ASEAN Studies Centre
ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE

29 ISSUE 4/2019
AUGUST 2019

ISSN: 2424–8045

ASEANFocus

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION PROVIDING CONCISE ANALYSES AND PERSPECTIVES ON ASEAN MATTERS

ASEAN in Action:
52 Years of Community Building

ASEANFocus is published by the ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute and available electronically at *www.iseas.edu.sg*

If you wish to receive an electronic copy of ASEANFocus, please email us at *asc@iseas.edu.sg*

Published on 20 August 2019

EDITORIAL CHAIRMAN
Choi Shing Kwok

MANAGING EDITOR
Tang Siew Mun

PRODUCTION EDITOR
Hoang Thi Ha

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS
Pham Thi Phuong Thao
Anuthida Saelaow Qian
Glenn Ong

SUPPORTED BY

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

The responsibility for facts and opinions in this publication rests exclusively with the authors and their interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views or the policy of ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute or its supporters. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission.

ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Singapore 119614

Tel : (65) 6870 4509
Fax: (65) 6778 1735

Contents

ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (formerly Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) is an autonomous organisation established in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security, and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute's research programmes are grouped under Regional Economic Studies (RES), Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS) and Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS). The Institute is also home to the ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC), the Temasek History Research Centre (THRC) and the Singapore APEC Study Centre.

Editorial Notes

As ASEAN marks the happy occasion of its 52nd anniversary, it is acutely aware of the gathering storm. After several fits and starts, the US-Sino trade dispute has erupted into a full-scale trade war with immense global economic ramifications. US President Donald Trump's tarring of Vietnam as the "single worst manipulator" could well be the first shot across Hanoi's bow. There will be no safe harbour for the brewing storm; the only uncertainty is the price ASEAN will pay for Washington's and Beijing's precarious duel. No doubt we are Lilliputians compared to the two Goliaths, but we are by no means hapless bystanders. A lot more than trade is riding on the negotiations of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership – a test of the 16 negotiating parties' resolve to rise above self-interest in defence of free trade and multilateralism.

On a less contentious note, ASEAN sailed past the 52nd ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) and related ministerial meetings with its Dialogue Partners with little controversy, a surprising outcome given China's recent "less than peaceful" activities in the South China Sea. The conclusion of the first reading of the draft Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) during the AMM was but a modest preliminary step in what promises to be an arduous process. ASEAN's sentiments on the COC negotiations are best summed up by Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi's tweet that Indonesia "welcomed the progress and hoped it would be reflected on the ground".

Away from these stormy waters, ASEAN marked a new milestone in the inauguration of the new Secretariat premises. With two new 16-storey towers adjoining the current 38 year-old building, ASEAN's new home was unveiled to much fanfare by Indonesia's President Joko Widodo on 8 August 2019, a brief tour of which is featured in this issue. But even as ASEAN celebrates its achievements, the jury is still out on whether exhortations of its centrality will hold in the years to come. ASEAN member states must unite and take firm positions if ASEAN centrality is to acquire greater currency against external headwinds. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, which bequeaths ASEAN with a common script, is a substantial development that should be consolidated. Indeed, the path ahead, while murky, is not altogether gloomy as ASEAN continues its outward-looking vision by welcoming Chile as its Development Partner.

To celebrate the important work that ASEAN has done, we are proud to present *ASEANFocus* August 2019 issue titled "ASEAN in Action: 52 Years of Community Building". This issue brings together a stellar cast of ASEAN old guards, thought leaders, and activists to recount the trials and tribulations, the joys and pains that went into making this community, and to chart the manifold possibilities ahead. To open the discussion, Mr. Glenn Ong and Dr. Tang Siew Mun review the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead of ASEAN.

The key milestones of ASEAN's history – the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Free Trade Area, the ASEAN Charter, and the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights – are prime examples of ASEAN's footprints in the region. We join eminent old hands like Tan Sri Datuk Seri Dr. Syed Hamid Albar, Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Prof. Tommy Koh, and Amb. Sihasak Phuangketkeow as they take us back to the origins of these initiatives. This issue also features a roundtable with former ASEAN Secretaries-General – Tan Sri Dato' Ajit Singh, Amb. Ong Keng Yong and Amb. Le Luong Minh – as they share with us key professional highlights and personal reflections on ASEAN.

ASEAN has also been proactive in projecting its voice on global issues to a broader audience. Dr. Marty Natalegawa explains the rationale and substance behind Indonesia's push for the global-regional nexus during its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2011. Taking the nexus further, Amb. Dang Dinh Quy elaborates on how Vietnam's imminent membership in the United Nations Security Council will contribute to raising ASEAN's international profile. While persistently outward-looking, ASEAN must not neglect its soul-searching to better position itself for uncertainties ahead. In this regard, Amb. Delia Albert, Mr. Endy Bayuni, Mr. Bilahari Kausikan, Tan Sri Dato' Dr. Mohd Munir Abdul Majid, Amb. Pham Quang Vinh, Amb. Pou Sothirak and Mr. Zeya Thu offer pointers on how ASEAN can be recalibrated.

This issue also examines certain economic-social issues close to the heart of ASEAN's community-building efforts. Mr. Sam Cheong sheds light on ASEAN's brightest investment hotspots while Ms. Anuthida Saelaow Qian explains how ASEAN social enterprises have grown in scope and significance in recent years. *ASEAN in Figures* highlights the best of the region – from our best performing economies to our most outstanding landmarks. In *Insider Views*, Filipino autism advocate Ms. Erlinda Uy Koe, winner of the inaugural ASEAN Prize, shares how she rose above her personal trials to become an indefatigable champion for family-based autism awareness and support.

In the home stretch of this issue, embark on our dual journey to visit some of the region's most iconic *Sights and Sounds*. Mr. Glenn Ong explores how the Mekong reflects the varied and complex histories of the diverse peoples lining its shores. Finally, join Ms. Thiviya Sri and Ms. Anuthida Saelaow Qian aboard the Eastern and Oriental Express for a train ride unlike any other as we usher ASEAN into its 53rd year. We hope that this issue of *ASEANFocus* will illustrate that ASEAN is not merely engrossed in the diplomatic art of talking: ASEAN has also always been about – and is very much engaged in – the practical science of doing. Last but not least, we pay homage to two dear friends and cherished colleagues who have been champions of ASEAN in their own right. We wish Dr. Termsak Chalermpalanupap and Ms. Moe Thuzar the very best in their future endeavours.

Happy birthday ASEAN, and many happy returns!

ASEAN at 52

Keeping the Multilateral Torch Lit Brightly

Glenn Ong and **Tang Siew Mun** review the challenges and opportunities ahead of ASEAN as it celebrates its 52nd anniversary.

Flags of ASEAN member states and Dialogue Partners at the ASEAN Secretariat

Fifty-two years ago, in 1967, ASEAN was established with five founding members as a bulwark against communism during the heady days of the Cold War. The end of the Vietnam War in 1975 laid the basis for the association's expansion. Today, with ten members and ten Dialogue Partners, the association stands once again at an inflection point in international relations. As the United States recalibrates the global dimensions of its foreign policy through the Indo-Pacific concept and with Europe plagued by an uncertain Brexit, all while China searches for an expanded global role, ASEAN has within its grasps the opportunity to shine as a beacon of multilateralism and international cooperation. The road ahead, however, is not without obstacles.

First, ASEAN needs to find its footing vis-à-vis the emerging Indo-Pacific concept. The Indo-Pacific envisions the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a contiguous and seamlessly integrated space, with ASEAN having the honour (or misfortune) of being at its geographical centre. The halting progress that ASEAN made in announcing its ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) illustrates the regional organisation's disquiet over the new concept. Rather than ride on the coattails of the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN should be more reflective in thinking through its relevance and challenges to the regional organisation. If its proponents are unable – thus far – to push the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade agreement past the finishing line, what future does an expansive and ill-defined political concept hold for ASEAN and the wider Asia-Pacific region? More importantly, would ASEAN be stretching itself too thin by embracing the grandiose idea of an enlarged geopolitical footprint? Level-headed minds will argue that it is better for ASEAN to get its house in order first; after all, how far could Indo-Pacific go if ASEAN is found to be "wobbly"? The onus is on ASEAN to substantiate its claims to centrality in the region with concrete initiatives, lest "ASEAN Centrality" amount to little more than a hollow truism.

Indeed, the viability and necessity of ASEAN have become a hard sell in recent times, given that most of the low-hanging fruits surrounding the association's *raison d'être* have already been plucked. These include the provision of platforms for political dialogue and security cooperation, as well as the promotion of freer intra-regional trade. Indeed, the extent of ASEAN's limitations are borne out by none other than the ambitious yet inconclusive RCEP. ASEAN has witnessed much success in concluding bilateral or bi-regional trading agreements with partners like Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea, and New Zealand, but it has struggled to coordinate and connect them into a unifying framework. Whatever the fate of RCEP, it is imperative for ASEAN and its partners to summon the requisite political will to make a decisive

judgment call by their self-declared deadline of end-2019 – whether it be to iron out an acceptable agreement, or to arrive at the difficult conclusion that the RCEP ship has all but sailed.

Second, the ambivalent state of ASEAN-EU relations – given abortive attempts to elevate ties to the level of strategic partnership – has been compounded by a delayed Brexit, as the United Kingdom's future in the European Union continues to hang in a precarious balance. It remains an open question as to how ASEAN will engage with a Britain that seeks to carve a political and strategic identity distinct from the EU. In the short term, ASEAN will have to iron out new bilateral trade agreements once Britain's exodus from the EU is formalised. More challenging for ASEAN, however, is the prospect of having to reckon with a Europe that appears to be shell-shocked by Brexit, and the current US administration's relentless attack on sacrosanct multilateral partnerships and institutions such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Notwithstanding these challenges, there remains much to be hopeful about ASEAN's progress on the international arena. In November 2019, ASEAN will celebrate 30 years of relations with Korea through an ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit in Busan, Korea. ASEAN-Korea relations began with sectoral dialogues in 1989 and have grown from strength to strength since then. Korea is now one of ASEAN's most important trading partners and an important source of foreign direct investment. Under President Moon Jae-in, Seoul has embarked on a New Southern Policy that seeks to increase and deepen Korea's engagement with Southeast Asia. ASEAN stands to gain from the Moon administration's proactive initiative, and can look forward to welcoming a deeper Korean strategic footprint in the region. At the same time, ASEAN's circle of friends has expanded with Chile officially becoming ASEAN's second Development Partner at the recently concluded 52nd ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand.

Moreover, the past two years have witnessed an increase in the stature of ASEAN countries on international fora. Indonesia presided over the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) this past May, and Vietnam will join the UNSC as a non-permanent member in January 2020. Nearly half of ASEAN was represented at the G20 Summit this June, with Indonesia participating as a member, and with Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam enjoying the distinction of being invited guests. These developments indicate the growing importance and recognition of ASEAN member states in the international arena, and provide diverse platforms for ASEAN members to champion the region's interests abroad.

Domestically, ASEAN has also beefed up efforts to augment its standing among ASEAN citizens. Since Thailand established its ASEAN Association of Thailand in 2009, other ASEAN members have followed in Bangkok's footsteps to create similar national associations to serve as national focal points for the promotion of ASEAN awareness. In 2018, Thailand again took the lead to propose the organisation of a Network of ASEAN Associations to link all the national associations together. This Network, it is envisaged, will serve as a collaborative platform for these national associations to share best practices and to consolidate a common regional identity, thereby intensifying regional linkages within ASEAN.

This 52nd anniversary of ASEAN's founding provides a valuable opportunity not only to take stock of ASEAN's many past accomplishments but also to ask difficult questions about its future. The road ahead is paved with obstacles that can be surmounted should ASEAN find the verve and gumption to inject its platitudes on "centrality" and "cooperation" with substance. ASEAN has no reason to sell itself short, given the illustrious achievements under its still-glistening belt. Indeed, ASEAN has displayed a unique gift for pulling in countries and organisations that are stronger than it is. Now it has to summon the will to pull itself together.

Mr. Glenn Ong is Research Officer and **Dr. Tang Siew Mun** is Head of the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Performers at the opening of the ASEAN MRT station in Jakarta, Indonesia

ASEAN at 52

Peering into ASEAN's Past to Understand the Present

The makers of ASEAN's socio-economic and political histories take a walk down memory lane to help us better understand the genesis and development of the EAS, AFTA, ASEAN Charter, and AICHR.

EAS Leaders at the 13th EAS in 2018

THE EAST ASIA SUMMIT: EXPANDING ASEAN'S GEOPOLITICAL FOOTPRINT

Tan Sri Datuk Seri Dr. Syed Hamid Albar was, *inter alia*, Minister for Home Affairs (2008–2009), Minister for Foreign Affairs (1999–2008), Minister for Defence (1995–1999), and Minister for Justice (1990–1995) of Malaysia.

The East Asia Summit (EAS) was established in 2005 with 16 founding members, i.e. ASEAN member states, Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand. The United States and Russia were brought into the fold in 2011. As the Foreign Minister of Malaysia in 2005 when Malaysia initiated, hosted and chaired the inaugural summit, Tan Sri Datuk Seri Dr. Syed Hamid Albar looks back on the EAS's genesis and connects it to the present strategic landscape.

AF: What was the primary impetus leading to the creation of the EAS? What value was the EAS intended to add to existing ASEAN mechanisms?

SYED HAMID: The EAS has its genesis in the evolving East Asian regionalism which gained momentum after the Asian Financial Crisis and the formation of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) in 1997. The APT was the first testbed to facilitate mutual understanding and economic-financial cooperation between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia, following the geographic contour of East Asia. Building upon the success of the APT, Malaysia was of the view that establishing the EAS would continue to further deepen East Asian economic integration and drive the process of East Asia community-building. The EAS would also provide a platform for ASEAN to play a bigger role in the broader region, since its clout in Southeast Asia had somewhat reached a saturation point.

AF: Malaysia has been credited with sparking the concept of the EAS. What was the most formidable challenge Malaysia encountered in lobbying for the EAS?

SYED HAMID: Malaysia's conceptualisation of the EAS originally followed the East Asian geographical footprint with the support of some ASEAN member states. However, other ASEAN members such as Singapore and Indonesia preferred a more inclusive construct. As far as the Plus Three countries were concerned, Japan was less supportive of a geographically defined EAS membership, unlike China. The Republic of Korea was somewhere in between and could be flexible. Other Dialogue Partners such as Australia, New Zealand and the United States were concerned that an EAS membership based on geographical scope would work to the detriment of their presence in the region. Reconciling all these differences both within ASEAN and with other Dialogue Partners was then the most challenging task for Malaysia as the Chair of ASEAN in 2005.

AF: The EAS eventually settled with the inclusion of India, Australia and New Zealand together with the APT membership. Why did the more outward-looking and inclusive vision of the EAS prevail?

SYED HAMID: Learning from the experience of the East Asia Economic Group (EAEG) proposal, which did not take off because of its exclusive nature, we needed

a new approach since we wanted to get the EAS off the ground against all odds. Furthermore, as the ASEAN Chair, Malaysia must exercise flexibility to preserve ASEAN unity and accommodate the interests of all parties concerned. We then shifted away from the geographical footprint to embrace the strategic and economic imperatives in the EAS. The change of leadership with Tun Abdullah Badawi becoming Malaysia's Prime Minister also helped enable this change of approach. I think Tun Mahathir Mohamad would not have agreed to a construct that would dilute his strong emphasis on a narrower East Asian geographical footprint.

AF: This debate cuts to the heart of how to define the broader regional order, i.e. whether an exclusive "East Asia for East Asians" or a more expansive construct would better reflect the state of the region. With the benefit of hindsight, which approach do you think would better serve the interests of ASEAN and its member states?

SYED HAMID: I think that the geographical footprint still makes sense since the idea of an East Asia Community (EAC) was inspired by the very success of the European Union (EU) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Economic integration based on geographical proximity, followed by community-building, should be a natural and intuitive occurrence, and should not have evoked such anxiety and suspicion. That said, the geostrategic and economic architecture of the region has changed with globalisation, and therefore does not have to be circumscribed by geographical determinism.

AF: The Kuala Lumpur Declaration in 2005 agreed that "the EAS will be an open, inclusive, transparent and outward-looking forum." Did you expect then that the US and Russia would later join the EAS, which they did in 2011?

SYED HAMID: As the geographical footprint was shifted to the strategic-economic emphasis, we could not afford to exclude the US or Russia. At the time of the first EAS, I think the US was no longer so critical since the mechanism was not exclusive. Unlike the US, Russia expressed its strong interest to join the EAS early on with all the valid arguments: (i) Russia already signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia; (ii) its province Vladivostok is indeed located in East Asia; and (iii) Russia maintains close economic and defence ties with some ASEAN member states. To deliver a positive and forward-looking gesture towards Russia's interest, Malaysia invited then Russian President Vladimir Putin to attend the first EAS as "Guest of the Chair".

AF: In your opinion, what has been the greatest success of the EAS?

SYED HAMID: Its greatest strength has been fostering interactions and personal relationships among the EAS Leaders, thereby promoting engagement and confidence among the EAS members. Given that ASEAN is so entrenched in the concepts of non-interference and sovereignty, the EAS has helped ASEAN member states become more open to regional cooperation on strategic issues, such as maritime security and counter-terrorism. The Leaders-led format also allows for great flexibility and freedom to discuss economic-financial cooperation and non-traditional issues confronting the region such as energy, disaster management, infectious diseases and food security.

AF: The EAS is designed to be a Leaders-led forum for dialogue on broad strategic, political and economic issues. But there have been calls to further institutionalise the EAS to ensure follow-up to the Leaders' discussions. What is your view on this?

SYED HAMID: I think it is time to further institutionalise the EAS with a robust structure to follow up on its initiatives. At present, the EAS remains a dialogue among the Leaders. It must be more proactive and substantive. Next year will be the 15th anniversary of the EAS, and ASEAN should start a serious debate on the future directions of the EAS and how to situate it vis-à-vis other platforms such as the APT and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). It should also be provided with robust secretariat support whether from within or outside of the ASEAN Secretariat.

AF: ASEAN recently issued its Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, highlighting the significance of the EAS in the emerging Indo-Pacific architecture. Do you think the EAS, in its current form, is able to manage the increasingly contested region in the looming shadow of US-China strategic rivalry?

