, stable, and prosperous. This effort would entail not only the promotion of the AOIP's four priority areas (maritime cooperation, connectivity, SDGs, economic and other possible areas of cooperation) but also the advancement of the principles enshrined in the AOIP, including by fostering a culture of dialogue and cooperation in addressing issues of common interest and concern both within ASEAN as well as between ASEAN and external parties, especially its partners.

The AOIP's emphasis on cooperation, collaboration, and non-confrontation would further enhance ASEAN's integrity and convening power on the global stage. In relation to the mainstreaming of the AOIP, there would be an expectation to continue to convene the ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum as well as to strengthen ASEAN's established engagement with the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

Third, taking up endeavors which support economic growth and community development in ASEAN against the backdrop of a rapidly ever-changing world. In 2023, Indonesia focused on food security, energy security (including by promoting the development of an electric vehicle ecosystem in ASEAN), regional health architecture, as well as financial stability. Based on Lao PDR's priority areas, we could expect continued efforts to ensure ASEAN's relevance, agility, and growth by, among others, enhancing digitalization, further empowering women, integrating economies, as well as promoting inclusiveness and sustainability in various areas of cooperation.

Leading ASEAN in navigating global and regional dynamics is a herculean task. In that regard, resources, capacity, and leadership are crucial elements. As all eyes will be on Lao PDR, especially during the ASEAN Summit and Related Summits, all of us await to see the continued achievements in 2024, which would serve as a stepping stone for ASEAN 2025 and even ASEAN 2045.



ASEAN-Korea 35th Anniversary and Journey to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

H.E. Lee Jang-keun
Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to ASEAN

Here in Jakarta, thirty-five years ago, a much-anticipated letter was signed and exchanged between Foreign Minister Choi Ho-Joong of the Republic of Korea and Foreign Minister Ali Alatas of the Republic of Indonesia in his capacity as the Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee. This very letter was inked and sealed to establish Sectoral Dialogue Relations between the Republic of Korea and ASEAN, indicating the direction for the newly established ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Partnership to embark on a new journey through the regional multilateral platform.

The ASEAN-ROK Sectoral Dialogue Partnership initially concentrated on economic areas such as trade, investment, and tourism, with the possibility of expanding the area of cooperation, including but not limited to development cooperation and the transfer of technology and human resources.

The Republic of Korea was accorded full Dialogue Partner status by ASEAN in 1991, only two years after the establishment of Sectoral Dialogue Relations. Our partnership has been incrementally expanded and deepened for more than three decades. As we celebrate the 35th anniversary of the ROK-ASEAN Dialogue Relations this year, I am happy to say that we have taken great strides forward in our mutually beneficial partnership encompassing all areas of the ASEAN Community, including the political, economic, and socio-cultural pillars.



Propelled by the full dialogue partnership, the ASEAN-ROK relations have developed exponentially in all aspects. Korea-ASEAN Summit, the highest level of engagement, has been held yearly since 1997, back to back with the annual ASEAN Summit and the Related Summits. Furthermore, the Republic of Korea has hosted three Commemorative Summits with ASEAN in Jeju in 2009 and Busan in 2014 and 2019, respectively. Regarding economic cooperation, the trade volume between ASEAN and the ROK increased from 8.2 billion USD in 1989 to 187 billion USD in 2023, a 23-fold increase in the last 35 years.

When it comes to FDI from Korean companies to the ASEAN member states, the figure is remarkable as the amount has increased by 122-fold during the same period, from 92 million USD in 1989 to 11.3 billion USD in 2022. As of today, ASEAN is Korea's 2nd largest trading partner, and Korea is ASEAN's fifth-largest trade counterpart. ASEAN is Korea's 2nd largest foreign investment destination, and Korea is ASEAN's 6th largest source of FDI. The Republic of Korea is a proactive and dynamic dialogue partner in supporting socio-economic development and narrowing the regional development gap. ASEAN is one of the most benefitted regions of the ROK's ODA as more than 30% or 800 million USD of the development aid arrives in ASEAN. For people-to-people exchanges, ASEAN is the Korean people's favorite holiday destination.

Leveraging the ROK's innovative and creative forefronts, a number of initiatives have been proposed and implemented throughout the years. The ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund (AKCF) was launched in 1990 to strengthen the ASEAN-ROK partnership further and has supported more than 400 projects agreed upon by both sides. The projects and programs include technology transfer, economic development, human resources development, and people-to-people exchanges. The ASEAN-Korea Centre (AKC) was established in 2009 in Seoul, aiming to forge more robust exchanges and cooperative endeavors between Korea and the 10 ASEAN member states. Since then, AKC has implemented programs, including the ASEAN-Korea Trade & Investment Roundtable and ASEAN Week. Inaugurated in 2017, the ASEAN Culture House (ACH) in Busan has enhanced mutual awareness and kinship of friendship between the peoples of ASEAN and Korea. ACH has served as a valuable platform to promote two-way cultural exchanges between Korea and ASEAN by hosting a number of exhibitions to showcase histories, societies and cultures of ASEAN and each ASEAN member state.

Building upon our robust partnership over the last 35 years, we believe that Korea and ASEAN still have much more to achieve by expanding and deepening our cooperation. Geared by the vibrant economy, holding so much potential to be realized, the convening power, and the steadfast, unwavering commitment to dialogue and reconciliation, ASEAN continues to embrace an ever greater role in promoting peace and prosperity in the region under the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. The Republic of Korea, having developed an advanced economy and democracy from the ashes of war, is now poised to play a more active role in promoting freedom, peace, and prosperity in the region and beyond, in line with our Global Pivotal State Initiative, guided by our Indo-Pacific Strategy. Together, we can better tap into our future potential in emerging areas and address ongoing global challenges for the betterment of our people.

Against this backdrop, President Yoon Suk Yeol announced the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI), our regional strategy exclusively tailored to ASEAN, at the 23rd ASEAN-ROK Summit in Phnom Penh in 2022. One of the main goals of the KASI is to suggest the establishment of the ASEAN-Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). This goal was formally suggested at the 24th ASEAN-ROK Summit in Jakarta in 2023. In response, President Yoon's proposal for the Korea-ASEAN CSP was warmly welcomed by ASEAN Leaders last year. In materializing the pledge by our leaders, we look forward to upgrading our relations this year to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership at the coming ASEAN-Korea Summit scheduled in October in Vientiane. The establishment of the CSP will culminate in celebrating the 35th anniversary of our steadfast and vibrant dialogue partnership.

Concretizing our vision for the CSP, Korea presented an "ABC Vision" to ASEAN at all levels early this year. ABC Vision reflects our enlightening vision and strategy for our promising future relations. A stands for Advancing Peace and Security for all; B for Building a Smarter, Greener and Connected Future; and C for Creating a Socio-cultural Platform for Young and Future Generations. In addition, we shared the so-called "100 ABC projects" to realize the vision. The projects include a detailed list of ongoing and upcoming projects in all pillars of the ASEAN Community.



Photo: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol expressed his views at the 24th ASEAN-Republic of Korea (ROK) Summit in Jakarta, Wednesday (6/9/2023). 2023 ASEAN Summit Media Center/Akbar Nugroho Gumay/foc.



Photo: Newly-appointed Ambassador of Republic of Korea to ASEAN presents credentials to Secretary-General of ASEAN.