SYED HAMID: The Outlook is a natural and evolutionary extension of ASEAN's strategic horizon from an emphasis on East Asia to Asia-Pacific and now Indo-Pacific. It reflects ASEAN's adaptability to changes in the regional strategic landscape while keeping to its outward-looking policy. To mitigate the US-China rivalry, the EAS could not afford to be parochial and static. ASEAN should be pragmatic and proactive in steering the EAS process by identifying the common ground and fostering regional cooperation on areas of shared interest and concern. It should focus on what the EAS members can achieve by working together, instead of being stymied by strategic competition.

ASEAN gong at Wat Tham Khuha Sawan in Thailand

RETRACING THE ROAD TO ASEAN ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee was, *inter alia*, former Minister of Energy and former Minister of Commerce of Thailand, and had a long record of public service and extensive experience in the private sector. Dr. Narongchai is currently Chairman of Khon Kaen University Council.

ASEAN's embrace of economic integration in the early 1990s was an important paradigm shift of the grouping, with the establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992 and the formation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, former Minister of Energy and Minister of Commerce of Thailand, shares his recollections of and insights into the long and winding road of ASEAN economic integration.

AF: What were the global and regional developments that led ASEAN to put economic integration at the centre of its agenda as the Cold War wound down?

NARONGCHAI: In retrospect, the drive for greater ASEAN economic cooperation gained traction after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, which signalled the regional concerns over the threat of the spread of communism, the domino effect, and the end of the US' containment policy towards the People's Republic of China. Against this backdrop, the first ASEAN Summit in 1976 stressed the need to foster regional economic cooperation. The economic agenda gained more attention after the global oil crisis in 1979, which had adverse impacts on most ASEAN economies. Then the Uruguay Round under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) started negotiations in 1986, and was about to reach conclusion in 1991. That same year, the Soviet Union was disbanded and the Cold War was brought to an end, and economic cooperation became a top priority in ASEAN's agenda.

AF: Your Excellency was part of the Thai delegation to kick-start discussions on AFTA in 1991. What was the most contentious issue during AFTA's formative process?

NARONGCHAI: Adopting the term "free trade" was the most contentious issue at that time. ASEAN had earlier adopted the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT), the rate of which was to be defined, for trade liberalisation. "Free trade" was meant to be tariff-free, or adopting zero tariffs as the CEPT rate. That was not acceptable to some ASEAN member states, especially to Indonesia.

AF: How did Thailand team up with like-minded ASEAN members to persuade the more reluctant ones to come on board the AFTA?

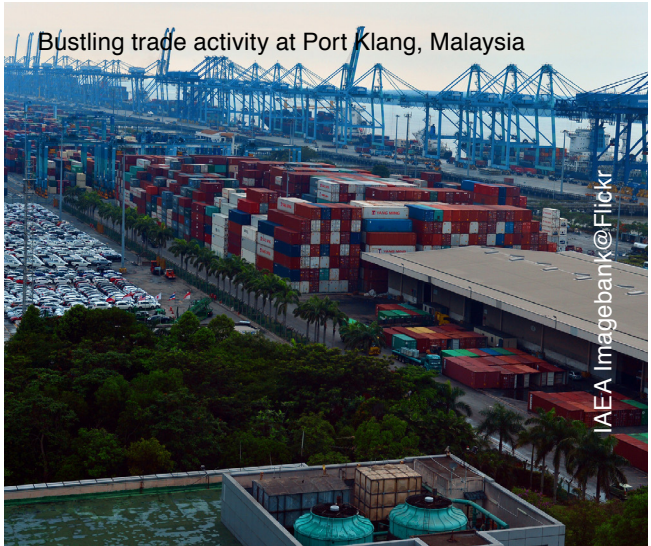
NARONGCHAI: Singapore and Thailand were the key movers for AFTA. For Singapore, it was to be expected, but that was not the case for Indonesia. Khun Anand Punyarachun, who became Thailand's Prime Minister in 1991, managed to persuade President Suharto to come on board. Other ASEAN member states were not so reluctant, partly because AFTA was first designed to be very flexible. The target was to adopt the CEPT rate of 0-5%, and the timeline for member states to reach that rate was 15 years, at first. Later on, it was reduced to 10 years, and the rate was 0%. As the term "free trade" was politically accepted, adopting the goal of zero rate was no longer a contentious point.

AF: Analysts often point out that economic integration in Southeast Asia has been driven more by bottom-up market forces through regional production networks of multinational corporations (regionalisation) than by top-down regional institutions (regionalism). What is your view on this?

NARONGCHAI: I partially agree to that notion. To me, regional economic integration was initiated and pushed by the technocrats, many of whom were in governments. As for the business sector, there were groups of pros and cons. Some wanted protection, while others wanted the benefits of the economies of scale through deeper and broader liberalisation at the regional level. The politicians were in general not supportive at that time, but went along after 1992 when the trend of trade liberalisation was spreading across the world, especially through the proliferation of regional FTAs.

AF: About 6,000 non-tariff barriers (NTBs) remain in intra-ASEAN trade, higher than the number of NTBs in ASEAN's trade with the rest of the world. Moving forward, what are the opportunity costs if this problem persists?

NARONGCHAI: Empirically, the impact of NTBs on trade has not been identified conclusively due to difficulties in measuring non-tariff measures (NTMs). However, some recent analysis findings suggest that harmonising technical NTMs and eliminating non-technical NTMs altogether in intra-ASEAN trade would significantly increase the net welfare of ASEAN member countries.



Bustling trade activity at Port Klang, Malaysia

AF: Intra-ASEAN trade has hovered around 20-25% for the past two decades. Is it a fair measure to judge the extent and effectiveness of ASEAN economic integration?

NARONGCHAI: The share of intra-ASEAN trade has not significantly increased, but that is to be expected. ASEAN is not a custom union. Furthermore, apart from regional trade liberalisation through AFTA, ASEAN member states have also undertaken unilateral trade liberalisation *à la* WTO. So, ASEAN member economies have been very open in trading with the world, and the regional production networks have become part of the global value chain. We should bear in mind that the real benefits of AFTA and the AEC are the economies of scale in production.

AF: The digital economy is projected to grow significantly, adding US$1 trillion to the combined GDP of ASEAN member states over the next ten years. What does ASEAN need to do to realise this potential?

NARONGCHAI: The digital economy is a reality in ASEAN, just as it is anywhere in the world. ASEAN member states are actively promoting digital economy in their respective countries. Regional undertakings are also being rolled out such as the implementation of the ASEAN Smart Cities Network and the signing of the ASEAN Agreement on E-Commerce last year. Moving forward, a holistic approach at the regional level is needed to bring about the whole eco-system of digital connectivity within ASEAN, including building digital infrastructure, enhancing digital literacy, facilitating cross-border e-commerce, and safeguarding cybersecurity.

THE ASEAN CHARTER: THE MAKING OF A COMMUNITY

Professor Tommy Koh is Ambassador-at-Large of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore and Chairman of the Centre for International Law (CIL) of the National University of Singapore (NUS).

The ASEAN Charter, which was signed on 20 November 2007 and entered into force on 15 December 2008, was a momentous turning point in ASEAN's history. Codifying ASEAN norms, rules and values, and solidifying ASEAN cooperation over its four decades of existence, the text of the Charter was delivered after nine months of intensive negotiations by the High Level Task Force for the Drafting of the ASEAN Charter (HLTF). Singapore's Ambassador-at-Large Tommy Koh, Chair of the HLTF, recalls the pain and joy of this historic mission.

AF: Could you share with us how national and regional imperatives crossed, collided and reconciled during the drafting of the ASEAN Charter, and how this manifested itself in the Charter provisions?

KOH: First, I should explain that the Members of the HLTF were conscious of the burden of history. We had the historic opportunity to draft the ASEAN Charter. We were determined to succeed in spite of the many difficulties. We represented different systems of government. Our governments had different views on democracy and human rights. We were at different stages of economic development. Some of us represented big countries, some represented small countries, and others represented medium-sized countries. It is truly a miracle that in spite of our diversity, we were able to negotiate and adopt the ASEAN Charter by consensus.

Thailand Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva (2008-2011) signing an ASEAN Charter commemorative poster

ASEAN Secretariat

AF: There is no mention of suspension, expulsion and withdrawal of membership in the Charter. Could you explain why it was designed that way?

KOH: The Charter is silent on suspension, expulsion and withdrawal of membership because we were specifically instructed by our Foreign Ministers not to mention them in the Charter.

AF: The Eminent Persons Group on the ASEAN Charter (EPG) was indeed "bold and visionary" in recommending that ASEAN decisions could be made in voting. The HLTF, however, kept intact ASEAN's decision-making by consultation and consensus. What were the prevailing arguments to maintain the status quo?

KOH: We reflected deep and hard on whether to stick to decision-making by consensus or to move to decision-making by voting. We decided to stick with consensus. Why? We were afraid that if we resorted to voting, the countries which were out-voted would not abide by the decision of the majority. This could lead to a divided ASEAN. Therefore, we decided that in the interest of preserving ASEAN unity, we should continue to take our decisions by consensus.

ASEAN senior representatives together with Dr. Surin Pitsuwan at the ceremony marking the entry into force of the ASEAN Charter at the ASEAN Secretariat in December 2008

AF: What did you find was the most challenging issue during the drafting of the ASEAN Charter?

KOH: The most difficult issue was human rights. We should remember that of the ten ASEAN member states, at the time of drafting the Charter, only four had national commissions of human rights. The family was sharply divided between those who wanted an ASEAN mechanism on human rights and those who were opposed. It was a shining example of the culture of mutual accommodation and of forward-thinking that the ASEAN Foreign Ministers were able to overcome the impasse in the HLTF, and decided that ASEAN would have an ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. I believe that Singapore's then Foreign Minister, George Yeo, played a critical role in brokering the compromise.

AF: Dato Paduka Osman Patra, Brunei's representative to the HLTF, once noted that the making of the ASEAN Charter was not only "hard work" but also "heart work". How did you feel "heart work" from your own experience as part of the HLTF?

KOH: The members of HLTF bonded as friends as well as colleagues. We had goodwill for one another. We sympathised with colleagues with a difficult brief, for example, Myanmar, and we tried to help them. We worked with our minds and also our hearts. This is what my good friend, Osman, meant when he said that it was "heart work" as well as "hard work".

AF: Upon the conclusion of the Charter, ASEAN member states emphasised that the Charter was not written in stone, hinting at future amendments as ASEAN evolves. With the benefit of hindsight, now that the Charter has passed its 10th anniversary, is there any provision that you wish to amend or any new provision that you wish to add to the Charter?

KOH: I think the Charter has served us well. There are no provisions in the Charter which I would like to amend. The Charter is not perfect but it was the best that we could achieve, given the realities and constraints. The situation has not changed.

AF: Do you think the Charter has really transformed ASEAN into a more rules-based organisation? If yes, in what aspects? Are there any other aspects that should be improved?

KOH: The transition to an organisation which has stronger rules and institutions takes time. What we are trying to accomplish is a change of culture and mindset. The ASEAN Way of doing things will always be with us. I think what we are seeking to accomplish is to complement the ASEAN Way with a greater reliance on rules and institutions and to take our commitments more seriously. The progress so far is modest but we are on the right trajectory. I am optimistic about the future.

THE ASEAN INTERGOVENRMENTAL COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS: RECONCILING NATIONAL IMPERATIVES AND REGIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Amb. Sihasak Phuangketkeow was former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, and is currently Special Advisor to the Eastern Economic Corridor Office (EECO).

The establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in 2009 was a milestone in ASEAN's history. Given the diversity of opinions among ASEAN member states on this matter, the birth of AICHR was not without labour pains. Amb. Sihasak Phuangketkeow, former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and Chair of the High Level Panel (HLP) that drafted the Terms of Reference (TOR) of AICHR, recalls how the HLP brought this process into fruition.

AF: The TOR that the HLP was tasked to formulate must ensure that AICHR would be a credible yet realistic body. Do you think this is an attainable goal? What are the benchmarks against which the performance of AICHR should be judged for its "credibility" and "realism"?

SIHASAK: I took up the Chair of the HLP with some trepidations. We were about to navigate through uncharted waters, yet we had to meet high expectations and our efforts would be subject to considerable scrutiny within and outside of ASEAN. It was incumbent upon us to strike the "best possible" balance between being credible while also being realistic. Being credible meant that the final outcome must not fall below the international obligations and standards on human rights to which we had committed ourselves. On the other hand, we had to recognise and accommodate the diversity of perspectives on human rights within ASEAN. The two goals at times proved contradictory and, in retrospect, I think we could have done better on certain issues that mattered in terms of credibility, especially the protection mandate. Some may say we were unrealistic to expect the two goals to be attainable in full measure, but they did inspire us to move forward. The TOR was only the beginning of a long-term undertaking that needed to be continued, improved and enhanced as part of an evolutionary process.

AF: As the Chair, how did you reconcile the very divergent views among the HLP members?

SIHASAK: From the very beginning, we knew that our national positions would diverge on certain key issues. The going was tough at times. But I was fortunate to work with senior and experienced colleagues who stayed focus on the "big picture". Most of us knew each other and worked together before, so we had the necessary amount of comfort level to be straightforward with each other. For sure, we all had to say our piece but after having done so, we sought to find common grounds. Whenever we had reached an impasse, the heads of delegation retreated into informal discussions, trying to go beyond our official talking points and find the necessary compromises. I recall an instance when emotions ran very high during one meeting, I had to call for a coffee break. After a while, we were able to laugh off the minor encounter and resume our work. As Chair, what I was most mindful of was that while we had to build consensus, our aim must be to achieve the highest, and not the lowest, common denominator possible.

AF: There were expectations and pressures from external parties and civil society organisations that preferred to see a strong ASEAN human rights body with "teeth". How did the HLP manage those expectations and pressures?

SIHASAK: Well, at least no one can accuse us of not engaging the civil society as we had at least two rounds of consultations with them. We also went to Geneva for consultations with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. I do appreciate the concerns about AICHR not having "teeth" or lacking a clear-cut protection mandate. But it was not for want of trying. We tried our utmost to push the envelope, so to speak, but we had to temper our ambitions with a hard dose of realism. If you look closely at some of the functions assigned to AICHR such as obtaining information on human rights from member states, they do provide a platform for AICHR to move towards a protection mandate. Even the study of thematic issues also meant that AICHR could address specific situations without having to single out countries. I had also hoped that AICHR would become the master of its own destiny, and when the time comes for the review of the TOR, AICHR would propose adjustments that would strengthen both the promotion and protection mandates.

AF: Your Excellency and other HLP members had extensive experience working on human rights in the UN context. How did that experience inform the drafting of the TOR, especially with regard to the dichotomy between the universality and national/regional particularities of human rights?

SIHASAK: We have to accept the fact that when dealing with sovereign states with different historical, cultural and religious backgrounds, and different political systems and development levels, such dichotomies are bound to exist, and, in fact, even more in the UN context. This reality was brought home to me when I served as President of the UN Human Rights Council. Worse still, we have seen the politicisation and application of double standards in the name of human rights. We need to draw a distinction between those who cite national or regional particularities for legitimate reasons within the bounds permitted under international norms and those who use these reasons to justify deliberate oppression of human rights. On the other hand, we must also recognise that many of the

Did You Know?

The ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies network – or more popularly known just as "ASEAN-ISIS" – holds the distinction of being the only entity listed in the ASEAN Charter under the category of think tanks and research institution. Founded in 1988, ASEAN-ISIS is a trailblazer in Track 2 diplomacy, a platform that brings together think tankers, researchers, academics, and public intellectuals in an informal context to discuss regional issues and propose solutions for their respective governments' consideration. Each ASEAN member state is represented by one institution within the network: Brunei Darussalam Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, Centre for Strategic and International Studies (Indonesia), Institute of Foreign Affairs (Laos), Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Malaysia), Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation (The Philippines), Singapore Institute of International Affairs, Institute of Security and International Studies (Thailand) and Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam. ASEAN-ISIS is a "loose" network, without a permanent or formal secretariat. The network is led by a chair who holds the position for a one-year term. The chair is rotated alphabetically and the incumbent holder is the Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress of the Philippines.

ASEAN Leaders, Officials, and Dr. Surin Pitsuwan at the AICHR Inauguration Ceremony

ASEAN Secretariat

situations of gross human rights violations might not be due to deliberate policies on the part of the government concerned but because they lacked the needed human rights infrastructure and capacities as well as awareness on the part of the authorities. That is why I believe that capacity building and technical cooperation must be part of AICHR's core agenda.

AF: As indicated in its TOR and name, AICHR is an intergovernmental and consultative body. How does this characterisation have a bearing on the exercise of AICHR's mandate and functions?

SIHASAK: Admittedly, AICHR's status as an inter-governmental and consultative body is perceived as placing limitations on its work and effectiveness. The decision on its name came at the eleventh hour after we had finished drafting the substantive part of the TOR. Personally, I had preferred the term "ASEAN Commission on Human Rights" because its inter-governmental status was already obvious from the fact that each government would appoint its representative to the Commission. Secondly, its consultative nature was also obvious as AICHR would report to the ASEAN Foreign Ministers and AICHR's recommendations are subject to their consideration. In my view, the real concern that accentuates these perceived limitations is the way the AICHR members are appointed. I believe the appointments should take into greater account the qualifications and experiences in the field of human rights of the individual representative, and the internal selection process should require engagement of all the stakeholders. Being a consultative body, it is also imperative for AICHR to regularise a process of consultation with civil society and other stakeholders. This would ensure that AICHR's recommendations carry more weight and reflect the voices of the peoples.

AF: AICHR is, by built-in institutional designs in the TOR, not a protective mechanism and its functions are largely promotional. What then is the significance of AICHR in ASEAN's human rights discourse?

SIHASAK: It is true that the functions and mandates of AICHR give more emphasis to promotion than protection. But the way the TOR is written allows for certain flexibility that would enable AICHR to work towards a stronger protection mandate, provided that it is prepared to be proactive and creative. For instance, obtaining information on human rights from member states can be an entry point for AICHR to do more when it comes to country situation of concern. Initiatives such as that of Indonesia to invite AICHR for a national dialogue on human rights also set an example for other countries and broaden the space for a discourse on human rights within each member state. And if AICHR can develop a cooperative approach and promotion of human rights, member states might eventually have greater comfort level discussing and addressing domestic human rights situations in a constructive way. Even the promotion mandate is crucially important and much more can be done. Without doubt, the best means of protection is prevention, which is only possible through awareness raising, education, and capacity building.

AF: An evolutionary approach was adopted as part of the compromise so that the TOR could be approved by all member states. Do you think it is time to revisit the TOR now that it enters its 10th anniversary this year?