To name a few projects among our 100 ABC projects, on the ‘Advancing Peace and Security for all,’ we will strengthen the high-level engagement of defense authorities between Korea and ASEAN, and expand collaboration to tackle non-traditional and emerging security challenges, including cyber security and transnational crimes. We will also support capacity-building in maritime law enforcement and maritime domain awareness for our ASEAN partners.

On the ‘Building a Smarter, Greener, and Connected Future,’ the ASEAN-ROK Digital Innovation Flagship Project will be officially launched this year to facilitate ASEAN’s digital transformation over the next five years. This 30 million USD flagship project includes establishing a shared data ecosystem and big data platform for AI training, building a data center with high-performance computers, and establishing Korea-ASEAN Digital Academies in ASEAN countries.

On the ‘Creating a Socio-cultural Platform for Young and Future Generations,’ we will expand the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS), a fully funded scholarship for undergraduate and graduate degree programs in Korea, for ASEAN nationals. GKS has been conceived as one of the flagship projects in education, and approximately 3,800 ASEAN students have received scholarships thus far. In addition, we plan to launch a new special CSP Scholarship Program for ASEAN nationals in the coming years. We will also continue to nurture greater bonds of friendship and solidarity between the peoples of Korea and ASEAN through art, music, film and sports exchanges. I foresee that more projects could be added as we continue to discuss ways forward to follow up on materializing the ASEAN-Korea CSP.

Upgrading our partnership is not only a symbolic nomenclature but will be followed by concrete actions. Therefore, we will be fully committed to strengthening, deepening, and broadening our cooperation ties. The ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund (AKCF), launched in 1990 starting with Korea's annual contribution of 1 million USD, has increased significantly to over 20 million USD last year. And we will further increase our annual contribution to the AKCF to 32 million USD by 2027, to facilitate and support the aforementioned programs and many more. Korea will also increase its annual contribution to sub-regional cooperation in the ASEAN region: 10 million USD for the Mekong-ROK Cooperation Fund (MKCF) and 6 million USD for the BIMP-EAGA-ROK Cooperation Fund (BKCF) by 2027. We are indeed action-oriented by demonstrating our aspiration to promote inclusive growth in the ASEAN region.

ASEAN and Korea have evolved into indispensable partners. As emerging challenges and opportunities lie ahead of us, we are committed to deepening and broadening the ties with ASEAN and our vital partnership for promoting freedom, peace and prosperity in the region and beyond. Marking the 35th anniversary of the Republic of Korea – ASEAN partnership this year, we are much anticipated to establish a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) with ASEAN's full support. It will serve as another timely opportunity for Korea and ASEAN to reaffirm the heartfelt wish for a stronger and deeper partnership of even greater scope. In tune with this, I look forward to charting a new chapter in Korea-ASEAN cooperation in the months to come.



Photo: The atmosphere of the 24th ASEAN-Republic of Korea Summit at the Jakarta Convention Center, Jakarta, Wednesday (6/9/2023). MEDIA CENTER 2023 ASEAN Summit/M Agung Rajasa/www.

2024 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit: Outcomes and Follow-Ups

H.E. Tiffany McDonald
Australian Ambassador to ASEAN

Su-Yin Lew
Second Secretary, Australian Mission to ASEAN

In March of this year, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese had the honour of welcoming ASEAN Leaders, the Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, and the Secretary-General of ASEAN to Melbourne, for a Special Summit to commemorate fifty years since Australia became ASEAN's first Dialogue Partner. Fifty years of cooperation have given us a strong foundation for the ASEAN-Australia relationship to deliver positive outcomes for ASEAN, Australia, and our region. But to appreciate how far we have come, and just what the Special Summit represents, we have to go back to where it began.

From Dialogue to Comprehensive Strategic Partners

It was in 1974 that Australia recognised ASEAN's central role – not only in the diverse and vibrant Southeast Asia but in our region more broadly. Australia's then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, recognised ASEAN was already central to addressing the region's challenges – and that this role would only become more pertinent. Indeed, at the time, Prime Minister Whitlam said that of all the arrangements in our region, "ASEAN is unquestionably the most important, the most relevant, the most natural". It was this vision that saw Australia take steps to become ASEAN's first official Dialogue Partner in 1974.

All those decades ago, Australia saw what we see today - that Australia and ASEAN share a region and a future. That our success and prosperity is intertwined, and that it is in our shared interests to work in partnership to address shared challenges. Australia saw the convening potential of ASEAN, which has since been realised, as a founding member of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994 and the East Asia Summit in 2005. In 2013, we established our Australian Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta and appointed the first resident Australian Ambassador to ASEAN. Ambassador McDonald was appointed the fourth resident Australian Ambassador to ASEAN in January this year.

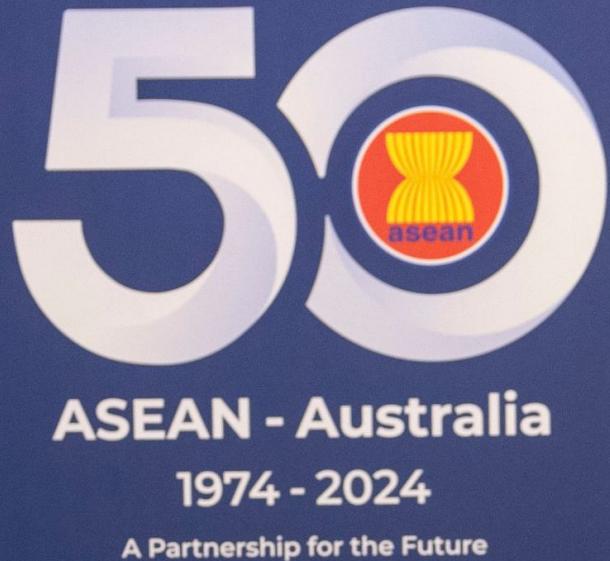


Photo: Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, met with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia, Senator the Honourable Penny Wong in Melbourne, Australia.

Over the last five decades, ASEAN and Australia steadily built the habits of cooperation, understanding, and trust that led to the expansion of our partnership. This culminated in establishing the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2021. This effort was a milestone decision and a new step for the ASEAN-Australia relationship, sending a strong signal of Australia's commitment to ASEAN and its central role. It also unlocked a new range of resources, with a package of 'Australia for ASEAN' (Aus4ASEAN) initiatives, including Aus4ASEAN scholarships, the Aus4ASEAN Digital Transformation and Future Skills Initiative, and our flagship Aus4ASEAN Futures facility (AUD204 million over ten years) which supports ASEAN-driven projects on ASEAN priorities. This strong foundation of fifty years of deep, broad cooperation allowed us to seize the opportunity of our anniversary and deliver strong outcomes at the 2024 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit.

Celebrating 50 Years

The heart of any meaningful summit is dialogue and partnership. This was truly the case with the ASEAN-Australia Summit in Melbourne, which was made possible through the strong leadership of Australia's ASEAN Country Coordinator, Lao PDR, the commitment of the ASEAN Member States, and the support of the ASEAN Secretariat.

The Summit was an important opportunity for ASEAN Member States, Timor-Leste, and Australia to come together to share views and discuss the challenges and opportunities that face us. With a Plenary and Retreat session, the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit saw Australia's Prime Minister and ASEAN Leaders discuss the breadth of ASEAN-Australia cooperation, shared priorities, and regional issues. It was a chance for forward-thinking and discussion at the highest levels on how ASEAN and Australia can shape the next 50 years of our relationship to ensure our region remains open, inclusive, and prosperous. These discussions formed the basis of two significant, Leader-level documents that set out our practical cooperation and shared aspirations for the future.

Firstly is the Melbourne Declaration, which highlights key areas of ASEAN-Australia cooperation and shared views on regional and international issues across 55 paragraphs. Secondly is the ASEAN-Australia Joint Leaders' Vision Statement, which commits ASEAN and Australia to work together to promote strategic trust and a rules-based regional architecture that upholds international law.

Leader-level Summits also provide a focal point to mobilise whole-of-government thinking on new initiatives to further our cooperation. At the 2024 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit, the Australian Government announced over AUD 500 million in funding for a range of new and expanded initiatives, which complement our already extensive engagement under the CSP. This included the establishment of an ASEAN-Australia Centre to drive greater Southeast Asian literacy within Australia and strengthen our connections across our peoples, education, business, and more. Australia also announced more than 75 new Aus4ASEAN Scholarships, and over 55 Aus4ASEAN fellowships to support ASEAN young professionals in fields that advance the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

Several initiatives announced at the Special Summit will also support the implementation of Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040, which outlines a practical pathway to significantly increase two-way trade and investment between Australia and Southeast Asia. For example, the establishment of an AUD 2 billion Southeast Asia Investment Financing Facility, to catalyse Australian private sector investment in the ASEAN region. Alongside our existing economic cooperation with ASEAN and an upgraded ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area, these investments will help secure a prosperous future for the people of ASEAN and Australia.

Beyond the Leader-level discussions, the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit also brought together officials and key stakeholders to engage across four thematic tracks: Business, Climate and Clean Energy; Emerging Leaders; and Maritime Cooperation. These tracks brought together experts, officials, and businesses to share insights and generate new solutions.

For example, Australia's Special Envoy for Southeast Asia, Nicholas Moore, shared perspectives from some of ASEAN and Australia's leading business voices who joined the Business Track to discuss how to build two-way trade and investment. Under the Maritime Cooperation Track, the first Track 1.5 Maritime Dialogue between ASEAN and Australia was held. The Climate and Clean Energy Transition Forum brought together over 160 participants from Australia, ASEAN, and Timor-Leste to discuss the region's clean energy transition. The Emerging Leaders track brought together the next generation of leaders to discuss the future of the ASEAN-Australia relationship. It is our hope that the ideas and connections generated across these tracks will help spur further collaboration.

A Partnership for the Future

Of course, a Special Summit does not end with its closing ceremony. Rather, a concerted effort is required to follow through and ensure that the 2024 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit delivers on its theme of 'A Partnership for the Future'. For my part, a key objective of my term as Australia's Ambassador to ASEAN will be taking forward the Special Summit's outcomes, including regular consultation with ASEAN Member States on implementation and making sure our efforts are focused on areas of shared priorities. ASEAN and Australia are also in the process of developing a new 'ASEAN-Australia Plan of Action', which will serve as the work plan for our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for the next four years. Incorporating the outcomes of the Special Summit into this plan will help to embed these initiatives and priorities into our program of work.

Australia will also continue to work with ASEAN to shape our shared future, in line with the ASEAN-Australia Joint Leaders' Vision Statement. We'll continue to be strong supporters of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and its key principles, such as ASEAN Centrality, transparency, openness, and a rules-based approach.

The Vision Statement commits us to work together to uphold principles that underpin our region – such as the desire for a region where sovereignty and territorial integrity are respected, where differences are managed through respectful dialogue rather than the threat or use of force, and working together to maintain peace and stability. We believe that ASEAN has a fundamental role to play in maintaining peace and stability and preventing conflict in the region. In this context, Australia co-hosted a Track 2 workshop on conflict prevention and the ASEAN-led regional architecture with Indonesia and Malaysia earlier this year, and we hope to continue this work with ASEAN.

Another key element of ensuring the longevity of the Special Summit's outcomes and our partnership is raising public awareness and engaging youth for the future. This was recognised in the Special Sumit's Emerging Leaders' Track, which brought together 65 members of the next generation from ASEAN, Timor-Leste, and Australia to discuss key economic, social, and geopolitical challenges facing the region.

We have also sought to further the Special Summit's impact through a series of 50th-anniversary events – both here in Jakarta and in the region – to engage a broader audience on the Summit, its outcomes, and our partnership. My team has taken forward photo exhibitions and community events to bring ASEAN-Australia relations to the people, and I've had the pleasure of speaking with university students and scholarship recipients about what role they can play in the future of our partnership.

The Australian Mission to ASEAN was also pleased to support the development of a new research report on ASEAN-Australia relations, co-authored by Professor Nicholas Farrelly, authors from Cambodia and Singapore, and CSIS Indonesia's own Dr Lina Alexandra. The report has catalysed further public discussion on the future direction of ASEAN-Australia relations. Bringing the people of ASEAN and Australia along with us affords the ASEAN-Australia relationship further legitimacy and ensures its longevity.

And while we are celebrating our golden jubilee of partnership this year, Australia's efforts are focused on a partnership for the future. The world has changed significantly since our partnership began in 1974, but the Special Summit and outcomes were a concrete demonstration that Australia is invested, engaged, and committed to working with ASEAN to create the region that we all want – one that is peaceful, stable, and prosperous. The ASEAN-Australia Joint Leaders' Vision Statement and Melbourne Declaration set the scene for ASEAN-Australia cooperation, providing us with guiding principles for the next 50 years and beyond. The initiatives announced serve to deepen our economic and cultural ties, strengthen our educational and environmental cooperation, and position us to tackle the challenges of the future. We were there in 1974, and Australia will continue to be with ASEAN every step of the way.



State of ASEAN: Latest Institutional Developments, Challenges to ASEAN's Relevance, Ideal, and Practical Recommendations

Bhanubhatra Jittiang

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For nearly six decades, ASEAN has stood as a significant platform for international cooperation between ten Southeast Asian countries. Its role in trust-building and fostering bonds between member states is not to be underestimated, as it has successfully transformed former adversaries into close allies. Moreover, the governments of Southeast Asian nations have effectively utilized ASEAN as a regional bloc to expand and strengthen their collaborations with external partners, including major powers in the Indo-Pacific, such as China, India, Japan, and the US. This has led to the creation of a sophisticated regional architecture, with ASEAN at the helm.

To govern their relations, ASEAN members have adopted common region norms enshrined in the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, including (1) Mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity of all nations; (2) The right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion and coercion; (3) Non-interference in the internal affairs of one another;

(4) Settlement of differences and disputes by peaceful means; and (5) renunciation of the threat of use of force. ASEAN leaders have also embraced ‘the ASEAN Way,’ which, according to the former Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar, emphasizes “informality, organization minimalism, inclusiveness, intensive consultations leading to consensus and peaceful resolution of disputes,”¹ reflecting the common socio-cultural norms in the region.

Despite being developed institutionally and normatively, ASEAN is often regarded as a mere ‘talk shop’ with limited concrete actions. Against the backdrop of the geopolitical rivalry between China and the US in the Indo-Pacific in the recent decade, commentators have casted more doubt on ASEAN unity. There were several instances when some member states aligned their interests strongly with those of major powers and hampered regional harmony, such as the incident during the ASEAN’s Foreign Minister Meeting in 2012 when ASEAN members, for the first time, failed to issue a joint communiqué due to the disputes over statements on the South China Sea. A divided regional bloc is, thus, the looming scenario for ASEAN.