SIHASAK: An evolutionary approach means that AICHR must continue to strive forward and seek to raise the bar higher. The individual country representative to AICHR must recognise that their tasks are not simply to serve the national interests but, even more importantly, to advance the human rights agenda of ASEAN as a whole, if we are to realise a people-centred ASEAN. When we wrote the TOR, many of us were aware of its imperfections but we saw it as the beginning of a long-term undertaking. The review of the TOR should have taken place after the fifth year and so it is long overdue. But we should not be doing a review simply for its own sake. We must muster the needed political will to do better where we can and to move forward where we must to ensure an AICHR that is credible, realistic and, most important of all, relevant to the rising aspirations of the peoples of ASEAN.

ASEAN at 52

Heart Talk on ASEAN's Past, Present, and Future

Through the years and decades, they remain ASEAN at heart and have kept the ASEAN flame shining brightly. The three former Secretaries-General of ASEAN share with us their ASEAN moments and their thoughts about its future.

AJIT Singh was the 9th Secretary-General of ASEAN (1993-1997).

ONG Keng Yong was the 11th Secretary-General of ASEAN (2003-2007).

LE Luong Minh was the 13th Secretary-General of ASEAN (2013-2017).

AF: What is the greatest challenge facing ASEAN now?

AJIT: This is a well-worn out question that has been asked of ASEAN since its inception in 1967. The irony is that ASEAN remains with us and is doing better than before, having taken all challenges in its stride. Obviously, there is something of intrinsic value in ASEAN which keeps all the members plodding along, come what may. It is that "value" we have to keep on nurturing, if we want to turn ASEAN into an organisation of excellence.

ONG: ASEAN has to maintain its strategic relevance in managing the regional architecture. It has to develop a viable public position of not taking sides in the competitive dynamics between China and the US. These two major powers have accepted that ASEAN has a role to play and they want to have ASEAN on their respective sides. Therefore, ASEAN has to refurbish its existing mechanisms urgently, but this task will not be easy as China and the US expect ASEAN to favour their separate strategic calculi.

LE: The challenges are multiple. Above all, quite a sizable number of ASEAN member states, including major ones, preoccupied with their domestic difficulties and also impacted by the trend of populism, are putting less priority on ASEAN. In this context, some ASEAN members are buckling under major powers' divisional pressure to choose sides, thus weakening ASEAN unity, undermining ASEAN's role in ASEAN-led mechanisms, and threatening ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional architecture.

AF: What does ASEAN centrality mean to you? What is the one thing ASEAN must do now to bolster its claim to centrality?

AJIT: As long as ASEAN is on its own turf, it should have full control over the agenda, the proceedings, and the invitees. Outside, the APEC experience is instructive. During the wooing period, former US Secretary of State Jim Baker once said that "there is no APEC without ASEAN or ASEAN without APEC". To sweeten this further, it was decided that APEC summit meetings would alternate between ASEAN and non-ASEAN member states, but what actually happened, as they say, is history.

ONG: This means that the ASEAN agenda, and the goals of ASEAN-centric mechanisms, should take precedence over the national priorities of individual ASEAN member states in specific circumstances. Strategic moves like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Indo-Pacific concept are unsettling the regional architecture. This means a derogation of existing ASEAN-centric mechanisms. Individually, ASEAN member states will find it hard to make much impact on the region's economic, security, and strategic developments, but collectively, they can be effective in advancing ASEAN's interests. The question to ask is whether other alternatives better serve ASEAN's interests, and if the answer is "no", then ASEAN member states ought to hang together to persist with ASEAN's own vision and action plans.

LE: When I was ASEAN Secretary-General, I always maintained that ASEAN centrality does not mean that ASEAN has to stand between or among the major powers, but rather on the side of ASEAN's interests as reflected

Promotional signage at the launch of Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2018

in the principles of the Bangkok Declaration, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), and the ASEAN Charter. My position remains. The security interests of ASEAN member states legitimised by those ASEAN fundamental documents, the UN Charter, and the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) are being threatened by the serious violations of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) by a non-ASEAN party. ASEAN cannot just remain in the middle between right and wrong, and claim centrality.

AF: What is your assessment of the recently issued ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)?

AJIT: This is a timely initiative to make sure that Southeast Asia will not fall into the kind of proxy wars of major power rivalries that wrought division and destruction to the region during the Cold War. Not wishing to see history repeat itself, ASEAN has offered a non-confrontational and constructive approach, based on its own experience of intra-ASEAN cooperation. Equally important is the assurance to all interested parties that this region is not a "cordon sanitaire", one that was erected during the Cold War, but an inclusive zone of peace, friendship, and cooperation.

ONG: The AOIP means that ASEAN is not fully comfortable with the articulated designs of regional architecture already out there. Instead, ASEAN has reiterated its own community and connectivity plans for an open, inclusive, and prosperous Southeast Asia. The acceptance of the term 'Indo-Pacific' means that the older nomenclature of 'Asia-Pacific' is replaced by a clarity for South Asian inclusion in the future dynamism of Asia and the Pacific. The AOIP is not a new strategic outlook for the Indo-Pacific, but a reaffirmation of what ASEAN wishes to do in building a community which is inter-connected with the rest of the world. Climate change, marine pollution, and sustainable development, as well as the smart cities network, have been intertwined into the AOIP. This is an advancement of the ASEAN consensus on tackling such challenges.

LE: Like Asia-Pacific, the Indian Ocean has long been recognised as a most dynamic region and an emerging global centre of growth. Also like Asia-Pacific, major powers' rivalry is deepening mistrust, miscalculations, and zero-sum patterns of behaviour in this region. Against this backdrop, I consider timely the adoption of the AOIP with the main principles of ASEAN centrality, inclusiveness, complementarities, a rules-based order anchored in international law, commitment to advancing economic engagement in the region and the role of ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), and other ASEAN-Plus mechanisms as platforms for dialogue and implementation of Indo-Pacific cooperation. Above all, such an outlook must aim to contribute to the maintenance of peace, freedom, and prosperity in the region.

AF: Can ASEAN afford not to make a binary choice in this age of intense US-China strategic rivalry, and how?

AJIT: Call it a curse or a boon, ASEAN has been endowed with a prime geo-strategic location, straddling important trade and naval routes along the Straits of Malacca and between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. All the major powers have vested strategic and economic interests here, which puts ASEAN in a very delicate position of having to manage relations with these powers, without compromising its efforts to build a peaceful, stable and a prosperous region. China and the US are also among ASEAN's largest investors and trading partners. Good sense and diplomacy are most needed now for ASEAN to navigate between the two powers.

ONG: It will be a challenge to avoid taking sides. The global economy and international order are not yet able to cope with a decoupling of China-US coexistence and accommodation. It is necessary to maintain the multilateral trading system and all the other multinational mechanisms which have governed the world in a wide variety of fields. A significant change to the prevailing international structure and way of doing things requires substantial realignment and redevelopment, and there

is no global leadership nor consensus at the moment to embark on such an undertaking. The unpredictability of the US Administration is a major issue.

LE: ASEAN can – but not without a condition: It must maintain and exercise its centrality of the type I mentioned above. Only with that can ASEAN maintain its relevance and have leverage on either of the two competing powers. ASEAN must take principled positions and act consistently with its principles, based on its own interests, not just standing idle and passive in the middle. As an organisation respecting and demanding others to respect international law, ASEAN must be more proactive in reacting to violations of international law committed by any party, including those taking place in its own neighbourhood – the South China Sea – while supporting and protecting decisions based on international law such as the 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration on the South China Sea. Likewise, as a strong supporter of multilateralism and free trade and a party to most free trade agreements in the world, ASEAN must be more vocal against unilateralism and protectionism in defence of WTO rules and principles.

AF: What concrete steps can ASEAN take to encourage the people of Southeast Asia, especially the youth, to identify with ASEAN as a community?

AJIT: I do not think there is a dearth of ideas, programmes, or activities, if that is the assumption. Much is already being done through various ASEAN work plans and declarations. The youth themselves have been active in organising their own forums, engagement summits and other volunteer, exchange, and sports programmes. For instance, the ASEAN Youth Forum in Yogyakarta held in June 2019 carried the theme "Linking ASEAN to the Young People on the Ground". Perhaps the full picture of what the youth and ASEAN are doing is not getting to public-at-large. This is something that the ASEAN Secretariat could look into.

ONG: The interesting ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2016-2020 identifies priority areas such as youth employability and entrepreneurship, youth awareness and appreciation of ASEAN Community, youth involvement and participation, and youth leadership and youth resilience. Towards this end, ASEAN member states should focus on strengthening systematic and coordinated policy at the national and regional levels to provide more job opportunities and future-readiness. There are many ideas and practical measures listed in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint. Just implement them.

LE: ASEAN 10 – ASEAN consisting of all Southeast Asian countries then – was achieved more than 20 years ago, the ASEAN Charter has been in effect for more than ten years, and the ASEAN Community has been launched for almost four years, but people's awareness of ASEAN as a community remains very low. This situation among the youth, the future of ASEAN, is even more disappointing. Work on raising awareness of ASEAN in the past few years has been underwhelming. Pertinent ASEAN agencies, including those at the ASEAN Secretariat and in member states, must invest more in implementing the measures specified in the ASEAN Communication Master Plan 2018-2025 focusing on promoting ASEAN as a community of opportunities.

AF: Economic integration was an emerging focus of ASEAN's agenda during your tenure with the initiation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). How do you see ASEAN's economic integration agenda has evolved in the past two decades?

AJIT: In its first 26 years, up to 1992, ASEAN went along singing its mantra of "cooperation" with nothing substantial to show for it. Then AFTA came along. It was a leap of faith and a challenge to the old mindset where national interests had prevailed over the larger ASEAN interests. It was the first serious step towards greater regional integration. Though national interests still predominate, the past 26 years have witnessed a remarkable transformation in ASEAN culminating in the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015. Problems are aplenty but importantly, there is no going back.

AF: Personal bonding and friendship among ASEAN leaders is central to the ASEAN Way and helped steer ASEAN through difficult moments. Could you share with us an ASEAN story in this regard?

ONG: In January 2007, the ten ASEAN leaders huddled together in Cebu to revise the ASEAN declaration on migrant workers. There were no officials present except for an interpreter and myself as Secretary-General. The ASEAN Chair was the Philippines. There were disagreements among the member states. After intensive discussions, the leaders accepted the need to revise the draft. They proceeded to put their ideas into words and finally came up with a new text, which was eventually adopted as the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. The point is that the group dynamics among the ASEAN leaders is constructive and forward-looking, and this should be nurtured at the highest level.

Future champions of ASEAN in an Indonesian school

RamadhanNotoredjo@Pixabay

AF: ASEAN has been called upon to step up its role in managing difficult and sensitive issues, such as the South China Sea disputes and the situation in Rakhine State, Myanmar. What is the biggest challenge facing ASEAN in this regard?

LE: ASEAN must maintain and strengthen unity, solidarity, exercise centrality based on the very long-term interests of its member states and people, not letting itself be dictated by outside powers.

AF: What did ASEAN mean to you when you first assumed office as Secretary-General? What does ASEAN mean to you now?

AJIT: I arrived in Jakarta at a very interesting time when the ASEAN of old was giving way to the new ASEAN eager to absorb fresh ideas and chart new courses with the end of the Cold War. The Singapore Summit in 1992 symbolised this transition. Among others, it set up the AFTA and appointed a Secretary-General of ASEAN with an enlarged mandate. For me, it was a great honour to be the first beneficiary of that decision and to be tasked to assist in the efforts towards closer economic integration of the region. Till now I remain ASEAN at heart.

ONG: ASEAN was regarded as an informal regional body with flexible arrangements for cooperation in selected fields. The key objective was to manage differences among member states and to avoid open confrontation and conflict. ASEAN was a security-oriented and strategically-focused enterprise. Today, ASEAN covers all sectors of human endeavours in Southeast Asia, and community development is the main motivator for regional cooperation. It is not just physical infrastructure and hardware. The aim is to create value for an ASEAN Community. We are recognised as a rules-based institution and an important inter-governmental regional organisation by other countries and international organisations worldwide.

LE: I have always desired for ASEAN to be an organisation of unity and solidarity with a high sense of shared interests and a mutual sense of belonging. However, much more needs to be done for ASEAN to deserve its motto as "One Vision, One Identity, One Community" since the "two-tiered ASEAN" mindset still lingers among corners of its leadership.

An AirAsia plane with ASEAN livery

Wikimedia Commons

AF: What was your most memorable moment during your tenure as the Secretary-General of ASEAN?

AJIT: Life at the Secretariat was very hectic and the five years passed like a flash. Nearly every week I was on the move. AFTA kept us on our toes nearly every day. The preparations for Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia for admission as new members were both exciting and challenging. We were part of the "East Asia Miracle" story. The number of Dialogue Partners rose to ten. Many others wanted similar ties. I could go on. I have called it the "Golden Years of ASEAN". It was so fast paced and yet so fulfilling that every moment was memorable.

ONG: That was when the ASEAN Charter was finally settled and adopted by the ASEAN Leaders in Singapore in 2007. I am not sure whether every country and official present realised it, but with the acceptance of the text for an ASEAN Charter, the notion of ASEAN being a regional organisation – where people have the choice to do or not to do anything – is gone. ASEAN has become a significant entity with the full backing of the law and supported by the society at large.

LE: It was how warmly I was received and welcomed to my new position by not only young people but also those of my generation, who might have been on the other side opposing me and my comrades in the divided Southeast Asia during the Cold War period.

AF: What are your hopes for the ASEAN Community for the next 10 years?

AJIT: I cannot over-emphasise this, but I would wish all ASEAN members states to stay united in purpose and have ASEAN interests uppermost in their minds. We have to be realistic that there will be differences in ASEAN but let us make an ASEAN with a difference.

ONG: There is peace and prosperity in a digital-ready ASEAN, and the ASEAN Community is taken seriously by all. Leadership matters and ASEAN can hang together and work together. ASEAN centrality is not a fair-weather notion and device. It is for all times, and it is essential for ASEAN's survival.

LE: Hopes can be distinct from predictions. Social science is not a physical or natural science. Nobody can say for sure what ASEAN will look like in the next ten years, especially in the context of many above-mentioned challenges the fledging ASEAN Community is facing. Having led the ASEAN Secretariat – ASEAN's central coordinating body – I was intimately involved in the most critical final process leading to the establishment of the Community and its 2025 Vision. I hope ASEAN will be able to overcome existing and emerging challenges, do away with the outdated "two-ASEAN" mindset and consolidate its unity, continue its forward-looking process of building a more inclusive and resilient people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN Community with closer coordination and coherence among its three pillars, so as to leverage the opportunities offered by the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Reinforcing ASEAN's Core Whilst Going Global

Marty Natalegawa shares his insights into the "regional-global nexus" in many of ASEAN's endeavours.

AF: Your Excellency was the main architect behind the theme "ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations" of Indonesia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2011. Could you elaborate on its rationale, and why it matters?

NATALEGAWA: As with most countries' foreign policy, there were both internal or national rationales, and those driven by regional-level considerations.

Of the former, I wanted to put to rest the then prevalent debate within Indonesia which falsely suggests that Indonesia's foreign policy was being constrained by its focus on ASEAN, and that Indonesia should instead pursue a "post-ASEAN" foreign policy. This is a patently false dichotomy. Instead, ASEAN as the cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy is compatible with an Indonesia that has global interests and roles. Indeed, it may arguably be a sine qua non. Hence, what better way to prove this point than by taking ASEAN along with us: Indonesia and, collectively, ASEAN, having a greater global role – an exercise of Indonesia's positive leadership within ASEAN, rather than the alternative case of Indonesian "absenteeism" from ASEAN.

Of the latter, it seems clear to me that with the goal of ASEAN Community in sight, ASEAN needs yet another transformative evolution. The notion of an ASEAN speaking with one voice on global issues of common concern is a natural progression from the ASEAN Community. After all, most of the issues that confront ASEAN member states increasingly defy national solutions alone. They demand regional-level and global-level, multilateral collaboration and partnership. I thought it best that ASEAN equip itself with this reality by adopting a more proactive stance, essentially to be a "net contributor" to international peace, security and prosperity.

AF: Could you expound on some prominent areas where ASEAN could play a significant role in connecting the "regional-global nexus"?

NATALEGAWA: It would not be particularly useful for me to simply recite plenty of ASEAN documents – especially those relating to ASEAN-UN cooperation – that reflect ASEAN's keen recognition of the "regional-global" nexus on a range of political-security, economic and socio-cultural issues. What is more important to underscore is the regional perspective or mindset that anchors such cooperation. At the minimum, it is to ensure that Southeast Asia does not further "burden" the global community with the region's unresolved issues. Instead, it seeks to equip ASEAN with a well-considered "script" to rally the international community's support on every issue in Southeast Asia that has potential regional and global ramifications.

Beyond that, as ASEAN becomes more adept in managing its own region's affairs, it can begin to share its collective views on beyond-Southeast Asia issues in keeping with the idea of "the ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations". These include, for instance, the challenges to our common environment, social-development issues, international peace and security, and reform of global institutional governance.

AF: Your shuttle diplomacy in February 2011 helped defuse tensions from the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute. Why was it important for Indonesia to proactively step up its engagement as the ASEAN Chair on this sensitive issue?

NATALEGAWA: The Cambodia-Thailand border dispute posed a litmus test for Indonesia as the Chair of ASEAN, and for ASEAN collectively. As Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the UN when Indonesia and Vietnam were both members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), I recalled that in 2008, the same dispute was brought before the UNSC but there was no ASEAN common position then to guide us within the Council.

Flags of ASEAN member states

Thapakorn Hemgo@Shutterstock

Cambodia and Thailand had diametrically opposite views on the engagement of the Council. Hence, when the issue once again escalated in February 2011, I worked to ensure that this time there would be an ASEAN "script" around which the international community, especially the UNSC and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), could rally around. The UNSC meeting on 14 February 2011 thus did not degenerate into a forum for mutual recrimination and accusation. Instead, it was a platform for the views of both the affected sides to be heard, and for the ASEAN Chair to assure the world that ASEAN was managing the situation. The Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting held days after the UNSC meeting provided such a road map. Although success of the ASEAN-path was in no way assured, the risk of failure did not discourage me. Instead, I was more concerned by the prospect of a passive ASEAN, abdicating its responsibility for the region. I continue to believe the experience demonstrated what ASEAN could achieve in managing intra-ASEAN issues that may have global repercussions.