Multifaceted crises in member countries like Myanmar, which has endured domestic armed conflicts since the 2021 military coup, have further constrained ASEAN’s effectiveness. For three years since violence has rampaged Myanmar, ASEAN still could not take any significant measures to ease tensions—needless to mention resolving conflict. The Five-Point Consensus (5PC)—negotiated by ASEAN leaders with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing during the Special Leaders Meeting in 2021—has also become impotent due to Naypyitaw’s lack of cooperation and the absence of ASEAN mechanisms to enforce compliance. Furthermore, different member states have taken different positions towards Naypyitaw, ranging from Indonesia’s playing tough on the junta to Laos’ cozy relations with the military regime. ASEAN unity is, therefore, constantly up to the test.

With these myriad challenges, another critical question arises: to what extent does ASEAN remain relevant in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific regional affairs in the next five to ten years? The answer to this question may lie in the outlooks of ASEAN member states, especially in how they view ASEAN as a regional bloc and their interests in engaging with others through ASEAN. Do member states still commonly believe in the formation of ASEAN as a political, economic, or socio-cultural community, while, in fact, most have already sided with some major powers for political, economic, and socio-cultural assurance in the returning era of realpolitik or indulge deeply into domestic conflicts? What role could ASEAN still play in the current global affairs? These questions deserve to be raised at all levels of future ASEAN meetings so that member states could reassess ASEAN’s positionality and relevance in global politics, especially for each nation to revisit their national and regional interests in ASEAN. If member states consider ASEAN relevant and essential, the next few years would be the time for them to set new ASEAN priorities and goals—some of which could be developed based on the existing agreements and ambitions.

[1] Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (Routledge, 2000), 63.

To such an end, ASEAN, in fact, always has institutional frameworks for actions. They have yet to be genuinely executed. Thus, ASEAN should prioritize ‘strategic implementation’ and focus more on removing hurdles that prevent it from achieving genuine cooperation, including obstacles caused by ASEAN norms and ways. Sovereignty would undoubtedly remain to be a mantra governing ASEAN regional affairs and international relations. However, considering the situations emerging in one member country and posing security, economic, or even social challenges to other states or the region, such as the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, ASEAN should serve as a platform to deliberate the extent to which regional body has a ‘responsibility to resolve’—including humanitarian intervention if necessary—in a matter of great regional concern.

The African Union (AU)—though facing some challenges of its own—could perhaps offer a new ideal for ASEAN, especially regarding regional involvement in domestic affairs when it comes to conflict prevention and management that destabilize regional security. Besides, the existing ASEAN mechanisms and bodies, such as the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) or the ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Center), could also be restructured and equipped with additional mandates so that these instruments could become more forceful in bringing about changes to shared regional challenges.

However, not all ASEAN member states value the regional bloc similarly; thus, the first barrier to cross is the political will of each member state. It is unfortunate that ASEAN unity may only emerge with a common ASEAN tragedy, just like a typical soap opera ending portrayed in ASEAN countries’ television channels, in which villains become cooperative only when they lose everything, and the only thing left is a community of friends, family, and neighbors, which they long neglected.



Photo: Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, today delivered welcoming remarks at the 17th Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)'s Governing Board Meeting, at the ASEAN Headquarters/ASEAN Secretariat.



Photo: On 13 June 2024, Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr Kao Kim Hourn, met with Members of the U.S. House of Representatives Young Kim and Joaquin Castro, in Washington D.C.

Reimagining Connectivity: Strengthening ASEAN Economic Resilience Amidst Geostrategic Competition

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Geostrategic Competition

This commentary presents a view of the ASEAN connectivity agenda amidst increasing geostrategic competition. The geostrategic competition encompasses more arenas than geopolitical competition and traditional (i.e., military) security.¹ This includes geoeconomic competition and non-traditional security arenas (e.g., climate, cyber, economic, and human security). These multiple, enmeshed arenas pose a major source of complexity and uncertainty for the region. They also add to the imperative for the timely call for ASEAN Connectivity and Resilience under Lao PDR's 2024 Chairmanship.

In the economic arena, geostrategic competition has quickly spread from imports (e.g., tariff wars) to affect exports, investment, science and technology, and cyberspace. Conventional economic subjects such as trade and supply chains are no longer seen as purely economic matters. Caught in this geostrategic competition, ASEAN economies face a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities.²

Present Modes, Challenges, and Opportunities

At present, geostrategic competition in the Indo-Pacific includes both geopolitical and geoeconomic strands. These strands intersect, as may be seen in geoeconomic competition and geopolitical tensions associated with critical minerals, semiconductor supply chains, and green technology.

[1] Cuong, Nguyen Xuan and Duong Van Huy. "ASEAN's Role in Promoting Non-Traditional Security Cooperation in the South China Sea: A Perspective from the Issues of Fisheries Security." *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 33, no. 2 (2021): 313-335. <https://doi.org/10.22883/kjda.2021.33.2.007>

[2] Jung, Sung Chul, Jaehyon Lee, and Ji-Yong Lee. "The Indo-Pacific Strategy and US Alliance Network Expandability: Asian Middle Powers' Positions on Sino-US Geostrategic Competition in Indo-Pacific Region." *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 127 (2021): 53-68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1766909>; Park, Jae Jeok, and Erwin Tan. "Exploiting Sino-US Geostrategic Competition: The View from Seoul and Singapore." *Asian Studies Review* 42, no. 3 (2018): 537-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2018.1478799>

Consequently, a key challenge arises in managing geostrategic risk and uncertainty for any ASEAN agenda on connectivity, including economic connectivity (whether in supply chains, digital space, physical infrastructure, regional standards, or otherwise). Non-economic dimensions may, in turn, bear economic risks such as disrupted supply chains, trade flows, and investment—with further impact on inflation and employment. In the longer term, this confluence of factors may lead to reduced allocative efficiency, lower productivity, a widening development gap, and lower overall growth if not managed properly.

Geostrategic competition also comes with the risk of weakening rules-based multilateral economic architecture amidst the rise of unilateralism and minilateralism among geopolitical allies. As the world shifts from a unipolar age to a multipolar one, an open, inclusive, and rules-based multilateralism remains in the interest of ASEAN as a grouping of middle powers and smaller economies.³⁴⁵

On the other hand, geostrategic competition may offer opportunities for ASEAN economies as alternative sources of imports and investment destinations to enhance supply chain diversification and derisking. These benefits, however, are neither automatic nor necessarily sustainable.

Having enjoyed decades of relatively high growth, the ASEAN economic agenda is currently at a crossroad. As active and growing players in global supply chains, many ASEAN economies are better connected externally (particularly with northeast Asian neighbors) than with each other. At the same time, the region's broad-based cooperation with external partners and commitment to open markets have fostered ASEAN economies' participation in the global economy. Given the region's embeddedness in global supply chains, the growing scope of geostrategic competition may increasingly affect ASEAN economies.

Conversely, effective recognition and response to geostrategic competition may offer opportunities for ASEAN economies without having to abandon support for multilateralism. This includes proactive planning for economic resilience through risk diversification and by enhancing regional coordination and response mechanisms, which in turn give the region a comparative advantage in this new uncertain age.

[3] Cho, Chansoo. "Making Sense of the Twenty Years' Crisis: A Critical Realist View." *The Korean Journal of International Studies* 21, no. 1 (2023): 61-89. <https://doi.org/10.14731/kjis.2023.04.21.61>

[4] Park, Albert Sanghoon. "Beyond great powers: Middle power paths to resilient multilateralism." *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 10, no. 1 (2022): 131-157. <https://doi.org/10.18588/202205.00a274>

[5] Tijaja, Julia, Simon Tay, and Sanchita Basu-Das. "ASEAN Post-2025: Reimagining the ASEAN Economic Community." *ISEAS Trends in Southeast Asia TRS* 7/24 (2024). https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/TRS7_24.pdf



To this end, ASEAN should strengthen its economic resilience or ability to respond to shocks and stresses, including rising geostrategic competition.⁶ We argue that fostering connectivity could be a potential solution for ASEAN economic resilience by harnessing its internal strength, optimizing its collective bargaining power externally, and enhancing its response strategy to the impact of geostrategic competition. For the sake of our argument, as elaborated below, we do not limit our concept of ASEAN connectivity to the contour of the ASEAN connectivity agenda as defined in the Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity.

Policy Recommendations

As today's challenges become more complex and multidimensional, ASEAN needs more—not less—connectivity among its community pillars. ASEAN should avoid treating its connectivity agenda separately from the other three ASEAN community pillars to effectively serve as a tool for resilience, as this would risk a disconnected ASEAN connectivity. The implementation of connectivity-enhancing initiatives also requires ownership and follow-up by existing sectoral bodies under the three community pillars.

Intra-regional: enhanced connectivity for enhanced response

First, improving intra-ASEAN connectivity would help the region harness its internal strength through economies of scale and scope, greater physical and digital market integration, development of regional supply chains and productive collaboration including green and just transition efforts. As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, connected internal markets could be more resilient and facilitate faster recovery from shocks.

To date, ASEAN market integration efforts have focused on introducing frameworks, agreements, and initiatives. Moving forward, more should be done to ensure the implementation and utilization of these initiatives to realize impact at the national level. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts must be focused on ASEAN market connectivity performance instead of the more superfluous officiation of initiatives.

[6] Park, Albert Sanghoon. "Understanding resilience in sustainable development: Rallying call or siren song?" *Sustainable Development* 32, no. 1 (2024): 260-274. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2645>

The ASEAN connectivity agenda should also evolve with time and megatrends, and partnerships and collaborations with the private sector, experts, and external partners should be fostered. Beyond frameworks and rules, the focus should be on digital connectivity to address the gap in digital capabilities to unlock the region's digital economy potential. On green transition, which is fast becoming the next frontier of geostrategic competition, ASEAN economies also have different capabilities in undertaking a just transition whilst the effect of climate change would be felt across national boundaries. Greater connectivity in the power grid, carbon and renewable markets, green skills development and mobility, and crisis prevention such as haze response, will strengthen ASEAN economic resilience to climate change.

Last but not least, connectivity could help address the region's development gaps by linking the more vulnerable groups to market and better employment opportunities. People-to-people connectivity could also be strengthened through platforms for dialogue and collaboration, which could help bridge the gap in trust and understanding and prevent or improve response to a crisis. All these matters are equally important for strengthening economic resilience.

External: Stronger external connectivity can strengthen ASEAN collective bargaining position

Second, by embracing connectivity beyond the region, ASEAN could optimize its collective bargaining power externally. Working together with like-minded countries to uphold an open, inclusive, and rules-based multilateral trading system would safeguard ASEAN's voice in the global economic architecture, including in emerging areas such as digital and green economy. ASEAN should also remain open to mutually beneficial trade and investment partnerships and collaboration in areas of mutual interest, to bring in the much-needed market, investment, and employment, at a time of uncertainties in the external market.

THE 23RD ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING (RETREAT)

ASEAN MATTERS:
EPICENTRUM OF GROWTH

3 SEPTEMBER 2023
JAKARTA, INDONESIA



Photo: The 23rd ASEAN Economic Community Council (AECC) Meeting in Jakarta, Sunday (09/03/2023). The Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia

Enhancing supply chain connectivity through trade agreements, cooperation in trade facilitation and customs procedures, and dialogues on supply chain response to crises could also contribute to stronger economic resilience. Strengthened trade and investment relations with partners bolster ASEAN economic appeal as a market or investment destination. In the context of geostrategic competition, it would help position the region as a competitive and sustainable option for a production hub. ASEAN could also achieve more by leveraging existing frameworks including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, given the rising cost of policy certainty. Finally, deepening engagement with established and new partners through new or upgrading of free trade agreements or other thematic/modular agreements would mitigate the impact of unilateral actions by partners while allowing ASEAN access to the know-how and best practices needed to adjust and thrive in the future economy and a voice in shaping the emerging global and regional economic architecture.

Response strategy: internal and external connectivity and institutional agility to enhance resilience to geostrategic competition

Third, by collectively advocating adherence to rules-based order both within and beyond ASEAN, ASEAN could contribute to the upholding of a predictable and stable environment for economic activity. It could also help shape more inclusive rules in emerging areas such as digital, green transition, and supply chains, whether collectively or in the membership's respective bilateral or plurilateral engagement. Connected markets and external partnerships could also enhance ASEAN's response capability to geostrategic competition induced crises and other crises more broadly.

At the institutional level, improved coordination across ASEAN's pillar-based structure is vital to effectively respond to geostrategic competition.⁷ This includes monitoring and identifying risks and generating early warnings of potential threats to ASEAN connectivity, both internal and external. It also facilitates the convening of dialogue platforms or activating coordinating mechanisms among the appropriate ASEAN stakeholders.

To conclude, ASEAN should strengthen connectivity within and beyond ASEAN as a strategy to build its economic resilience to geostrategic competition. The focus needs to be on impact such as through regulatory cooperation, investment facilitation, digital ecosystem development, green technology adoption, practical trade facilitation, and supply chain resilience initiatives. ASEAN must also continue to support open, inclusive, rules-based multilateralism, and be proactive in shaping global, and regional rules in emerging areas. Optimizing the effectiveness of ASEAN connectivity agenda requires institutional agility and adaptation. Ultimately, ASEAN is about the people, and the pursuit of connectivity should be a means to that end. The post-2025 strategic plan development process opens a vital opportunity to reiterate said commitment to ASEAN stakeholders and realign plans for regional connectivity and resilience in uncertain times.