AF: What steps could ASEAN take to wage peace on a contentious issue facing the region now, namely the situation in Rakhine State, Myanmar?

NATALEGAWA: Given the complexity of the issue and the limitation of space, any mention of specific steps risks impression of oversimplification and skewed priorities. Suffice to say that ASEAN and within it, Myanmar, has more than a decade-long practice of working hand-in-hand in navigating Myanmar's past reform and democratisation process. However difficult and challenging was the situation – the multiple fora in which developments in Myanmar were discussed – ASEAN stood united vis-à-vis the rest of the world. At the same time, and this was a prerequisite, we were able to have robust, frank and candid discussions within the ASEAN family, practically on all matters pertaining to Myanmar as a family member. This helped Myanmar certainly, and enhanced ASEAN's credibility. Today, the same spirit must be nurtured. There cannot be à la carte regionalism. It happens to be Myanmar today. In the future, it could be any other ASEAN member state that needs to navigate international attention and expectations on their internal developments but with international ramifications. ASEAN needs a clear and comprehensive script on internal issues of its member states that are obtaining international attention. It needs to empower and utilise the various regional capacities it now formally possesses to deal with complex issues within the region.

AF: The ASEAN Community in Global Community of Nations aims for ASEAN member states to have a cohesive and coherent voice on global issues of common interest. What are the key challenges to achieving this goal?

NATALEGAWA: One key challenge is creating the necessary "comfort level" among ASEAN member states. After all, it has not been the practice – at least purposefully – for ASEAN to develop and present a common voice on global issues. Indeed, when the idea was first mooted, it was not uncommon to encounter some misunderstandings that ASEAN was seeking to develop an EU-like common foreign policy. This was obviously not the case. To allow for a natural development of such "comfort level", I have sought to dissect the approach in at least three manners. First, to formalise – "ASEANise" – the pre-existing reality that ASEAN member states individually share similar outlooks on a number of global issues to make a collective "ten". Second, to project to the global/multilateral level a common ASEAN position that had been adopted at various ASEAN meetings. And third, to identify issues at the global level that have ramifications for Southeast Asia/ASEAN, on which ASEAN should take a lead with a view to shaping and moulding the debate, thereby extrapolating ASEAN's thought leadership globally.

Dr. Marty Natalegawa and other ASEAN foreign ministers at the 44th AMM in 2011

ASEAN Secretariat

AF: Multilateralism is ceding ground to competing narratives of nativism and nationalism. But ASEAN remains steadfast in being outward-looking through its Outlook on the Indo-Pacific issued recently. What do you think of the Outlook?

NATALEGAWA: The Outlook is of tremendous importance as it reaffirms ASEAN's outward-looking perspective beyond Southeast Asia. Although the term "Indo-Pacific" may not often be used officially in the past, ASEAN-led processes such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS) clearly reflected an Indo-Pacific footprint and ASEAN indeed had formally anticipated the notion of Indo-Pacific in 2013-14. The Outlook is to be welcomed, after the "pause" ASEAN appears to have adopted between 2014 and 2018. As a consequence of such a "pause", ASEAN now of course finds the Indo-Pacific discourse a rather congested one.

The Outlook's first segment contains a well-considered view on the nature of the challenges and opportunities in the region stemming from geopolitical and geo-economics shifts, and how ASEAN would position itself. I am yet to be fully informed, however, whether the rather extensive list of cooperation areas identified in the second half of the Outlook actually addresses and is relevant to the nature of the identified challenges and opportunities. Further, if ASEAN centrality is a key principle, there is a critical need to ensure prior ASEAN-level cooperation or at least common position on the identified areas of cooperation before they are taken to the Indo-Pacific context. I am deeply encouraged, though, by the Outlook's recognition of the importance of extrapolating the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) through an appropriate ASEAN document to the wider Indo-Pacific region. This is a point that deserves emphasis.

AF: Your Excellency has twice served in the UNSC. Could you share some pertinent experiences that may be of useful reference for Vietnam when it becomes a non-permanent member at the UNSC next year?

NATALEGAWA: It is not for me to advise given the wealth of diplomatic experience and expertise that Vietnam enjoys. Suffice for me to share a couple of points. First, like in 2008, next year will be particularly significant since both Indonesia and Vietnam will serve as members of the UNSC. This presents a tremendous opportunity and responsibility for both countries to ensure that on any Southeast Asia-related issues before the Council, ASEAN takes the lead in shaping and moulding the global response. The situation also provides an opportunity to demonstrate ASEAN's beyond-Southeast Asia outlook. And second, as the ASEAN Chair and concurrently a UNSC member, a special weight of responsibility will be on Vietnam to deliver ASEAN unity on matters of interest to ASEAN before the Council.

AF: How did your ASEAN experiences enrich and enhance your work when you served as Indonesia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in 2007-2009?

NATALEGAWA: It is impossible to list them all. One quality that comes to the fore is the capacity to forge consensus, even when confronted with the deepest of divisions among states, to build bridges. Essentially, that is to be relentless and tireless – an almost infinite reservoir of patience – in favour of diplomacy. I am rather partial to the term "waging" peace.

AF: How did you see the spirit of ASEAN camaraderie at the UN and its agencies, both inside and outside of the conference halls?

NATALEGAWA: Irrespective of the capitals and cities we are at – including at the UN headquarters in New York – there is always a sense of special bond that brings together ASEAN diplomats, including of course their families. It helps make previously unfamiliar cities home to us.

Dr. Marty Natalegawa was the Foreign Minister of Indonesia from 2009-2014. Prior to that, he served, *inter alia*, as the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the UN (2007-2009), and Director-General for ASEAN Cooperation in the Department of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia (2002-2005). He is the author of *Does ASEAN Matter? A View from Within* (ISEAS 2018).

Did You Know?

There are 54 ASEAN Committees in Third Countries and International Organisations (ACTCs) across the world. Comprising heads of diplomatic missions of ASEAN member states, the ACTCs are mandated by the ASEAN Charter to "promote ASEAN's interests and identity in the host countries and international organisations". The ACTCs have played meaningful roles in fostering solidarity and camaraderie among the diplomatic missions of ASEAN member states, and promoting cooperation between ASEAN and the external parties.

Source: ASEAN Secretariat

Viet Nam Primed for ASEAN and Global Responsibilities in 2020

Dang Dinh Quy sheds light on how Viet Nam will fly the ASEAN flag high as it becomes a member of the United Nations Security Council and chairs ASEAN next year.

AF: Viet Nam will become a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for 2020-2021, after securing a record high number of votes – 192 out of 193. Could you walk us through the preparatory process towards this ultimate success?

DANG: Viet Nam presented her candidature for the UNSC membership for 2020-2021 in 2010, shortly after our first term (2008-2009). After Indonesia and Viet Nam were both members of the UNSC in 2008, ASEAN realised the importance of an ASEAN presence at the Council. The Joint Communiqué of the 44th AMM then endorsed ASEAN candidates to the UNSC for various terms, including that of Viet Nam. This early endorsement helped us tremendously in convincing the rest of the Asia-Pacific.

During all these years, we have been actively promoting Viet Nam's foreign policy of peace and independence, expanding and deepening our partnerships with many countries. Viet Nam also successfully hosted important international gatherings, such as the 132nd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly (IPU) in 2015, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in 2017, the 26th Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF) and the World Economic Forum (WEF) on ASEAN in 2018, and the DPRK-US Summit in 2019.

In May 2018, Viet Nam was endorsed by the whole Asia-Pacific group as its sole candidate for the group's seat at the UNSC for the term 2020-2021. Our campaign did not rest there. We kept on engaging all partners for their continued support not only at the elections but also for the two years ahead. For us, this substantial vote of confidence and trust from the international community is not only for Viet Nam, but for ASEAN as a whole.

AF: What would Viet Nam's priorities be during its tenure as the non-permanent member of the UNSC?

DANG: First, the world is at difficult and complex times, and needs a unified and effective UNSC. Our actions should be geared towards and anchored on the unifying factor that is international law, including the UN Charter, and multilateralism in addressing global challenges of the world today. Second, global actions must achieve local solutions which can be sustained with the strong engagement of regional arrangements. We therefore would promote cooperation between the UN and regional organisations, particularly ASEAN. Third, ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific increasingly suffer from negative effects of climate change, with the Philippines and Viet Nam among the world's top ten countries most affected by extreme weather events. Security aspects of climate change would also be a big priority for us. Last but not least, we will actively contribute to the work of the Council on the areas of peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding; women, peace and security; and children and armed conflicts.

ASEAN flag raising ceremony at Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to celebrate ASEAN's 51st anniversary in 2018

AF: It is expected that Viet Nam would raise ASEAN's profile at the global level, especially when Viet Nam will take over the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2020. How would you seize this historic opportunity to promote the global-regional nexus?

DANG: History will repeat itself in 2020 as Viet Nam will take over ASEAN Chairmanship, and Indonesia and Viet Nam will serve together at the UNSC. This would be a wonderful opportunity to promote ASEAN's stature and centrality through active contribution and participation of ASEAN members in maintaining international peace and security, and in fostering cooperation between the UNSC and regional organisations, especially in conflict prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes enshrined in Article 33 of the UN Charter. ASEAN's experience goes a long way in building confidence and preserving regional peace and stability. ASEAN can therefore strengthen its centrality in the larger regional architecture by demonstrating its leading role and ownership of

regional issues based on the ASEAN Way. We will work closely with our ASEAN fellow members to elevate the image of ASEAN at the world stage.

AF: The international rules-based order is under duress both at the global and regional level. How would Viet Nam leverage its seat at the UNSC to promote the sanctity of international law and the value of multilateralism?

DANG: First, we need to be clear that the only viable rules-based order is the one that is guided by and based on international law. At times, there may be temptations to change or develop new "rules" to accommodate the interests of one or a few. However, history has shown that common good requires the adherence by all to international law. Second, the global challenges facing us today cannot be solved by a single country or a group of countries. Multilateralism is not a matter of choice or convenience. It is the only way. The world therefore expects the UNSC to perform its primary responsibility in maintaining international peace and security in conformity with international law, through a multilateral approach. The Council as a whole and each of its members should lead by example. So will Viet Nam. We will do our utmost to contribute to creating an environment in which the UNSC can show its leadership in exercising its mandate in accordance with the UN Charter in a more effective, responsive and accountable manner.

AF: ASEAN and its member states have accumulated considerable experience in conflict prevention and peace building in the region. Do you think such experience would enrich Viet Nam's toolkit in dealing with peace and security issues at the UNSC?

DANG: Over the past 50 years, ASEAN has accumulated a lot of experience in the prevention of conflicts. There have been success stories that we want to emulate and fraught situations that we have learnt better to avoid. During Viet Nam's previous term at the UNSC, we managed to demonstrate that the ASEAN Way worked on certain issues in our region. In recent years, ASEAN has proven to be the leader and owner of solutions to our own regional issues. Among many regional groupings, ASEAN stands out for the solidarity and unity among its member states.

Next year, we are confident that the two ASEAN members at the UNSC – Indonesia and Viet Nam – can bring a good value-added from our region to the world. Viet Nam will seek to promote closer cooperation between the UN and regional organisations, and among regional organisations themselves, including through sharing of best practices.

AF: The ASEAN Committee in New York (ANYC) is one of the most active ASEAN Committees in Third Countries. Could you give us some impactful examples of its activities?

DANG: The ANYC meets regularly at Ambassadorial and expert levels whereby we coordinate, cooperate and consolidate, especially on issues that enjoy our common positions to promote ASEAN's voice in the UN framework. On average, there are 50-60 ASEAN statements each year on a wide range of issues from international law, conventional weapons to development issues and gender equality. ASEAN coordination is also exemplary within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) when negotiating the Southeast Asia section of NAM outcome documents for NAM Summits and Ministerial Meetings.

Promoting ASEAN's external relations is another focus of the ANYC as it is best placed to engage with high-level UN officials, Dialogue Partners and other external partners all over the world. Equally important is the role of the ANYC in cementing the bonds of friendship among ASEAN people, such as through the annual ASEAN Family Day that goes a long way in fostering the "we-feeling" in the ASEAN Community. The image of ASEAN solidarity is very much visible among the larger diplomatic community in New York.

AF: There are a number of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolutions with regard to ASEAN-related matters. How do ASEAN member states coordinate among themselves and mobilise support of the international community or these initiatives?

DANG: We have close coordination and cooperation in almost every matter at the UN, either for sharing views, concerns, coordinating positions or supporting one another. It manifests our solidarity, resilience, patience and determination on matters concerning Southeast Asia, including on the South China Sea issue.

In the UNGA, ASEAN has biennial resolutions on cooperation between the UN and ASEAN and on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (SEANWFZ). ASEAN coordination is done through many channels and levels, namely capitals, ASEAN official meetings and in New York. ASEAN members would first try to achieve consensus among themselves as soon as possible on the draft resolutions. Then we conduct consultations with the wider UN membership through informal meetings and even bilaterals to mobilise overwhelming support for the resolutions, and ensure their adoption by consensus and co-sponsorship by an increasing number of countries over the years. ASEAN members also actively co-sponsor the initiatives of other groups and countries, which provides a strong incentive for others to support ASEAN ones.

Amb. Dang Dinh Quy is Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations in New York.

Did You Know?

Since August 2011, the ASEAN flag has been flown alongside the respective national flags at all ASEAN member states' diplomatic and consular missions in ASEAN countries, ASEAN's dialogue partners, and ASEAN member states' missions to the UN headquarters and offices. This is a symbol of ASEAN's commitment to its community building efforts.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore

Making ASEAN More Relevant and Dynamic

Thought leaders and seasoned ASEAN hands put on their thinking caps to reflect on the regional organisation's challenges and chart the way forward for a resilient, dynamic, and inclusive ASEAN.

Humanising ASEAN to Better Connect ASEAN with Its People

First, like all government institutions, ASEAN is afflicted with the same criticism of being aloof and detached from the people that it purports to represent and serve. ASEAN is seen as excessively government-centric, and over-obsessive with and bound by rigid protocols and bureaucracy, all of which get in the way of the drive to build a strong sense of community among its people. The ASEAN People's Assembly (APA) looked like a good start, but for it to grow and develop organically, it should be given more freedom, independence, and room for innovation. At present, APA participants and civil society organisations are still carefully selected by their governments, with the unintended consequence of turning this novel process into an echo chamber parroting the same government line and perspective. Admittedly, ASEAN has serious issues with finance, but some of the money spent on the two summits and over 1,000 annual official meetings could be reallocated to encourage grassroots participation and initiatives. ASEAN needs to rethink its priorities as it strives to become a community.

Second, ASEAN is in urgent need of an effective communication strategy to reach out to and engage its 660 million stakeholders. ASEAN's Leaders, and in particular its diplomats – who are the primary drivers of the regional organisation – need to speak in the language that the people on the street, including millennials, use and understand. ASEAN officials should take particular attention to avoid using – or altogether eliminate – acronyms and terminologies that only they understand. Communiques and Joint Statements at the end of their summits and meetings are hard to decipher, and even journalists find it hard to explain their relevance to their readers. At the same time, ASEAN activities and discussions are often shrouded in a cloak of "officialdom" and secrecy, making its doubly difficult for the people of ASEAN to understand the regional organisation and its processes.

Third, ASEAN should re-examine its media engagement to convey its message more effectively to the region and beyond. The ASEAN Secretariat routinely issues press releases that are often written in diplomatic and legalistic prose which are barely comprehensible to members of the media. Partly due to the inter-governmental nature of the organisation, ASEAN errs on the side of caution and sticks to the "basics" at the expense of readability and human interest. It can do a better job of crafting captivating and relatable narratives to convey the breadth and depth of its regional cooperation. Its press releases and briefings should be simplified to minimise diplomatic verbosity, and they should strive to humanise the narratives to "sell" the ASEAN story and make it resonate with the community. Otherwise, ASEAN's "as a matter of fact" storylines will be bypassed by journalists and their editors. Media accessibility to officials will also help journalists to get a better handle on the news item. The media should be treated as an integral conduit to ASEAN's community-building efforts. One actionable proposal is for ASEAN to select media of all three platforms (print, broadcast, and online) – preferably independent agencies – from the ten ASEAN member states as partners to help get the ASEAN message out to the people.

Mr. ENDY BAYUNI is Editor-in-Chief of *The Jakarta Post* and has covered ASEAN affairs for several decades.

ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi speaking at the ASEAN Media Forum in July 2019 in Bangkok

Harness the Synergy of the People to Make ASEAN Work Better

First, it is time to bring the ASEAN story to the people in the street, into their homes and their local communities. ASEAN's greatest achievement thus far is the peace dividend prevailing among Southeast Asian neighbouring countries, thereby creating the conducive environment for people in the region to focus on economic development and improve their lives. But ASEAN has not been able to connect its achievements with the people whose interests it is supposed to serve. The larger community of stakeholders in every member country can take part in this endeavour to bring ASEAN closer to the people. The proposed establishment of the Network of ASEAN Associations with identified national focal points is a good start, but more can be done to make the unfolding ASEAN story more inclusive. At the same time, each member state should review the implementation of major ASEAN agreements and monitor whether such implementation has made an impact on the general public, not only on the elite.

Second, as the political-security and economic pillars have always taken top billing in ASEAN community-building, it may be time to relook this top-to-bottom pyramid by giving more emphasis to the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. In practical terms, this means taking ASEAN beyond the corridors of power into dining tables, mobile phone chats and myriad existential initiatives that should not begin and end with ASEAN processes but focus directly on issues that impact the daily lives of the public. It is also equally important for people in the region to develop a greater sense of familiarity and understanding of each other's societies, cultures and histories. Studies and exchanges should be conducted on the history of ASEAN member countries, identify commonalities and build upon them. Southeast Asian history is abundant with stories of cooperation with mutually dependent communities sharing common traditions. All these should be considered while weaving the ASEAN tapestry.

Third, the private sector should play a bigger role in ASEAN. After all, it is the private sector that benefits from ASEAN's efforts to enable a stable political-strategic environment and a more integrated regional economy. Without the support and active participation of the private sector which includes business, academe, media, civil society, among others, ASEAN's growth will be stunted. The challenge is to change the mindset of the private sector, encouraging them to forge collaboration and partnership among themselves without relying on ASEAN officialdom as the prime mover. This is not a novel idea. The Asian News Network (ANN), for example, has established a framework for sharing articles from 23 leading newspapers from South, Southeast and Northeast Asia. The private sector should emulate ANN's example in forging cross-national mutually beneficial partnerships.