[7] Hew, Denis, and Julia Tijaja (Eds.). "Building an ASEAN Economic Community Beyond 2025." Centre on Asia and Globalisation (2024). <https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/cag/building-an-asean-economic-community-beyond-2025.pdf>

Role of Middle Power in Supporting ASEAN's Cooperative Agenda: ROK-ASEAN Relations in 2024

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2024 marks a milestone year for ASEAN and the Republic of Korea (ROK) as they celebrate 35 years of dialogue relations. Both sides are expected to elevate their relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)—the highest tier of relations between ASEAN and its dialogue partners, signifying a closer strategic alignment.¹

Relations between ROK and ASEAN have become stronger and more multifaceted over the years. The launch of the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI) in 2022 has propelled their cooperation beyond practical and functional cooperation to encompass strategic issues including maritime security and defence.²

Nearly two years after the launch of the KASI, the key question that emerges is whether South Korea has established itself as a more credible middle power and a strategically important partner for ASEAN. After all, President Yoon's pivot to the Indo-Pacific reflects ROK's ambition to become a "global pivotal state."³ Given the increasingly complex geostrategic environment, Korea wants to transcend its traditional ties with major powers and assume a larger role in international affairs.⁴

With the US-China rivalry at the forefront, the role of middle powers like South Korea becomes even more critical. Strengthened ASEAN-ROK relations can help hedge against the uncertainties of major power rivalries and address other regional challenges. Like ASEAN, Seoul is striving to balance its security and economic interests between the US and China, despite the narrowing space for maneuvering as the rivalry intensifies. Scholars have noted that elevating its relations with ASEAN represents Seoul's strategic response to these diplomatic challenges, offering a potential solution to the diplomatic gridlock that hampers its security and economic objectives.⁵

[1] ASEAN, "ASEAN, ROK Reaffirmed Commitment to Further Strengthen Partnership in View of 35th Anniversary of Dialogue Relations," ASEAN, 4 April 2024, <https://asean.org/asean-rok-reaffirmed-commitment-to-further-strengthen-partnership-in-view-of-35th-anniversary-of-dialogue-relations/>.

[2] "Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, n.d., https://overseas.mofa.go.kr/www/brd/m_3924/down.do?brd_id=13007&seq=363570&data_tp=A&file_seq=2.

[3] William Choong and Joanne Lin, "South Korea: A Global Pivotal State, Not Quite," Fulcrum, 17 May 2023, <https://fulcrum.sg/south-korea-a-global-pivotal-state-not-quite/>.

[4] Shinae Lee, "Global Pivotal State: South Korea's Ascendance in Defense Exports," Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 12 April 2024, https://www.spf.org/iina/en/articles/lee_04.html.

[5] Hahnkyu Park, "Seoul's New Southern Policy with ASEAN States and Its Security Implications for Peace on the Korean Peninsula," in *Contemporary Korea-Southeast Asian Relations, Bilateral and Multilateral*, Routledge, 2023, pp. 16

f ASEAN-ROK Cooperation: Cultural Heritage and Socio-Cultural Solidarity
한-아세안 협력의 미래: 문화유산과 사회문화적 연대



Photo: In commemorating the 35th Anniversary of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations, the International Conference on ASEAN-Korea Cultural Heritage Cooperation, with the theme "The Future of ASEAN-Korea Cooperation: Cultural Heritage and Socio-Cultural Solidarity" was held in Seoul, ROK on 26 June 2024.

In Southeast Asia, the ROK is recognized as a technologically advanced middle power with substantial resources and capabilities.⁶ ASEAN values South Korea's growing international affluence and appreciates being the "centerpiece" of Korea's Indo-Pacific initiative, as well as ROK's support for ASEAN centrality.⁷

According to the State of Southeast Asia 2024 Survey report, the ROK ranks fifth among ASEAN's 11 dialogue partners (following China, the US, Japan, and the EU) in terms of strategic relevance to ASEAN.⁸ This ranking grants South Korea greater strategic weight in the region compared to other traditional middle powers such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Russia, India, Canada, and New Zealand. Furthermore, the same survey indicates that the ROK surpasses the UK, India, and Australia in economic, political, and security influence in Southeast Asia.

The survey's indication of ROK's increasing regional standing can be attributed to several key factors. Firstly, ROK is emerging as a "defence industry powerhouse" and one of the largest exporters of arms to Southeast Asia (particularly to the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand), effectively taking over the role previously held by Russia. The appeal of Korea's defence equipment is evident due to its technological sophistication, compatibility with Western-made equivalents, and affordability.⁹ As such, it is projected that South Korea could become the world's fourth-largest arms exporter by 2027.¹⁰

Secondly, South Korea's rising ambition and defence posture has not been perceived as hostile in the Southeast and bears no historical baggage in the region. Unlike Japan, the ROK does not have a history of colonialism, military aggression, or territorial disputes in Southeast Asia. Its adherence to ASEAN's principles of non-interference and respect for sovereignty has been well-received.

Thirdly, South Korea is experiencing rapid growth in its strategic industries, including semiconductors. The recent announcement of a US\$19 billion support package for the chip industry aims to bolster South Korea's competitiveness in the sector.¹¹ Its leadership in technology and innovation positions the ROK as an attractive partner for cooperation in emerging sectors.

[6] Lam Peng Er, *Contemporary Korea-Southeast Asian Relations, Bilateral and Multilateral*, Routledge, 2023, pp. 4-5.

[7] Jo He-rim, "ASEAN is New Centerpiece of Korea's Indo-Pacific Initiative," *The Korea Herald*, 4 August 2022, <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20220804000774>.

[8] Sharon Seah, Joanne Lin, Melinda Martinus, Kristina Fong, Indira Aridati, Pham Thi Phuong Thao, and Damon Chee, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2024 Survey Report*, ISEAS- Yusof Ishak Institute, 2024, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/centres/asean-studies-centre/state-of-southeast-asia-survey/the-state-of-southeast-asia-2024-survey-report/>.

[9] Lee, "Global Pivotal State;" *The Korea Times*, "South Korea Emerges as Fastest-Growing Arms Exporter in the World, South China Morning Post, 24 July 2022, https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/3186411/south-korea-emerges-fastest-growing-arms-exporter-world?campaign=3186411&module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article; Maria Siow, "Asean Turns to 'Reliable' South Korea to Feed Growing Demand for Affordable Hi-Tech Arms," *South China Morning Post*, 1 June 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3222501/asean-turns-reliable-south-korea-feed-growing-demand-affordable-hi-tech-arms>.

[10] Chris H. Park, "Is South Korea Ready to be a Global Pivotal Arms Exporter?" *The Diplomat*, 13 July 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/07/is-south-korea-ready-to-be-a-global-pivotal-arms-exporter/>.

[11] Heekyong Yang and Ju-min Park, "South Korea Announces \$19 Billion Support Package for Chip Industry," *Reuters*, 23 May 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/south-korea-announces-19-bln-support-package-chip-industry-2024-05-23/>.

Fourth, ROK's popular culture has gained widespread appreciation in Southeast Asia, surpassing Japan and China. K-pop groups like BTS and Blackpink have achieved international stardom, while K-dramas, such as "Parasite" or "Squid Game," have captivated global audiences.¹² Additionally, the popularity of K-Beauty products and Korean cuisine, often referred to as "Kimchi Diplomacy," further enhances South Korea's cultural influence worldwide.

These factors clearly demonstrate that South Korea has a significant opportunity to increase its standing as a middle power in the Indo-Pacific and become a more trusted partner for ASEAN. However, the extent to which the priorities of ASEAN and ROK can align remains a critical question.

Despite the strong alignment in promoting principles and norms, such as those in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), notable differences in priorities exist between ASEAN and South Korea.

With the ROK's pivot to the Indo-Pacific, changes to its foreign policy are evident in four key areas namely the strengthening of its alliance with the US, adopting a hardline position on North Korea, adopting a more cautious stance towards China, and pursuing rapprochement with Japan as highlighted in the historical trilateral summit between US, ROK and Japan at Camp David in August last year.¹³

In contrast, ASEAN's security priorities focus on other regional flashpoints, such as the South China Sea (where the ROK has traditionally been less vocal) and pressing issues like the Myanmar crisis.¹⁴ As such, observers have cautioned that the ROK's narrowly defined geopolitical perspective—centered on the North Korean threat and concerns over China's rise—could potentially overshadow its cooperation with ASEAN. Additionally, the ROK's strong alignment with the US could undermine its credibility and neutrality as a middle power in hedging against the uncertainties of the US-China rivalry. This concern is reflected in the State of Southeast Asia 2024 Survey, where the ROK ranked last as the region's preferred choice for hedging against US-China competition.

[12] VOA, "Asia Goes Crazy Over Korean Pop Culture", VOA, 31 October 2009, <https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-asia-goes-crazy-about-korean-pop-culture/328363.html>

[13] The Economist, "South Korea Has America in Its Face and China Breathing Down Its Neck," The Economist, 24 April 2023, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2023/04/24/south-korea-has-america-in-its-face-and-china-breathing-down-its-neck>; "The Spirit of Camp David: Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States," White House, 18 August 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/08/18/the-spirit-of-camp-david-joint-statement-of-japan-the-republic-of-korea-and-the-united-states/>.

[14] Jaehyon Lee, "Korean Geopolitical Outlook and Its Relations with ASEAN" in Andrew Mantong and Waffaa Kharisma, *Navigating Uncharted Waters: Security Cooperation between ROK and ASEAN*, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2022, pp 136.

Despite these differences, South Korea's enhanced security cooperation with ASEAN and its member states represents a turning point for Seoul's security and foreign policy. It signals South Korea's maturity as a middle power, capable of deploying its resources to support ASEAN's priorities while transitioning from a "regional balancer" role to one with greater agency.

ASEAN will welcome the ROK's maritime interest, even though the ROK does not yet have a specific cooperation mechanism with maritime Southeast Asian countries. Both sides can begin by enhancing cooperation in non-traditional security areas such as law enforcement, counterterrorism, counter-piracy, illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, protection of migrant workers in the fishing industries, search and rescue, and the transfer of decommissioned ships.

Beyond the security sector, South Korea can focus on other strategic areas such as research and development in emerging sectors like semiconductors and Artificial Intelligence (AI), the digital economy, sustainable development, and strengthening economic resilience in the global value chain. These efforts can bring greater leverage as strategic partners.¹⁵

While strategic priorities differ between the two sides, enhanced cooperation between ASEAN and the ROK in security and emerging sectors can present an opportunity to elevate South Korea as a trusted power for ASEAN, sustaining its strategic relevance in the regional architecture.



Photo: Minister of Foreign Affairs Cho Tae-yeol hosted a luncheon to welcome ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn, who is visiting Korea on Tuesday, May 28, and exchanged opinions on the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).



Myanmar Crisis: ASEAN's Long Journey

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The year 2024 marks the third anniversary since the military coup emerged in Myanmar. Hitherto, it is sad to see no real progress on the ground, as violence continues to occur, no entry for massive humanitarian assistance to be delivered, and the pathway toward democracy restoration in the country seems to be very bleak.

As a regional organization, ASEAN has been highly expected to spearhead the effort to facilitate a solution to the crisis. In principle, according to the Charter, ASEAN shall promote political development in adherence to democracy promotion, human rights protection, and implementing rules of law and good governance in the region. What is currently happening with the crisis in Myanmar blatantly defies ASEAN's own principles.

It is not to say that ASEAN is not doing anything. Indonesia took the lead in the early days through the effort of Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi to initiate the meeting with the State Administration Council (SAC)—the military-formed administration representative in Bangkok airport three weeks after the coup started on February 1, 2021. Indonesia then brought up again the urgency for ASEAN to respond to this crisis in the informal ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in early March 2021, followed by the push for the ASEAN leaders to conduct a Special Leaders' Meeting, which eventually took place on April 24, 2021 in Jakarta. The result was the enactment of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus (5PC).

In essence, the 5PC gives the mandate to ASEAN to work toward the cessation of violence, facilitation of humanitarian assistance delivery, and furthermore, with the appointment of the Chair's Special Envoy, to facilitate mediation of the dialogue process.

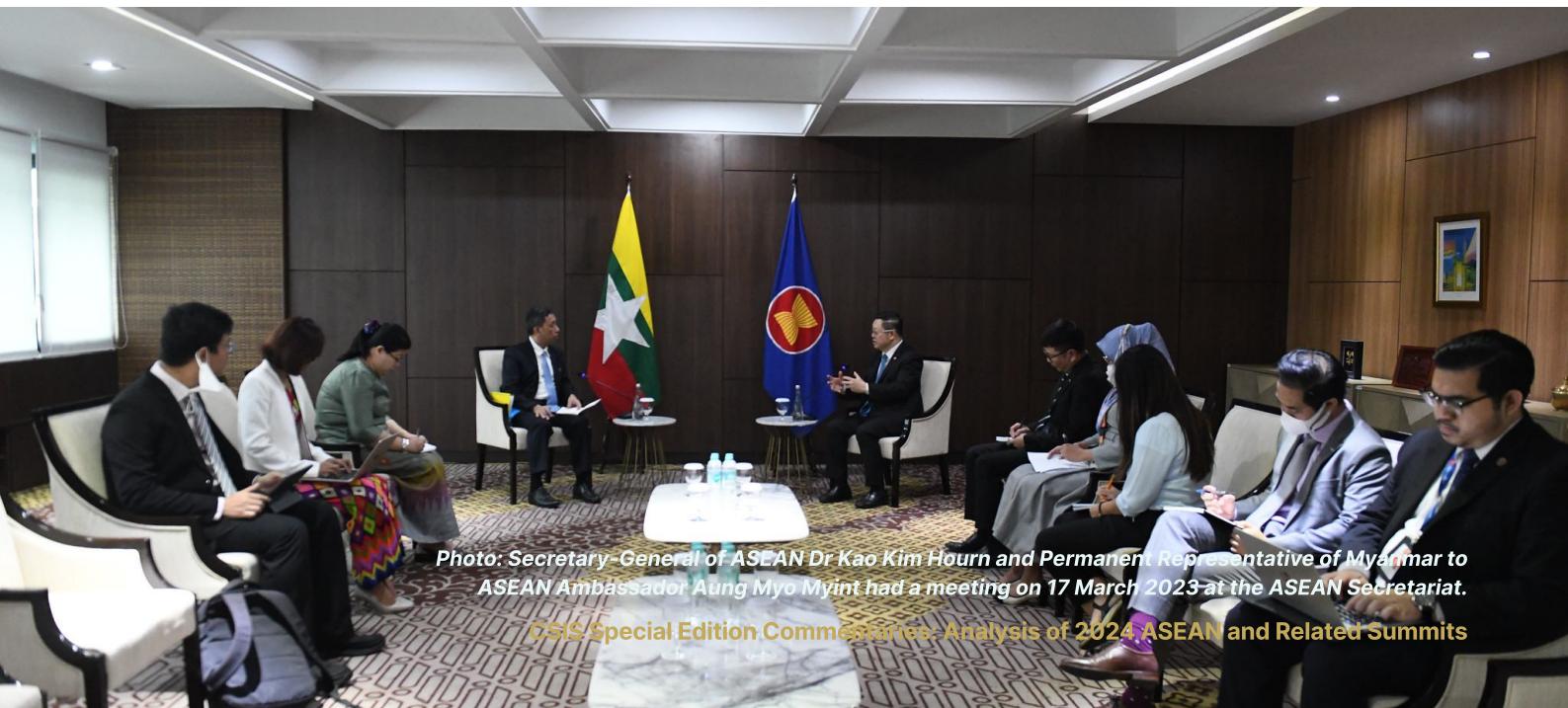
However, what we are seeing is far from those expectations. More armed clashes are taking place between the Myanmar army and the People's Defense Forces, as well as between the military and ethnic armed organizations. Despite the previous effort from the Envoys to create the so-called humanitarian corridor, it is still far from being materialized, leaving many civilians in dire situations due to limited, if not prevented, access to humanitarian agencies to deliver aid to the areas in need. Moreover, the conflict has worsened the situation for the already-deprived Rohingya community, causing them to be further displaced and even forced to join the conscription program implemented by the military.¹