Amb. DELIA ALBERT was the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines from 2003 to 2004, and is currently the Chairperson of the ASEAN Society of the Philippines.

Towards a More People-Centred, People-Oriented ASEAN

First, the media should play a more active role in bringing ASEAN closer to the people by communicating what ASEAN is doing to improve their lives. Only when they are aware of the significant impacts of ASEAN policies on their lives will they develop a sense of ownership of and support for ASEAN. That will foster the virtuous cycle of a 'people-centred, people-oriented ASEAN'. Though coverage of ASEAN has improved in recent years, much remains to be done. For example, media outlets in ASEAN need to understand what makes ASEAN unique to shine more light on the organisation. Yet, communication and engagement between ASEAN, the media, and the people is a two-way street. ASEAN also has to carry its weight and take greater initiative to engage Southeast Asia's media communities as well.

Second, ASEAN needs to increase public participation in its policy-making because the people are the ultimate beneficiaries of ASEAN's work, and because ASEAN cannot thrive without support on the ground. Yet, policy-making in ASEAN is a complex and sophisticated process. Ordinary people need to be empowered through capacity-building programmes so that they can understand the processes at work and find their ways to make their voices heard. More importantly regional governments should be open-minded to listen to the people. With the fast and mass adoption of mobile phones in Southeast Asia, communications technology can help bridge the gap between policymakers and ordinary people.

Third, to ensure the longevity of efforts to make ASEAN people-centred, people-oriented, we should dedicate more time and resources to the region's youths, ASEAN is a young region with more than 200 million people in the 15-34 age group, comprising one-third of the overall population. Thus, ASEAN needs to provide its youths with more avenues to contribute to shaping ASEAN's future. Young people from different ASEAN countries should be offered more opportunities to meet and work together, both offline and online. This will lay the foundation for promoting an ASEAN sprit among diverse populations in the region. ASEAN-aware and ASEAN-oriented youths will make the goal of a people-centred, people-oriented ASEAN achievable and, crucially, more sustainable.

Mr. ZEYA THU is Chairman of the Myanmar Journalism Institute and is the Publisher-cum-CEO of *The Voice Weekly Journal.*

A Hard Look at ASEAN: "Regain, Refocus and Relook"

First, ASEAN must find the courage to regain strategic ambition. Timidity has infected ASEAN decision-making and we have deliberately narrowed our strategic horizons, focusing too much on form and process rather than substance. The complexities, domestic and international, that we face are real. But we have faced and overcome no less complex and dangerous situations in the past and can do so again. Fatalism can be fatal and the greatest risk is sometimes trying to avoid all risk. We will not be 'central' merely by repeating the phrase 'ASEAN centrality' as if it is a magic incantation.

Second, to do so, we must refocus on fundamentals. Despite the serious challenges of its difficult first decades, ASEAN never lost sight of the fact that the regional interest had to be part of each member states' definition of national interest. That sense has considerably weakened. ASEAN is not a replacement for national interest but a means of advancing each member's national interest. That reality is captured in a slogan that has all but disappeared from the ASEAN lexicon: 'National resilience enhances regional resilience, and regional resilience enhances national resilience'.

Third, to do both, we must seriously relook the Charter. It has been in force for more than a decade. We now ought to have a better sense of what works and what needs revision in the light of our changed environment. Every legal instrument needs to be updated from time to time. But we have lacked the political appetite to seriously review the Charter because we started from a sense of our limitations rather than a sense of our possibilities. We should not presume failure. We cannot expect others to have faith in ASEAN if we have insufficient faith in ourselves.

Mr. BILAHARI KAUSIKAN is Chairman of the Middle East Institute, an autonomous institute of the National University of Singapore. He served in Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 37 years and retired as Ambassador- at Large in 2018.

Deepening and Broadening Economic Integration and Raising ASEAN Awareness

First, ASEAN should work to be more effective by forging consensus on issues where there is a common stand. However, when it comes to challenging issues such as the South China Sea, where a common stand is noticeably absent, ASEAN should instead focus on working towards the Code of Conduct, where a common purpose seems to exist. This is the ASEAN way: the longer something walks or meanders towards the future, the greater there is consensus. ASEAN's approach towards the implementation of its many visions, roadmaps and visions is instructive in this respect. But where there is great urgency and consensus – like on the US-China trade war – ASEAN cannot operate under this modality. During the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ABAC) interface with the ASEAN Leaders on 22 June this year, we called for ASEAN to stand up against the trade war and call for what I termed "world economic peace".

Second, ASEAN should register its voice and actively contribute to the defence of the fraying open, rules-based world trading system. To be fair, ASEAN has not been silent as its member states are staunch supporters of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The ASEAN flag flew highly at the G-20 Summit in Osaka, Japan where ASEAN was eminently represented by Indonesia (full member), Thailand (observer as ASEAN Chair), Singapore (observer, representing the Global Governance Group), and Vietnam (observer as APEC Chair). Collectively, these ASEAN member states were "noisier" – in the most productive and constructive sense – than they had been for the past decade when ASEAN was first granted observer status. To continue this good work, ASEAN should form an effective Southeast Asian caucus at APEC 2020 so that ASEAN can more effectively move issues for an open, rules-based and global free trade system. At the end of the day, ASEAN Centrality is not just about hosting meetings and regional fora. ASEAN's claims to centrality are only sustainable to the extent that it is able to remain relevant and be a part of the solution to the myriad of challenges to the global commons.

Third, ASEAN must walk the talk and put its economic house in order. It would be hypocritical of us to call for an open trading system while simultaneously putting up all sorts of non-tariff barriers and measures that are all but protectionist in name. The very basis of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) of a single market and production base will be undermined if member states continue to use non-tariff barriers to circumvent ASEAN agreements on the reduction and elimination of tariffs. ASEAN loses its competitiveness and attraction as an investor-friendly region if member states are not fully committed to the AEC. The state of affairs literally cries out for an impartial and comprehensive study (or audit, if you will) on why these barriers and measures are increasing in spite of official and public pronouncements of ASEAN member states in support of free trade and the AEC. The AEC Scorecard, which is meticulously compiled by the ASEAN Secretariat, should be made public in the spirit of good governance and transparency, and also to constructively identify implementation gaps to be addressed.

Tan Sri Dato' Dr. MOHD MUNIR ABDUL MAJID is Chairman of CIMB ASEAN Research Institute (CARI), and Chairman of the Malaysia Chapter of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ABAC). He is also Visiting Senior Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) IDEAS for the Southeast Asia International Affairs Programme.

Reality Check Is Needed to Improve ASEAN's Future

First, ASEAN must improve its performance on the ground and deliver convincing results to its citizens. Towards this end, ASEAN must work harder in its community building process which has been sluggish, and address all issues specified in the Community blueprints which largely remain incomplete. ASEAN must re-double its efforts in building a cohesive socio-cultural community by mobilising all ASEAN citizens to feel a shared sense of community and mutual respect for their diverse cultural identities. On economic cooperation, ASEAN must accelerate its integration process while individual member states must overcome domestic economic nationalism and persist with globalisation to avoid reliance solely on any single major power.

Second, it's worth repeating the mantra that ASEAN centrality must be earned. ASEAN must go beyond agenda setting and playing host to engagement with and among external powers to fulfil its potential as a credible regional security mechanism and an 'honest broker' in the midst of major power competition. To do so, ASEAN must command greater space for action and leadership in containing tensions and mitigating conflicts in the region, including on the South China Sea issue. The grouping must forge greater unity, mobilise political courage and determination to withstand strategic challenges deriving from today's uncertain regional order. Individual ASEAN countries must also avoid negative externalities deriving from weighty financial agreements which might trade away their sovereign rights and long-term national interests for short-term economic gains.

Third, ASEAN needs to recalibrate the ASEAN Way, especially the principle of non-interference, and go beyond consensus and non-substantive reaction in dealing with today's pressing challenges. Internally, ASEAN's decision-making process must be more proactive and responsive in offering mediation in intra-regional border disputes and tensions and assisting its members in distress due to domestic issues. ASEAN must also not shy from the issues of good governance, human rights, accountability, and corruption. Externally, the ASEAN Way must not hold back ASEAN from discussing hard security issues to maintain its credibility. Essentially, the ASEAN Way must give way to a more rules-based framework, and ASEAN governance structure be bolstered with effective enforcement and compliance. Last but not least, collective and intelligent leadership is sorely needed for ASEAN to move forward, absent which ASEAN's ability to determine its future would be ceded to outside powers.

Amb. POU SOTHIRAK is Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP). He was Minister of Industry, Mines and Energy and Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Deepening and Broadening Economic Integration and Raising ASEAN Awareness

First, ASEAN should refocus on issues of strategic urgency. While ASEAN community-building continues to be a long-term goal, ASEAN mechanisms, especially those of political nature, have got too involved in technical and process-driven discussions. This has limited ASEAN's ability to focus on issues of strategic urgency, e.g. the unfolding US-China competition, the shifting global supply chains, and other profound challenges to ASEAN centrality and multilateralism. ASEAN must find ways, including through reactivating more retreat-like meetings (at senior officials, ministers, and leaders levels) to enable frank discussions on strategic issues facing the grouping and the region.

Second, the ASEAN Charter should be reviewed, especially on structural matters. ASEAN's performance under the Charter's provisions over the past 10 years has given us sufficient experience and lessons learned to conduct a serious review of the Charter. The review is not intended to revisit the purposes, principles, or the nature of ASEAN, but to look into its institutions and working methods with a view to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. Such a review should allow for more strategic discussions of ASEAN political bodies and streamline the functions of the four coordinating councils and the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN, among others.

Third, I have three specific suggestions to make. First of all, the ASEAN Free Trade Area should be upgraded and expanded beyond a tariffs-based FTA, because many of the obstacles hindering freer intra-ASEAN trade have little to do with tariffs. There remain up to 6,000 non-tariff measures (NTMs) in intra-ASEAN trade, many of which have trade distorting effects. Second, ASEAN member states need to leverage on national education to increase basic awareness of ASEAN among the region's children and youths. Knowledge on ASEAN should be incorporated as a compulsory component of national elementary education to reach out to youths during the formative stages of their education so as to foster a lifelong interest and a sense of ownership in the regional project. Last but not least, ASEAN has to consolidate and strengthen the East Asia Summit (EAS) in the economic and strategic dimensions, e.g. through developing an 18-member FTA and an EAS Code of Conduct, modelled on the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). This would allow ASEAN to anchor itself as a key player in the changing regional architecture, promote economic interdependence, and thereby mitigate regional tensions and intense major power rivalry.

Amb. PHAM QUANG VINH is Vietnam's former Deputy Foreign Minister and ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) Leader.

Analysis

Investment Boom in ASEAN: Wherein Lie the Opportunities?

Sam Cheong identifies strengths for ASEAN's continuing success story and maps out some of the region's many bright investment hotspots.

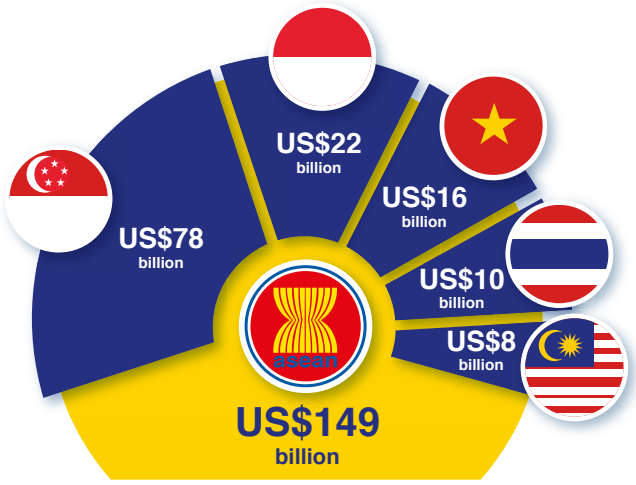
ASEAN is experiencing an investment boom. The region's fast-growing economies, young population and tech-savvy consumers make it an attractive destination for both multinationals and individual investors.

The numbers speak for themselves. Last year, ASEAN bucked the global trend of falling foreign direct investment (FDI) to emerge as the world's main driver of FDI growth. The region's FDI inflows reached a record high of US$149 billion, according to data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). This marked a three per cent increase from a year ago, in contrast to a 13 per cent decline in global FDI. The data also indicated that not only did ASEAN beat Europe in terms of FDI inflows, it also surpassed China, the world's second largest FDI recipient last year.

Spearheading the growth of FDI into the region is its favourable demographic profile. Comprising 10 countries, ASEAN has the world's third-largest population of more than 660 million people, of which more than half are below 30 years of age. These demographics make ASEAN an attractive market for firms that are keen to access the region's growing consumer base. Riding on this positive trend, we have seen a wave of Japanese consumer companies such as retailers and food and beverage players expand into ASEAN in the last few years.

Cost-competitiveness, strong economic growth, and established legal frameworks have also contributed to the region's attractiveness as an investment destination. In addition, the region is the fastest-growing internet economy in the world, with an online population expanding by an estimated 124,000 new users each day, according to ASEAN's Investing in ASEAN 2019/2020 report. The booming digital generation in the region will continue to drive the demand for innovative digital solutions that provide greater convenience, giving rise to more opportunities for technology-focused investments.

While ASEAN presents vast investment opportunities, expanding into the dynamic economic bloc also comes with its share of challenges, particularly for investors who are unfamiliar with the region. With unique cultures, customs, and languages, each of the ten ASEAN member states is distinct and complex in its own way. Investors who are turning their gaze towards this region must therefore understand and embrace the varying business environments and local practices.



FDI flows into ASEAN (2018)
Source: UNCTAD

At UOB, we understand the complexities of entering ASEAN and the advantages that working with local partners with the relevant expertise and connections can provide. To help companies navigate their expansion across ASEAN, we set up the FDI Advisory team in 2011 to provide business and financial support through our integrated network and strong knowledge of and experience in local markets. We also partner government agencies, business associations, and professional service providers in the region to provide companies seamless connectivity and integrated market entry support. All ASEAN member states are attractive investment destinations in their own right, and here we cast a spotlight on a sampling of the golden investment opportunities abound in ASEAN.

Singapore

With a highly-educated workforce and world-class infrastructure, Singapore offers a conducive and efficient business environment that appeals to investors taking their first step into the region. Of the US$149 billion in FDI that poured into ASEAN last year, more than half went to Singapore, demonstrating the city state's attractiveness to foreign investors.

The country has bilateral and multilateral agreements with other ASEAN countries, providing global companies and investors a launch pad to engage with and to understand other regional markets before taking the leap in their expansion plans. Singapore's FDI growth momentum is expected to continue. This is on the back of research and development activities, and a services cluster boosted by digitalisation and innovation.

Indonesia

Indonesia is the largest market in the region, with its population of more than 250 million comprising more than one-third of ASEAN's total population. The rapidly-increasing demand for goods and services from its growing middle class presents enormous opportunities for foreign investors, who directed US$22 billion of FDI into the country in 2018. Given the favourable demographics, there are many investment opportunities for companies in consumer-related sectors, especially those tapping the digital economy for growth. These examples include e-commerce, mobile payments, and food delivery.

Indonesia's appeal as an FDI destination is further supported by the commitment from President Joko Widodo's Administration to build up the country's infrastructure such as housing, clean water supply, as well as transportation for greater connectivity with the region.

Malaysia

Known for its highly-skilled labour market and well-established manufacturing sector, Malaysia has seen steady FDI inflows, particularly in its manufacturing, logistics, and services industries. In 2018, FDI flowing into Malaysia was US$8 billion. In the first quarter of 2019, Malaysia registered a record of approximately US$7.1 billion in approved FDI for all sectors, up 73.4 per cent from a year ago, according to the country's finance ministry.

Malaysia's expanding services and manufacturing sectors, and the initiatives to support its digital economy and to encourage entrepreneurship, make investing in the country appealing to investors who wish to tap the sectors' growth. An environment of competitive tax policies will also help strengthen the country's position as an investment destination.

Thailand

A traditional manufacturing base, Thailand drew US$10 billion in FDI last year, of which more than half went to its manufacturing sector. This was more than double the inflow from the year before, according to data released by UNCTAD and the Bank of Thailand.

The Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), Thailand's pilot project for the economic development of its eastern seaboard, has also given the country impetus for attracting significant FDI. Thailand's eastern seaboard enjoys strong connectivity to neighbouring countries and established trade routes, making it fertile ground for transport and logistics infrastructure projects. The electronics sector is also growing, with approved projects in 2018 totalling US$ 1.2 billion, according to data from the Board of Investment. Over the next five years, the Thai government is projecting US$43 billion in investments to support the realisation of the EEC.

The country's e-commerce market has also expanded significantly in recent years to become one of the largest business-to-consumer e-commerce markets in ASEAN. This is underpinned by the Thai government's promotion of digital technologies and a young, internet-savvy, mobile-first population. Recognising the opportunity to serve the needs of the country's digital generation, UOB chose Thailand as the first market to launch its mobile-only bank, TMRW. TMRW is the first digital bank that is built for ASEAN millennials who prefer to bank on their mobile phones, anywhere and at any time.


Tos Gamex (Tomiya Summit Garment Export) company in Bien Hoa II Industrial Zone, Vietnam

UNIDO@Flickr

Vietnam

Touted as ASEAN's rising star, Vietnam has seen an increase in FDI over the last few years. UNCTAD data shows that Vietnam received US$16 billion in FDI in 2018. In the first six months of 2019, foreign investors committed US$18.47 billion, according to the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

Vietnam's economic and industrial growth will make it a critical trade partner and market for countries in the ASEAN region over the next 10 years. Vietnam's attractiveness in the long run will be further enhanced by an ambitious government plan to develop infrastructure in major industrial hubs across the country. For example, Hai Phong, a new economic zone in northeastern Vietnam, has been attracting significant FDI in sectors such as high-tech agriculture, following the government's investment promotion strategy for the port city.

UOB has been working with key government agencies and strategic business partners such as the Foreign Investment Agency of Vietnam and Vietnam-Singapore Industrial Park (VSIP) Joint Venture to help companies tap investment opportunities in Vietnam. In 2018, UOB was the first Singapore bank to set up a foreign-owned subsidiary in Vietnam, and currently has presence in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. This enables us to continue deepening our efforts to help companies accelerate their investment and expansion into and across the country.