Since last year, the "balance of power" has tipped over as the military is losing more ground in its fight against the opposition groups.² The turning point was the launch of an offensive "Operation 1027," named after the attack on 27 October 2023 conducted by The Three Brotherhood Alliance (3BTA), composed of the Arakan Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and Ta'ang National Liberation Army of total around 15,000 fighters against the SAC in Northern Shan State. Afterward, between November and March 2024, several other attacks were subsequently launched by different groups against the SAC military bases in different ethnic-controlled areas, such as in Arakan in the West (Arakan Army) West), Kachin in the North, and in Karen state where a coalition of KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army) and People's Defense Forces attack the military post in Kawkareik township.³ Due to these developments, many assessments portray that the military is in bad shape, which may create momentum for change in the country.

[1] Sarah Shamim, "How is renewed violence in Myanmar affecting the Rohingya?", Al Jazeera, 22 March 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/22/how-is-renewed-violence-in-myanmar-affecting-the-rohingya>.

[2] "Myanmar's junta is losing ever more ground," The Economist, 11 April 2024, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/04/11/myanmars-junta-is-losing-ever-more-ground>

[3] IISS, "Melee in Myawaddy: Resistance battles junta in key border town," IISS Report, April 2024, <https://myanmar.iiss.org/updates/2024-04>.



What does the future look like for ASEAN?

First, the political crisis is going to become even more complex. The military continues to fight back to reclaim its former bases, while at the same time, the pro-democracy forces are intensifying their struggle, as they are motivated by the previous success in occupying the key military bases in different parts of the country. Internally, the military seems to be in crisis as the position of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing as the junta leader is severely challenged due to military severe defeats. Nonetheless, there is a concern that the replacement could be more hardliner than him. In short, ASEAN may face even worse deadlock, and Myanmar would continue to become the organization's Achilles heel.

Second, the longer the crisis, the more ASEAN's reputation and credibility would be at stake. Should the military continue with the plan to conduct a national election, which many widely believe would never be free and fair, ASEAN would be placed in a very dilemmatic position.⁴ So far, ASEAN is still refraining from inviting the junta representative to attend the ASEAN Summit and Foreign Ministers Meeting to give Myanmar time to solve its issue (many would instead read this as a "sanction"). But, if the election takes place, ASEAN would have to decide whether it will recognize the newly elected government as a result of the election or not. ASEAN would be even more divided than what it currently is.

Third, with the persisting crisis, Myanmar would slide into becoming a battleground for the great powers' competition. The successful launch of Operation 1027 shows that the role of external actors, i.e. China, in determining its success is extremely crucial. The tendency of the great and major powers, especially the ones that are frontline states, to pursue their pragmatic interests would likely shape the conflict dynamics which are not necessarily in line and contribute to ASEAN's objective to stop the violence and facilitate political dialogue among the stakeholders. Without having ASEAN to lead the way and coordinate with all these external powers, Myanmar would surely plunge into that abyss, an entry point for major powers to meddle and assert their footprints in regional affairs.

What more can be done?

Many have claimed that 5PC is a big failure and has to be scrapped. Scraping it or not, it is unlikely that ASEAN would come out with a new initiative on Myanmar. 5PC remains perhaps the only reference or the "hook" that serves as the basis for ASEAN to stay on the course and deal with the crisis. If ASEAN is serious, the question is how to operationalize it into concrete steps, leading to the creation of a roadmap for ASEAN's long-term approach to the Myanmar issue.

After the Indonesian Chairmanship in 2023, there are at least three lessons to learn. First, after three consecutive chairmanships in ASEAN, it is clear that the role of the Chair's Special Envoy is not sufficient as ASEAN's instrument. Leaving the chairing country to deal with such a complex crisis only within a one-year timeline is definitely not enough. ASEAN must return to the original idea of having a dedicated ASEAN Special Envoy who would work within a longer timeline, not following the rotating term of the chair.

[4] *The Irrawaddy*, "Myanmar Junta Ramps Up Prep for National Poll Despite Losing Territory," *The Irrawaddy*, 19 February 2024, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-ramps-up-prep-for-national-poll-despite-losing-territory.html>.



Moreover, there has been notable progress since Indonesia set up the Office of the Special Envoy, breaking the tradition of having the active Foreign Minister to be the Chair's Special Envoy. The Laos chairmanship this year has also appointed a senior diplomat to be the Envoy. This must be appreciated, although once again, it cannot just stop there.

Second, a sustainable regional approach to Myanmar is crucial. Indonesia's proposal to apply the Troika mechanism toward the end of its chairmanship indicates the urgency of doing so. With the Troika mechanism, the past, present, and future chairs could work together, where the past chair can share its lessons learned with the present and even the next chair about what strategies need to continue or change. Passing this "institutional memory" is pivotal in dealing with such a complex crisis, not leaving the subsequent chair alone to think and start from scratch again.

In fact, in the ideal construction, the Troika should be loosely interpreted as not strictly limited to having the past, present, and future chairs. Rather, if ASEAN is willing, it could feature the committed and interested members of ASEAN, especially those who have the leverage and resources, to work together.

Third, consequently, by doing so, then ASEAN could come up with the so-called ASEAN Roadmap for Myanmar. Indonesia's brave initiative to conduct the engagement for the first time with all the stakeholders in Myanmar must be appreciated and extended. Through this effort, the trust in ASEAN from the Myanmar stakeholders, to a certain extent has been significantly rebuilt.

Nonetheless, without any roadmap, engagement would lose its meaning. Engagement is not simply doing the meeting and talking; it is also the ability to shape the conversation, enlightening the stakeholders and laying out the options for them to ponder and negotiate toward certain common solutions acceptable to all. Otherwise, every meeting starts from scratch and is nowhere closer to the expected destination.

Looking at ASEAN now, while there is an opportunity for a diplomatic move to put more pressure on the junta as it is in a more defensive position now, we are seeing a worrying sign of "Myanmar fatigue" from most ASEAN members, indicating the intention to allow Myanmar to be "back to the fold" as part of the ASEAN family. Instead of getting more consolidated and coordinating more with various external powers with the leverage and influence on Myanmar, ASEAN is on the verge of giving up.

Finally, it is a painstaking process and a muddy road ahead for ASEAN. It has no choice but to face and settle the problem, as the crisis has put ASEAN's credibility at great stake. ASEAN no longer has time for complacency but to put its house back in order if it wishes to remain relevant.



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