Despite macro headwinds, ASEAN remains a bright spot for foreign investors. The region's burgeoning population, large labour force and growing affluence, coupled with the commitment from the region's governments in supporting economic development, will give rise to growth opportunities in the areas of manufacturing, infrastructure, consumer, and technology products.

Mr. Sam Cheong is Head of Group FDI Advisory and Network Partnerships, Group International Management, United Overseas Bank (UOB), Singapore.

Analysis

The "New" Face of Southeast Asian Regionalism: The ASEAN Secretariat

Join us on a journey to Jakarta to explore the ASEAN Secretariat's expanded home and what it means for ASEAN's future.

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo handing over the symbolic key of the new ASEAN Secretariat building to ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi

For nearly four decades, the ASEAN Secretariat at 70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja in Jakarta, Indonesia has been the face of the regional organisation and the heart of its community-building project. It has been the port of call for the region's top leaders and diplomats to deliberate ASEAN's thorniest issues, and it is home to the management, staff, and interns who make ASEAN's work possible. Furthermore, countless heads of states and foreign dignitaries from around the globe have graced its hallowed halls since the venue was completed and officiated in 1981 by then Indonesia's President Suharto. Prior to its current premises, the Secretariat was first housed in the Department of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta at the generous invitation of the Indonesian government on 24 February 1976, when the first ASEAN Summit, held in Bali, declared the establishment of the ASEAN Secretariat. Indonesian general and diplomat Hartono Rekso Dharsono served as the Secretariat's first Secretary-General on 7 June 1976, while Tan Sri Dato' Ajit Singh of Malaysia had the distinction of becoming the inaugural Secretary-General of ASEAN on 1 January 1993, when the Secretariat's top position was renamed to reflect the regional organisation's growing mandate and ambitions.

Recently, the face of ASEAN received a much welcome facelift. At the august occasion of ASEAN's 52nd anniversary on 8 August 2019, history seemed to have come full circle when Indonesia's President Joko Widodo unveiled the Secretariat's newly expanded premises – a testament to the association's growing importance and scope of responsibilities. The Secretariat's expansion is in line with the recommendations of the High Level Task Force (HLTF) on Strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat and Reviewing the ASEAN Organs, first declared on 12 November 2014 in Myanmar, and reaffirmed recently during the 52nd ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) on 31 July 2019 in Bangkok. The AMM Joint Communique celebrated the expanded Secretariat's enhanced ability to "advance the work of ASEAN and deepen the community-building process", as well as "strengthen cooperation and collaboration among ASEAN Sectoral Bodies and ASEAN's partners and to underline ASEAN unity and centrality".

Even as regional organisations around the world encounter challenges to their structural integrity, the expansion of the ASEAN Secretariat demonstrates that ASEAN's *raison d'etre* remains robust amidst international headwinds.

In addition to the current nine-storey building occupying 10,000 square metres, the upgraded Secretariat features two new 16-storey towers constructed on 13,200 square metres of land donated by the Indonesian government during its Chairmanship in 2011. With a gross area of 49,993 square metres, the towers are five times the size of the current building. The towers will host the Secretariat's staff, as well as facilities like the ASEAN Gallery and the ASEAN Library, while the old building will welcome Jakarta-based ASEAN entities, centres, and project facilities.

The Secretariat's new conference venue – the Nusantara Hall – will accommodate up to 800 standing guests, comparable to that of a five-star hotel's reception hall. There will be 14 new public meeting rooms from the ground floor to the fifth storey, in addition to 16 internal meeting rooms reserved exclusively for the Secretariat's staff and management. Moreover, each of the ten ASEAN member states will be accorded a country room. The towers are connected by a 40.5-metre building bridge, the longest such bridge in Indonesia without buffer. The earthquake-resistant premises were also certified environmentally friendly, making the Secretariat an embodiment of ASEAN's sustainability agenda. The project, which aims to unite all ASEAN institutions, functions, and meetings in one centralised location, cost upwards of US$37 million. This centralisation will enhance the coordination of ASEAN's functions, and augment ASEAN's efforts to promote greater opportunities for interface among stakeholders.

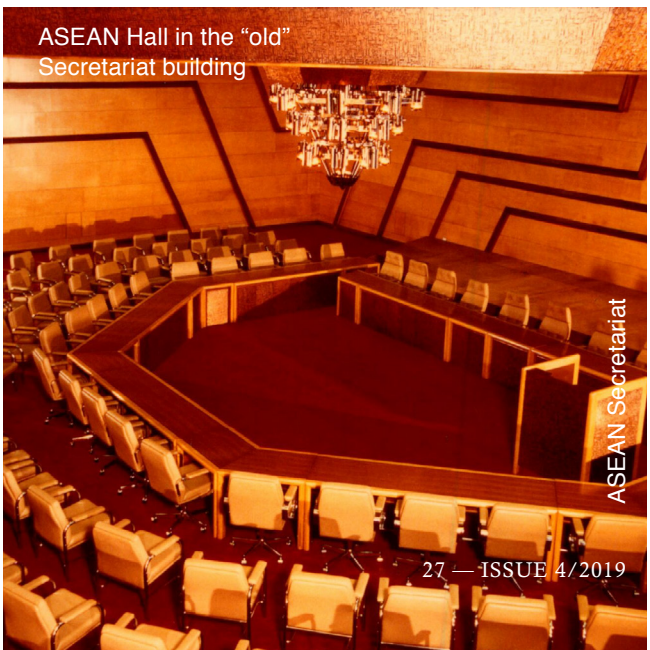
The expansion of the ASEAN Secretariat comes at a welcome time, and parallels the enlargement of ASEAN's scope of work and institutional structure. As the Secretariat's manpower continued to mushroom, so too did the need to address the space constraints become ever more urgent. Furthermore, the ASEAN Secretariat has increasingly become the venue of choice for numerous ASEAN events and meetings. Thus, the upgraded infrastructure is ASEAN's – and specifically Indonesia's – answer to the growing demands that ASEAN's operations have placed on the Secretariat. Indeed, Indonesia's forthcoming contribution of land and resources illustrates the country's generosity and support for the organisation, and demonstrates Indonesia's steadfast commitment to remaining the physical centre of ASEAN's operations. With Indonesia set to relocate its administrative hub to Kalimantan, the expansion of the ASEAN Secretariat could cement Jakarta's status as ASEAN's nucleus.

Along with the inauguration of the new Secretariat is the launch of Jakarta's first Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) network. Officially opened on 24 March 2019, the network connects the centre of Jakarta to the south through 13 stations, one of which stops conveniently outside the Secretariat and is appropriately named "ASEAN", a fitting tribute to the association's centrality to the area. The MRT system is Jakarta's solution to the busy district's congestion woes, and goes to great lengths to ease the commute of the Secretariat's staff. The near-simultaneous unveiling of these two infrastructural improvements reinforces the themes of consultation, communication, and connectivity – processes and objectives which are mainstays of ASEAN's operations.

In all, the expansion of the Secretariat is a cumulative and collaborative process that reflects ASEAN member states' continuing commitment to the organisation and its mission of forging a common identity and community. As the face of ASEAN, the Secretariat represents not just how ASEAN sees itself, but also how it wants to be seen by the world. The new towers reflect ASEAN's desire to be viewed as a united force that stands tall in the face of adversity and scepticism. The towers' outward-facing demeanour, with edges that fan out and widen from the centre, represent a reinvigorated ASEAN with a strengthened core, spreading its wings as it springs forth into the new decade.

Indeed, there is little time to rest. The proposed bridge linking the old building with the new towers remains a work in progress, a metaphorical if poetic reminder that ASEAN's task to forge connections – both within and without – is an unending and dynamic process. The enlarged Secretariat will not only facilitate the day-to-day operations of ASEAN, but will surely augment the stature of the regional organisation. The imposing complex demonstrates to the world that ASEAN is not just here to survive – it is determined to blossom.

The old ASEAN Secretariat building



ASEAN Hall in the "old" Secretariat building

President Joko Widodo, High Level ASEAN Representatives, and ASEAN SG Dato Lim Jock Hoi at the opening ceremony of the new ASEAN Secretariat building

ASEAN Secretariat

The new and old ASEAN Secretariat building

AHA Centre

The Nusantara Hall at the new ASEAN Secretariat building

ASEAN Secretariat

ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi with former SG Ajit Singh and Le Luong Minh at the unveiling of the new ASEAN Gallery with Russian ambassador to ASEAN

ASEAN Secretariat

ASEAN Secretariat staff at the ASEAN Station

ASEAN Secretariat

Cultural performance at the opening of the new ASEAN Secretariat building

ASEAN Secretariat

The Bangkok Declaration

The Presidium Minister for Political Affairs/Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand:

MINDFUL of the existence of mutual interests and common problems among countries of South-East Asia and convinced of the need to strengthen further the existing bonds of regional solidarity and cooperation;

DESIRING to establish a firm foundation for common action to promote regional cooperation in South-East Asia in the spirit of equality and partnership and thereby contribute towards peace, progress and prosperity in the region;

CONSCIOUS that in an increasingly interdependent world, the cherished ideals of peace, freedom, social justice and economic well-being are best attained by fostering good understanding, good neighbourliness and meaningful cooperation among the countries of the region already bound together by ties of history and culture;

CONSIDERING that the countries of South East Asia share a primary responsibility for strengthening the economic and social stability of the region and ensuring their peaceful and progressive national development, and that they are determined to ensure their stability and security from external interference in any form or manifestation in order to preserve their national identities in accordance with the ideals and aspirations of their peoples;

AFFIRMING that all foreign bases are temporary and remain only with the expressed concurrence of the countries concerned and are not intended to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence and freedom of States in the area or prejudice the orderly processes of their national development;

DO HEREBY DECLARE:

FIRST, the establishment of an Association for Regional Cooperation among the countries of South-East Asia to be known as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

SECOND, that the aims and purposes of the Association shall be:

1. To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of South-East Asian Nations;
2. To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter;

Signing of the Bangkok Declaration on 8 August 1967

3. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;
4. To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres;
5. To collaborate more effectively for the greater utilization of their agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade, including the study of the problems of international commodity trade, the improvement of their transportation and communications facilities and the raising of the living standards of their peoples;
6. To promote South-East Asian studies;
7. To maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes, and explore all avenues for even closer cooperation among themselves.

THIRD, that to carry out these aims and purposes, the following machinery shall be established:

(a) Annual Meeting of Foreign Ministers, which shall be by rotation and referred to as ASEAN Ministerial Meeting. Special Meetings of Foreign Ministers may be convened as required.

(b) A Standing committee, under the chairmanship of the Foreign Minister of the host country or his representative and having as its members the accredited Ambassadors of the other member countries, to carry on the work of the Association in between Meetings of Foreign Ministers.

(c) Ad-Hoc Committees and Permanent Committees of specialists and officials on specific subjects.

(d) A National Secretariat in each member country to carry out the work of the Association on behalf of that country and to service the Annual or Special Meetings of Foreign Ministers, the Standing Committee and such other committees as may hereafter be established.

FOURTH, that the Association is open for participation to all States in the South-East Asian Region subscribing to the aforementioned aims, principles and purposes.

FIFTH, that the Association represents the collective will of the nations of South-East Asia to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation and, through joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their peoples and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom and prosperity.

DONE in Bangkok on the Eighth Day of August in the Year One Thousand Nine Hundred and Sixty-Seven.

Analysis

Strengthening Social Enterprises in ASEAN for Sustainable Development

Anuthida Saelaow Qian explains how the power of social enterprises can be harnessed to transform an ordinary idea into extraordinary life-changing deeds.

In the last two decades, social entrepreneurship has increasingly taken off in ASEAN, where a heady appetite for positive change and innovation has gained traction. As the region continues to prosper, social entrepreneurship has made great strides towards boosting its visibility and value by bridging the gap between social needs and economic reality. Fuelled by greater awareness of pressing challenges and spurred by the motive to alleviate them, social enterprises have continued to make their mark on several intersecting realms, ranging from the environment and health to education and community development. Also augmenting the sector is burgeoning interest from passionate individuals, particularly the youth, who seek purpose and meaning in their work beyond a paycheck. With buzzwords like "sustainable" and "ethical" sliding into everyday lexicon, consumers have also grown increasingly conscious of the impact their choices, purchases and the companies they support have on the world, allowing social enterprises to extend their reach more effectively.

While a universally accepted definition of the sector remains elusive, social enterprises are typically recognised as organisations with social value at the heart of their businesses. They are a hybrid of conventional for-profit businesses and charities, aimed at addressing social challenges and practising social responsibility while striving for self-sustainability. By combining traditional commercial strategies and tactics with continuous innovation, social enterprises focus on the "triple bottom line" of people, planet, and profit. These organisations are also a promising complement to ASEAN's objective of building a resilient, inclusive, people-oriented, and people-centred community, serving to narrow the development gap between member states and safeguard the most vulnerable.

Surprise delivery to an orphanage in Myanmar

Examples of such ground-up initiatives abound throughout ASEAN. For instance, the Filipino movement Gawad Kalinga has sprouted numerous social enterprises since its founding in 2003. Through businesses like the Enchanted Farm, First Harvest, and Human Nature, Gawad Kalinga has offered employment, lodging, and a new lease of life to thousands of former slum dwellers by engaging them in manufacturing delicious peanut butter, thirst-quenching beverages, and natural skincare products made from fresh ingredients sourced from poor farmers. Gawad Kalinga has set its sights on ending poverty for five million Filipino families by 2024.

Yet, social enterprises do not necessarily have to create new products in order to be meaningful. Myanmar entrepreneur Mike Than Tun Win, who was educated in Singapore, observed that the exodus of bicycle-sharing companies from Singapore left the island with thousands of unutilised bicycles. Having experienced the toil of walking to school every day when he was growing up in the Myanmar city of Mandalay, Mr. Than is determined to spare children today of the same hardship. He founded the movement Lesswalk in March 2019, and purchased 10,000 bicycles in Singapore and Malaysia at about S$20 per unit using his own savings and with help from corporate sponsors. After the bicycles are shipped to Yangon and refurbished, they will be distributed to "teenagers and families living in rural villages in Myanmar, beginning with villages in the Mandalay and Sagaing regions". These initiatives showcase the best of ASEAN's people, and illustrate the heights that can be achieved when bright minds and kind hearts think regionally to solve the region's complex challenges.

Indeed, the social enterprise landscape in Southeast Asia today is dynamic and flourishing, with region-wide resources and events being convened by governments and national authorities to support, strengthen, and sustain the growing sector. According to the Thomson Reuters Foundation's 2016 ranking of the best countries for social entrepreneurship among the world's 45 biggest economies, five ASEAN member states ranked 4th (Singapore), 9th (Malaysia), 17th (Indonesia), 20th (the Philippines), and 29th (Thailand) respectively. As a whole, the region came out tops in terms of ease of access to grant funding, and second in a ranking of government policy support for social entrepreneurs.

The ASEAN Social Enterprise Structuring Guide, launched in 2018 by the British Council, Tilleke & Gibbins, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the Thomson Reuters Foundation, is one such resource available to social entrepreneurs. The guide outlines relevant legal, regulatory, and fiscal frameworks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, enabling social entrepreneurs to make more informed operational decisions and better navigate the social enterprise ecosystems in each jurisdiction.

Also advancing the viability of and recognition towards social enterprises is the ASEAN Social Impact Awards, established in 2017. The awards bring visibility to the efforts of social enterprises that have positively impacted the region, and enable them to scale up their operations through mentoring and the provision of resources. In its inaugural year, the award was conferred upon Ms. Tri Mumpuni, founder of Indonesia-based People Centered Business and Economic Institute (IBEKA). IBEKA has successfully captured the zeitgeist around social entrepreneurship by powering rural communities in Indonesia with renewable energy through its "community-based power supply" approach. By harnessing wind, water, solar, and biogas power as well as training locals to operate and manage micro-hydro power plants themselves, IBEKA has changed the lives of half a million people living in remote communities.

Other past events like the ASEAN Forum on Social Entrepreneurship in October 2014, ASEAN Conference on Social Entrepreneurship in July 2016, the Young ASEAN Plus Three Social Entrepreneurs in Action in February 2018, and the ASEAN Plus Three Conference on Social Enterprises in March 2019, have created a platform for social enterprises, corporations, and governments to join hands in learning and sharing experiences, discuss the opportunities and challenges for collaboration, and engage in wider dialogue. As a result of the ASEAN Conference on Social Entrepreneurship, three collaborative projects between ASEAN-based social enterprises encapsulating the food and agriculture, culture and tourism, and health and disability sectors were launched at its Project Showcase in October 2016. Among them, "Map for Good: Follow the Impact Trail" was jointly designed by six social enterprises from Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, and Singapore to identify and map out different social enterprises in ASEAN member states for the benefit of conscientious travellers seeking to patronise businesses with a mission to do good.

Many ASEAN member states have taken action to protect the sector and create favourable conditions for social entrepreneurs. In Singapore, the Ministry of Social and Family Development, the National Council of Social Service, and the Singapore Centre for Social Enterprise (raiSE) help social enterprises looking to set up or expand their businesses by regularly organising workshops and connecting budding social entrepreneurs with a network of experts. A similar trajectory can be charted in Thailand, where the Thai Social Enterprise Office (TSEO) was set up in 2010 to push for supportive policies and provide consultations to social enterprises. In 2014, Vietnam revised its Enterprise Law to include a definition of social enterprises, thereby recognising their role in stimulating economic growth. The Philippines proposed the Poverty Reduction Through Social Entrepreneurship Bill in 2018, while Malaysia launched the Malaysian Social Enterprise Blueprint in 2015, a three-year roadmap aimed at developing the social sector.

Social enterprises create manifold opportunities and safety nets for developing economies, narrowing the chasm between them and their developed counterparts by offering financial security and a sense of empowerment for disadvantaged persons and vulnerable communities. Social enterprises are more than just a passing fad. By affording these ventures the recognition they deserve, steering policy efforts to build a positive environment for their growth, and spreading the good word, their impact and influence can be increased across multiple levels.

Ms. Anuthida Saelaow Qian is Research Officer at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. Ms. Moe Thuzar and Mr. Teo Ang Guan provided research assistance for this article.

Eastern Seas GK Village, a Gawad Kalinga residential project in Mindanao

Gawad Kalinga Mindanao@Facebook

ASEAN in Figures

ASEAN's Many Bright Spots

ASEAN's Demography[1]

660.7 million

#1 Indonesia — 270.6 million
#2 Philippines — 108.1 million
#3 Vietnam — 96.5 million

50.4%
Productive working age group of 20-45 years old.

34.5%
Below 20 years old.

US$2.92 trillion

3rd largest in Asia

5th largest in the World

ASEAN's GDP in 2018.[2]

450%
ASEAN's GDP expansion from 2000 to 2017.[1]

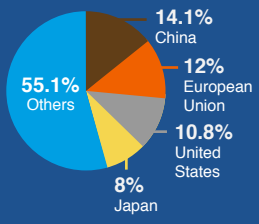
Top 10 largest economies in the world based on GDP in 2018 (in US$ trillion): [2]

1. United States — 20.5
2. China — 13.4
3. Japan — 5.0
4. Germany — 4.0
5. ASEAN — 2.9
6. United Kingdom — 2.8
7. France — 2.8
8. India — 2.7
9. Italy — 2.1
10. Brazil — 1.9

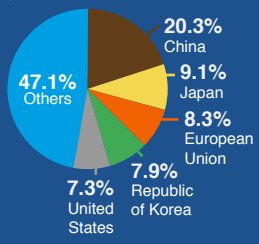
World's Most Populous Cities in Southeast Asia[8]

- 18th Jakarta (10,042,200)
- 28th Ho Chi Minh City (8,247,800)
- 40th Bangkok (5,686,600)
- 41st Singapore (5,607,300)

Largest external markets for ASEAN exports in 2017[1]



Largest external markets for ASEAN imports in 2017[1]



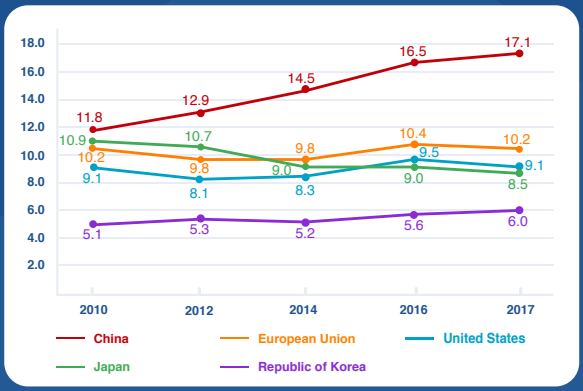
US$790 billion

US$2,574 billion

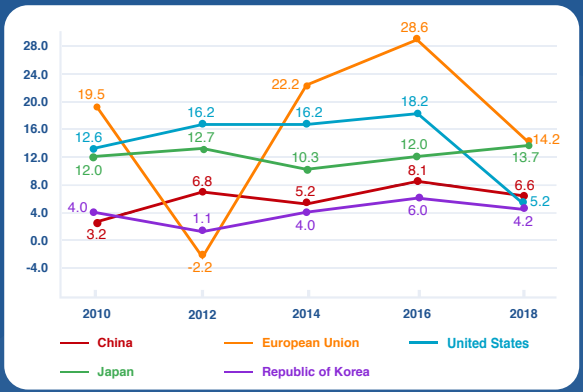
ASEAN's total merchandise trade from 2000 to 2017.[1]

US$154.7 billion
Recorded amount of FDI inflows to the ASEAN region in 2018.[1]

Share of ASEAN's Top 5 Trading Partners in 2010-2017 (in percentage)[1]



Share of ASEAN's Top 5 FDI Sources in 2010-2018 (in percentage)[1]

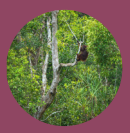


Unique ASEAN Landmarks[3]

Mekong River:
World's 12th and Southeast Asia's Longest River, 4,300 km long, rises on the Tibetan Plateau and flows through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam before emptying into the South China Sea.

Hkakabo Razi, Myanmar:
Highest Mountain in Southeast Asia, with an elevation of 19,295 feet (5,881 meters), in the northern Myanmar state of Kachin in the Greater Himalayan mountain range.

Son Doong Cave (Mountain River Cave) in Quang Binh Province of Vietnam is the **World's Largest Natural Cave,** created 2-5 million years ago, with 200m wide, 150m high, and approximately 9km long.



Borneo Lowland Rainforest, Indonesia:
2nd oldest rainforest in the world, 130-140 million years, 165,000 square miles, and is home to over 600 different species of birds and 10 species of primates.

Borobudur Temple, Java, Indonesia:
World's Biggest Buddhist Monument built in the 9th century AD, covers an enormous area of 123x123 meters and decorated with 2,672 relief panels and 504 Buddha statues.

Kuthodaw Pagoda, Myanmar built in 1857 at the foot of Mandalay Hill is dubbed the **World's Largest Book** as it houses 729 marble slabs inscribed with Buddhist teachings set around the Pagoda.

Istiqlal Mosque, Jakarta, Indonesia: Southeast Asia's Largest Mosque, opened to public in 1978, has 45m diameter dome and tall minarets, and can accommodate congregations of up to 120,000 people.

The Second Penang Bridge in Malaysia is currently **the longest bridge in Southeast Asia** (24km). This title will be taken by Temburong cross-sea bridge in Brunei (30 km) upon completion in November 2019.

The University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila, the Philippines, is **Asia's Oldest Existing University**, established in 1611.

Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, founded in 1993, is the only museum in the region devoted to exploring artistic the heritage of Asia.

(Compiled from various sources)

World's Best Airport 2019[4]

1st Singapore Changi
46th Bangkok Suvarnabhumi
86th Hanoi Noi Bai
40th Jakarta
54th Kuala Lumpur

Singapore's Changi Airport[5]

WORLD'S BEST AIRPORT 2019 (SKYTRAX)

more than **120** airlines | **380** cities | **100** countries

7,400 flights land in/depart from Changi a week.

65.6 million passengers pass through Changi a year.

Internet & Social Media Use in Southeast Asia in 2019[13]

415 million Internet users

402 million Monthly active social media users

World's Heaviest Internet Users (Time per day spent using the internet)[13]

10 hours 2 mins	1st Filipinos
9 hours 11 mins	3rd Thais
8 hours 36 mins	5th Indonesians

World's Heaviest Social Media Users (Time per day spent using social media)[13]

4 hours 12 mins	1st Filipinos
3 hours 26 mins	4th Indonesians
3 hours 11 mins	8th Thais

ASEAN Ports[6]

- ASEAN has 127 international ports as of 2017.
- Singapore is the busiest port in the region, followed by Port Klang and Tanjung Pelepas in Malaysia.

World's Most Tourist-friendly Countries[10]

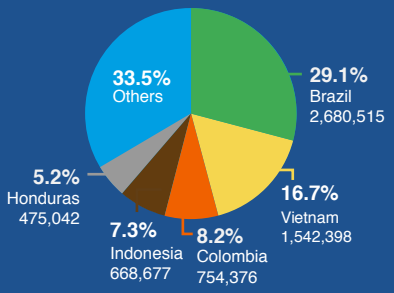
13th Singapore
26th Malaysia
34th Thailand
42nd Indonesia
67th Vietnam
79th Philippines
94th Laos
101st Cambodia

125.5 million

Total number of visitor arrivals to ASEAN in 2017, an increase of **220.7%** compared to 2000.[1]

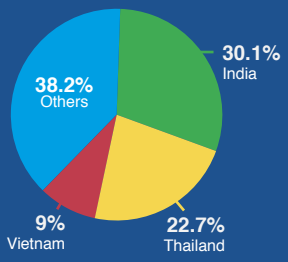
World's Top 5 Coffee Producing Countries in 2017[11]

*Share of World's Production (%)/ Production Quantity (tonnes)



World's Top Rice Exporters in 2018[12]

*Share of Global Rice Exports



Top 10 ASEAN universities in the 2019 QS Rankings for Asia[7]

ASEAN Rank	Asia Rank	Institution
1	1	National University of Singapore
2	3	Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
3	19	Universiti Malaya, Malaysia
4	34	Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia
5	41	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia
6	43	Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia
7	44	Chulalongkorn University, Thailand
8	47	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia
9	52	Mahidol University, Thailand
10	57	Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

Among the World's Top 100 Tallest Completed Buildings, 5 are from ASEAN countries.[9]

12th Vincom Landmark 81 in Ho Chi Minh City (461.3m)

56th Four Seasons Place in Kuala Lumpur (342.5m)

100th Magnolias Waterfront Residences Tower 1 in Bangkok (315m)

14th Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur (451.9m)

76th Keangnam Hanoi Landmark Tower in Hanoi (328.6m)

1 ASEAN Secretariat. **2** IMF. **3** Compiled from various sources.
4 Skytrax, World Airport Awards. **5** Changi Airport Group.
6 ASEAN Secretariat Facebook. **7** QS Top Universities. **8** WorldData.info.
9 The Skyscraper Center. **10** Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017.
11 FAOSTAT. **12** WTEx. **13** We Are Social and Hootsuite 2019.
Images obtained from royalty-free open sources.

Insider Views

From Personal Pain to Regional Advocacy

Erlinda Uy Koe – winner of the inaugural ASEAN Prize – shares her story of advocacy for autism awareness and support in ASEAN.

AF: What inspired you to start your journey of advocating for autism awareness and support?

UY KOE: This is a very personal journey for me. My first son, Gio (now 25), was diagnosed with autism at 2 years and 7 months. My husband and I then looked for older children in the spectrum so we can learn from their families in raising Gio. That's when we found the Autism Society Philippines (ASP) – a national not-for-profit organisation for families living with autism. We realised that "it takes a village to raise a child", specially one with special needs. Then and now, I strongly believe in and actively support the ASP's vision: an environment that empowers persons with autism spectrum disorder to become, to the best of their potentials, self-reliant, productive, independent and socially-accepted members of an Autism-OK Philippines. The advocacy has evolved from mere awareness to acceptance, accommodation and appreciation of people like my own Gio.

AF: Could you give us an overview of the prevalence of autism in the ASEAN region?

UY KOE: We are looking at more than 6 million people, and families, living with autism across the region. The number is based on studies of the US' Center for Disease Control and Prevention that identified 1-2% average prevalence of autism. As the *ASEAN Post* reported in March this year, there are difficulties in collecting information on autism prevalence and a lack of awareness among many rural communities. In this regard, the ASEAN Autism Mapping project was launched recently to provide data on the existing autism situation with a view to enhancing policy and program development for persons with autism in the region.

Ms. Erlinda Uy Koe receiving the ASEAN Prize at the Opening Ceremony of the 33rd ASEAN Summit in 2018

AF: What were some of your most memorable experiences being part of the ASP and the ASEAN Autism Network (AAN)?

UY KOE: I have so many memorable experiences, including the ASP's annual Angels Walk for Autism which has gathered 24,000 people as of this year, many of whom are families, partners and supporters of persons with autism. It is heartening to see autism families as one big community working for an Autism-OK Philippines. I have had opportunities to touch base with ASP chapter leaders, now 97 nationwide, and witness how they can do so much with so little for the autism community. At times, I was choking with emotion seeing how our children with autism have matured, the triumphant faces of those who graduated from college, got employed, got to vote, got recognised for their talents, and the confidence of the new ASP Self-Advocates Circle, Inc to speak for themselves.

Through the AAN, an Autism-OK Philippines expanded to an Autism-OK ASEAN before my eyes. I have had the chance to engage with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), and gained precious friends from the ASP to the AAN. There were very touching moments when I witnessed players with autism during the ASEAN Autism Games, their parents/teachers/caregivers running with them, devising ways and means for them to reach the finish line, and the crowd cheering and applauding not just the winners, but the last ones to complete the race. And yes, the special and proud moments when I stood beside former Philippine President Benigno Aquino Jr. in 2013 and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in 2018 to represent the accomplishments of the ASP and the AAN.

AF: What was the inspiration behind the ASEAN Autism Games initiative?

UY KOE: Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stipulates their rights to participate in recreational, leisure and sporting activities, and cultural life. And yet, persons with autism had been excluded from international sports events. The AAN then decided to organise autism-specific sporting and recreational activities. In 2016, the ASP took up the responsibility of holding the first ASEAN Autism Games (AAG), which inspired the other AAN members to host the AAG in the subsequent years. The AAG has been held biennially since 2016 and we are looking towards its third iteration in 2020 in Malaysia.

AF: Could you share with us the positive impacts that this event has brought to its participants and to autism advocacy in the region?

UY KOE: The AAG is walking the talk of "leaving no one behind." While there are competition games for the potential athletes, there are also autism-friendly games so everyone in the autism spectrum can join. The Games demonstrate that given the opportunity and appropriate support, persons with autism are capable of actively participating in sports, leisure and recreation. The AAG also promotes collaboration, understanding and acceptance of different cultures among persons with autism, their parents and supporters across the ASEAN region, and even Japan. The Games attract media attention which helps increase public autism awareness and acceptance. Furthermore, the attendance of government leaders in the event provides us with lobbying opportunities for needed government support for the autism sector. The AAG has even paved the way for airlines and airports to become autism-friendly.

AF: What does winning the ASEAN Prize mean to you?

UY KOE: For the inaugural ASEAN Prize to be awarded to a family autism advocacy, it goes a long way in showing that the ASEAN Community has embraced inclusion for persons with autism and other special needs. I am but a servant leader. The recognition goes to the more than 13,000 fellow parents and family members who comprise the ASP, and countless other advocates from the AAN's ten member countries. All of us work hard to engineer institutional mechanisms for the acceptance, accommodation and appreciation of people in the autism spectrum.

AF: How has winning the ASEAN Prize impacted your work, especially the programs and services under the ASP?

UY KOE: Obtaining visibility in ASEAN is important to a national organisation like the ASP, and to the rest of the AAN members: SMARTER Brunei, Cambodia Autism Network, Yayasan Autisma Indonesia, Association for Autism Laos, National Autism Society of Malaysia, Myanmar Autism Association, Autism Network Singapore, The Parents Association of Thai Persons with Autism and Vietnam Autism Network. The recognition helps open doors locally because policy-makers now know that our autism advocacy is a regional and global priority.

AF: On a regional level, what are the biggest challenges to promoting autism awareness and acceptance?

UY KOE: The biggest challenge is securing government support, which includes funding. For early intervention, we need the following programs/services: diagnosis, special education, therapies, community-based programs, home-based programs, inclusive education in regular schools, parent education, and of course the availability of doctors, therapists, teachers and social workers to implement these. For the growing maturing population of ASEAN citizens with autism, we need employment and livelihood opportunities, and group homes for independent/supervised living after their parents are gone. With limited resources and lack of sustainable funding, all AAN member organisations have to cope with many challenges regarding the succession of leaders both at the national and local levels, maintaining member volunteerism and advocacy, resource manpower quantity and competency, and donor prospecting and acquisition.

AF: Have the ASP and AAN been engaging with ASEAN frameworks to support persons with autism and their families?

UY KOE: Yes! As we wait for the ASEAN accreditation of the AAN expected by the end of this year, the ASEAN Autism Mapping project is already ongoing and expected to be completed by next year. Through the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability, the ASEAN Secretariat also extended its support to the AAN in the ASEAN Autism Games 2018 in Jakarta, conduct of Training of Trainers for Inclusive Development in Sports Program in Laos and Bangkok this year, and in the publication of reports for these programs. On top of that, a memorandum of understanding on employment of persons with autism is now being finalised between the ASEAN Foundation and AAN partner London School Beyond Academy.

ASEAN partners joining Angels Walk for Autism

AF: What are your suggestions for the mainstreaming of autism intervention in ASEAN agenda in the future?

UY KOE: We know that the ASEAN Secretariat can link us up with different sectors to tap partners and resources for projects like community-based rehabilitation, home-based interventions, parent training and those I mentioned earlier. We hope and pray that the ASEAN Secretariat will continue to support the AAN to become a platform for autism-related family support groups in ASEAN member countries to collaborate and coordinate in developing non-discriminatory strategies and intervention programs in support of families living with autism, especially those who are economically challenged.

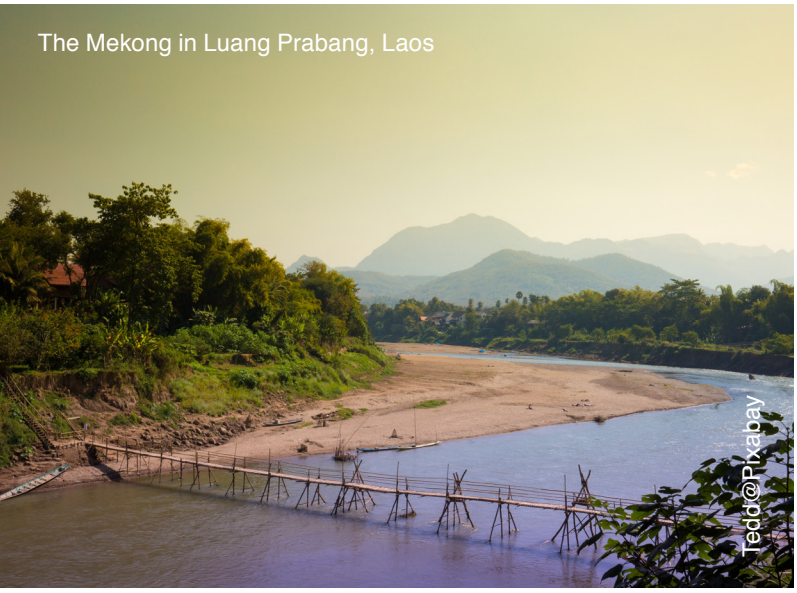
Ms. Erlinda Uy Koe has been at the forefront of family-centric autism advocacy in the Philippines and in the region for 22 years. She was the recipient of the Philippines' Apolinario Mabini Award, as the nation's Outstanding Rehabilitation Volunteer in 2013, and the winner of the inaugural ASEAN Prize in 2018. She was the chair of the ASEAN Autism Network in 2016-2018, and is currently the Chair Emeritus of the Autism Society Philippines while working full-time as Vice President of Abraham Holdings, Inc.

Sights and Sounds

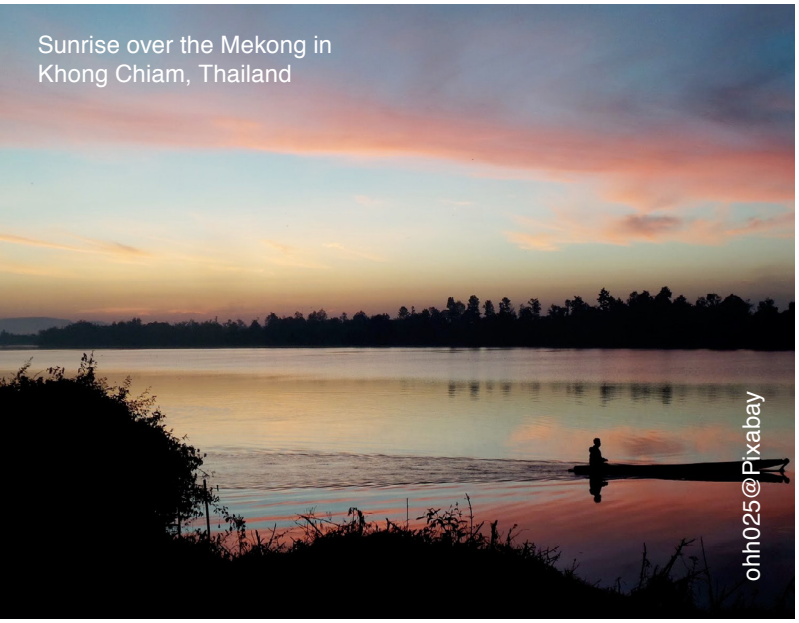
The Mekong: Mother of Life

Glenn Ong explores the connections and divides that characterise the Mekong River.

Beginning in the frigid heights of the Tibetan Plateau's Lasagongma Springs, the Mekong threads through the modern nation-states of China, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, before finally unravelling into the South China Sea. True to its name – which means "Mother of Life" in Lao – the Mekong provides sustenance to more than 70 million people, and its biodiversity is second only to that of the Amazon. Weaving together diverse polities since ancient times, the Mekong has played no small part in fashioning the rich tapestry of the region today: it is a microcosm of the intricate patchwork that is mainland Southeast Asia. Uneven though its course may be, the river has for centuries been of uniform importance to the region's many inhabitants.


The Mekong in Luang Prabang, Laos

Tedd@Pixabay


Sunrise over the Mekong in Khong Chiam, Thailand

ohh025@Pixabay

The southbound journey down the Mekong begins when the frozen, blue-tinted spring waters of Lasagongma melt into the Za Qu riverhead, which meander into the Lancang River – the Chinese moniker for the Mekong. From Yunnan, the waters hurtle for more than 2,000 kilometres before finally reaching the town of Houayxay in Laos, its beautiful landscape a perfect backdrop for outdoor adventures like biking, hiking, and kayaking. The Chomkao Manilat Temple, nestled atop a small hill at the centre of Houayxay, offers a breathtaking view of the Mekong on one side and of Thailand on the other. Indeed, drawn to the allure of the river and its surrounding communities, thousands of tourists flock to travel companies like Avalon Waterways and Grasshopper Adventures for curated yet authentic experiences from their Mekong cruise tours or bike tours.

Traversing down the river and deeper into the heart of mainland Southeast Asia, the serenity of Houayxay gradually gives way to the vibrant greenery of Luang Prabang. The city's name, meaning "Royal Buddha Image", is located in the mountainous terrain of northern Laos. 32 of Luang Prabang's 58 villages were designated UNESCO Heritage Sites for being "outstanding example[s] of the fusion of traditional architecture and Lao urban structures with those built by the European colonial authorities". Hugging the riverbank is the French colonial era Royal Palace. The palace-turned-museum features an amalgamation of Lao and French architectural styles, and – like much of Luang Prabang – is a testament to and a product of the transnational flows and connections of a region that stands at the crossroads of empire and globalisation.

Further downstream but still along the Laotian riverbank, Luang Prabang's luscious foliage yields to the urban dwellings of Vientiane – the capital city and economic nucleus of Laos – where life revolves around the river. Sitting on the riverbank, one can easily see Thailand's Nong Khai province on the other side. Bereft of formal border demarcations, it is not uncommon to see Laotians and tourists swimming in the Mekong or frolicking on its sandy waterfront. The waters here are so calm, and the twilight so charming, that a sunset walk along the waterfront has become a daily ritual for locals and visitors alike. As night falls, the riverside night market bursts to life as locals peddle their wares in buoyant spirits. Eager diners flock to waterfront restaurants boasting exquisite Laotian delights, as they bask in the balmy evening breeze coming from the river to the tune of oldies from the 1980s.

Journeying further down the Mekong takes one to Thailand's northeastern province of Nakhon Phanom. The province is renowned for the Lai Reua Fai Festival, an illuminated boat procession. Every October on the night of the full moon, temple communities around the province converge at the Mekong to celebrate the Wan Ok Phansa, a spiritual retreat observed by many Theravada Buddhists. Worshippers release giant bamboo rafts decked with flowers, candles, incense sticks, and lanterns. As the Mekong glistens with the lustre of these luminous boats, the city's skyline roars to life with the crackling of fireworks.

Nakhon Phanom is home to the Wat Okat Si Bua Ban, a sacred old temple that "houses two revered Buddha images", the Phra Tio and the Phra Thiam. From the Mekong, one is greeted by a riverbank adorned with the Wat Okat's distinct white walls and ornate golden spires. Indeed, all throughout the riverbank across several countries, colourful temples representing a variety of religions dot the Mekong's vibrant waterscape. The constant sight of such temples confers a sense of comfort and familiarity, all while highlighting the diversity that characterises the region.

Following the Mekong's trajectory and zipping by several of Thailand's national parks, one is brought before the majesty of Cambodia's Wat Hanchey. The holy site, perched on a hill and home to several ancient Hindu and Buddhist temples, is situated right at the bank of the Mekong. The Wat Hanchey's medley of red, white, and gold structures is a feast for the eyes and provides a striking contrast to the surrounding greenery and watery landscape.

Moving downstream and along the river of time, many Cambodians will be found commemorating the Bon Om Touk water festival on the full moon of the Buddhist month of Kadeuk, usually in mid-November. The festival celebrates the reversal of flow between the Tonle Sap and the Mekong, which happens during the rainy season every June. For three days, as many as a million Cambodians partake in boat races, parades, and carnivals to express their gratitude to the waters that shore up the country's farming and fishing industries. The festivities climax in the capital city of Phnom Penh, where exuberant crowds throng the Sisowath Quay along the Mekong to cheer on the boat races and marvel at the fireworks. Such water festivals are not unique to Thailand or Cambodia; the Mekong is a source of life for many peoples along its course, and rituals celebrating its significance are ubiquitous throughout the region.

The last leg of the journey ushers one to the Mekong Delta region of southwestern Vietnam, where the river splinters into multiple distributaries as the Mekong discharges into the sea. With its booming agricultural industries supplying half of Vietnam's rice and fish, the delta is the "rice basket" of the country. One of the delta's most popular attractions is the city of My Tho, located in the northern delta province of Tien Giang. The waters surrounding My Tho are home to a dizzying array of floating markets, while the land is festooned with intricate pagodas and fruit orchards.


Wat Hanchey by the Mekong

Visitcambodia.org


Water Festival in Cambodia

ASEAN-Korea Centre


Floating market by the Mekong in Vietnam

Quangpraha@Pixabay

Alternatively, make a stop at the Vietnamese city of Soc Trang, located along one of the Mekong's southern distributaries and home to the largest Khmer diaspora outside of Cambodia. The diverse population has spawned a syncretic cultural composition, as evidenced by the city's eclectic pagodas and festivals. To be sure, this community is but a microcosm of the pre-modern migration flux among the communities lining the Mekong. In the 10th month of the lunar calendar, the Vietnamese Khmers organise the annual Ooc Om Boc Festival to "thank the moon god for good crops of rice and abundant catches of fish, and to celebrate the end of the Khmer year". Visitors are treated to a spectacle of boat races, dances, and musical performances. At the delta's tail, the Mekong merges into the sea, blurring the lines that delineate where Southeast Asia ends and the world begins.


The Mekong Delta in Vietnam

G. Smith@Flickr


Fishermen by the Mekong

Quangpraha@Pixabay

This narrative of connections notwithstanding, the Mekong was not always a medium that facilitated transnational flows. Contemporary tourism belies the historical reality that the river has divided just as it has connected mainland Southeast Asia. Spanning 4,350 km and with a drainage basin the size of Mozambique, the Mekong is the world's 12th longest river and Asia's seventh largest. A myriad of rapids and waterfalls lie in wait to ambush unsuspecting travellers, and navigation conditions continue to vary extensively along its length. Given its colossal expanse and feral nature, the river was said to have demarcated rather than united the overlapping frontiers of pre-modern Southeast Asian kingdoms. The advent of European imperialism, along with French attempts to conquer and control the Mekong, ensured that the river was swept up in a turbulent history of conflict just as it entwined the fates of Southeast Asia and the West.

This story of turbulence still entangles the fortunes of the peoples along the Mekong. While peace has generally prevailed in its vicinity, the river has witnessed the presence of new fault-lines as natural disasters and contested damming projects continue to affect the well-being of many who inhabit its coasts. Acts of God aside, emerging geopolitical divides and developments are fragmenting the Mekong's ecosystem in ways that riparian communities exercise little control over. As the father of the protagonist in Vaddey Ratner's bestselling *In the Shadow of the Banyan* remarks, "'Life is like that.' Papa turned once again to the Mekong. 'Everything is connected, and sometimes we, like little fishes, are swept up in these big and powerful currents. Carried far from home…'" Indeed, the Mekong evokes emotions as conflicted as its meandering course – harsh and calm, bountiful yet turbulent.

The Mekong River provides a prism with which to glimpse panoramic snapshots of the region across space and time. It is a complex tale of connections and divisions, consolidation and fragmentation. With all its natural and political ebbs and flows, the Mekong has acquired a unique centrality in the lives of many mainland Southeast Asians. It is – and will continue to be – the mother of life in the region. As the American author Tucker Elliot reflects in his memoir, *The Rainy Season*, "No matter the border, the Mekong has been an indiscriminate giver and taker of life in Southeast Asia for thousands of years".

Mr. Glenn Ong is Research Officer at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Sights and Sounds

The Eastern and Oriental Express: Luxury Hotel on Wheels

Thiviya Sri and **Anuthida Saelaow Qian** take us on a timeless journey aboard the Eastern and Oriental Express.

There is nothing quite like travelling by rail, looking out of the window as the world passes by and feeling the rush of fresh air against your skin. While modern air travel has made jetting off between Southeast Asian destinations in just a matter of hours possible, a lesser-known alternative to the stress and strain of airports and planes in the region presents itself in the form of a luxurious and romantic train journey: The Eastern and Oriental Express.

As an elegant bastion of a bygone time, the Eastern and Oriental Express has stood as a symbol of connectivity that links Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore for the last quarter of a century. Setting foot onboard is like stepping back in time, when travelling was a leisurely affair and the journey was as essential to the entire experience as the destination. A sister train to Europe's Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, the Eastern and Oriental Express has a truly worldly past. Originally built in Japan and used in New Zealand throughout the 1970s, its train carriages were brought to Southeast Asia in 1990 to provide a welcome oasis to travellers looking to slow down and recharge in style. Prior to its inception, passengers had to utilise separate railway networks in Malaysia and Thailand to travel between the two countries until an agreement signed in 1991 allowed for a single train to connect Bangkok and Singapore. In September 1993, the Eastern and Oriental Express set off on its maiden voyage, travelling a total of 2,030 kilometres.

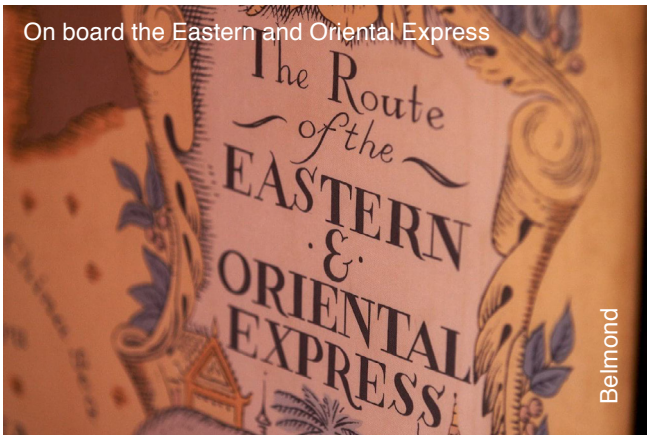
The experience that the Eastern and Oriental Express has to offer is nothing but unique. As the last carriage door shuts and the train whistles off the station, one is immediately transported back to the golden age of rail travel. Melding an elegant colonial aesthetic with the essence of Indochina, the cabins are distinctively lavish with elaborate marquetry and tasteful trimmings. The very best from Southeast Asia's treasure trove of textiles are on display in the cabin's upholstery and drapery, which feature exquisite Thai silk and delicate Malaysian embroidery. Passengers are also welcomed with various delights and entertainment offerings showcasing the region's flavours and diversity, so that not a minute on board could afford to be dull. An open-concept observation car offers an unobstructed view of the surrounding scenery, allowing one to watch as Southeast Asia's varied and beautiful landscapes flit by, almost close enough to touch. As the train chugs on, metropolitan cityscapes flatten into quaint fishing villages, lush tropical wetlands, vast crop plantations, and rolling rice paddies, promising a new spectacle at every turn.

The Eastern and Oriental Express in Chiang Mai, Thailand

FredTC@Wikimedia

The Eastern and Oriental Express on the move

Isabella Cai@Unsplash



On board the Eastern and Oriental Express

Plush upholstery and elegant touches in the train cabins

Bridge over the River Kwai

Rice farmers in Thailand

A world of luxury and sophistication awaits discerning travellers with a selection of tours starting at a cool US$2,400. The three-day, three-night Classic Journey begins in the bustling city of Bangkok. Before heading down to Southern Thailand, take a detour to the small town of Kanchanaburi, where its earth is rich with gems and its architecture full of history. Visit the iconic River Kwai Bridge, also known as "the Death Railway", which has been in operation since the Second World War. This 300-metre long bridge was built by Japan's prisoners of war to connect Burma to Thailand for improved transport and communication during the war. Every year in late November, locals celebrate the River Kwai Bridge Festival, which recalls the history of the bridge and honours the fallen through a Sound and Light Show.

The Eastern and Oriental Express meanders through rural areas of Thailand, giving a glimpse into local life away from the bustle of Bangkok. Just 200 miles south of the Thai capital, the small coastal town of Huai Yang comes alive after sunset when the sea is illuminated by the lanterns of fishing boats. This quiet town is well-known for its white sandy beaches and the popular Huai Yang Waterfall National Park, which features a spellbinding seven-tier cascading waterfall of the same namesake. Every tier offers a different opportunity to bask in nature's glory, from a breathtaking panoramic view of the Gulf of Thailand to an array of wildlife like the Indochinese serow, leopard, and langur.

Further afield, the Eastern and Oriental Express route gives occasional insights to Thailand's massive rice farming industry. If you are lucky, you might be able to exchange greetings with farmers as they tend to their paddy fields. These unsung heroes that toil on some 9.2 million hectares of cultivated land have made Thailand one of the world's leading rice exporters. Past these verdant fields, the Eastern and Oriental Express travels through Southeast Asia's lush tropical rainforests. Part of the Earth's oldest existing tropical ecosystems, and also among the most biologically diverse, these rainforests are home to many endangered plant and animal species such as the Bengal tiger, the proboscis monkey, and the silvery gibbon.

The last stop in Thailand takes passengers to the coastal province of Surat Thani. Known in Thai as the "City of Good People" and also called "the province of a thousand islands", this landscape is home to unique rock structures and famous for fun water activities. The clear waters surrounding Koh Pha-Ngan are perfect for snorkelling and diving, and often leave visitors in awe at the lush marine life surrounding the islands.

Bidding farewell to Thailand, the Eastern and Oriental Express next cruises down to Butterworth, Penang, its first stop in Malaysia. The UNESCO heritage city of George Town in Penang Island is only a short ferry ride away, where visitors can feast their eyes and tastebuds on a rich mix of different distinct cultures. The "Straits eclectic style", which blends the influence of the British with

Malaysian, Indian, and Chinese elements, is apparent in George Town's ubiquitous shophouses. While indulging in famous hawker fare like char koay teow and assam laksa, visitors can also admire the architecture of old buildings dotted around the city, such as colonial structures and various places of worship.

Before reaching its final destination at Singapore, the Eastern and Oriental Express makes a stop in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. These iconic cities need no introduction with their eclectic offerings of shops, food joints, and activities forming a fascinating cosmopolitan smorgasbord. In Kuala Lumpur, passengers can opt to uncover Malaysia's illustrious history and culture by embarking on a heritage trail of Merdeka Square, Masjid Jamek, and Sin Sze Si Ya Temple, or experience local life by browsing the sprawling stalls in Pudu Wet Market and Chinatown on Petaling Street.

The once-in-a-lifetime journey comes to an end as the train crosses the causeway over the Straits of Johor and leisurely rolls into Woodlands Train Checkpoint in Singapore. As passengers disembark the train, they are spoilt for choice by the panoply of attractions ranging from strolling down glitzy Orchard Road to relaxing by the Singapore River. The city-state is the perfect bookend to cap off an incredible trip, leaving travellers with unforgettable memories of their journey, refreshed and ready to set off on the next leg of their travels.

Every moment on board the Eastern and Oriental Express is as charming and magical as the region itself, making the sights and sounds outside only half the journey. With a different experience offered at every stop of the way, the Eastern and Oriental Express gives a first-hand look into the myriad faces of Southeast Asia. This luxury hotel on wheels has continued to connect the region for decades, rewarding its passengers with an extraordinary chance to explore the best of Southeast Asia on land. As Agatha Christie enthused, "To travel by train is to see nature and human beings, towns and churches and rivers – in fact, to see life".

Ms. Thiviya Sri was an intern and **Ms. Anuthida Saelaow Qian** is Research Officer at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Masjid Jamek in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

elwynn@Shutterstock

View of Singapore's skyline at night

Larry Teo@Unsplash

ASEAN Studies Centre

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE

Philippine Eagle

Pithecophaga jefferyi

Numbers remaining in the wild:
Estimated to be in the hundreds (fewer than 500)

Status: Critically Endangered
Found in four islands in the Philippines - Luzon, Samar, Leyte and Mindanao

The Philippine Eagle is considered the most powerful amongst forest raptors with broad wingspans of 2.1 metres. At a height of one metre, the Philippine Eagle is among the largest eagles in the world. Its physical features allow it to swoop down at a high speed and hunt on smaller mammals such as bats and monkeys. Due to its rapidly declining population over the past 40 years, the Philippine Eagle was named the National Bird of the Philippines in 1995. The Philippine Eagle faces serious threats from deforestation and other human activities such as hunting. It is classified as Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, and listed on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

(Sources: BirdLife International, IUCN)