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ASEAN Focus



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The 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 Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (NSC) and the Singapore APEC Study Centre.

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August has always been a momentous month for ASEAN with celebrations of the ASEAN Day – 8 August – as well as the National Days of Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. This year’s celebrations carry even greater significance as it marks the 50th anniversary of ASEAN. From its humble origins as a five-country grouping to the ten-member multi-pillar and multi-sectoral institution today, ASEAN has grown in leaps and bounds to become one of the more successful regional organisations in the world. Although not without its imperfections, ASEAN has become the best platform for Southeast Asian nations to realise their aspirations for cooperation, security, prosperity and engagement with the world at large. We are pleased to have Ambassador Barry Desker reflect on the road to achieving the ASEAN Community thus far and the many obstacles that remain, and Mr. Jason Salim assess the value of ASEAN’s open skies in building a tighter-knit community for the people in the region.

As ASEAN celebrates this milestone, the world that surrounds it is witnessing tectonic changes that come with both opportunities and uncertainties. China’s Belt and Road Initiative is rolling out robustly in parts of Southeast Asia while Japan is also in the game with its Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure. In this issue, Ms. Agatha Kratz and Dr. Dragan Pavličević give us a comparative analysis of both countries’ rail diplomacy in Southeast Asia.

As the region has to contend with brewing troubles in the Taiwan Straits and the Korean Peninsula, there was a positive development in the South China Sea, with ASEAN and China eventually agreeing on the Framework of the Code of Conduct as a basis for future formal negotiations. Ms. Hoang Thi Ha analyses some of these developments coming out of the recently concluded 50th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM) and related meetings in Manila, the Philippines.

This festive August also commemorates important landmarks in ASEAN external relations, including the 40th anniversary of ASEAN-Canada, ASEAN-EU, and ASEAN-US dialogue relations. It is therefore a positive gesture by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte to invite the EU and Canada’s leaders to attend the November East Asia Summit as Guests of the Chair. In this connection, we are delighted to feature in *Insider Views* the perspective on EU’s future engagement with ASEAN by Ms. Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission.

Continuing with our *Outlook at 50* series, we focus on the demographic issues facing the region. Professor Jean Yeung gives us an overview of current population trends in Southeast Asia. Ms. Moe Thuzar and Dr. Lee Hock Guan respectively analyse both ends of the population spectrum – the young and the elderly – and their impacts on the region. We supplement these with statistics on the region’s populations in *ASEAN in Figures*.

To add to a packed month for ASEAN, athletes across the region will converge in Kuala Lumpur from 19-30 August for the 29th Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games). Our *Know Your ASEAN* segment features the history and interesting facts of this important event, including proud achievements of some of the most illustrious sportsmen and sportswomen of Southeast Asia. For *People and Places*, we introduce you to Filipino singer Arnel Pineda and the Vimanmek Mansion at the heart of Bangkok.

In addition to accessing *ASEANFocus* on the ISEAS website as well as at all public libraries in Singapore, we invite you to pick up a copy of the publication from Singapore Airlines’ First Class, Business Class and KrisFlyer Gold lounges at Singapore Changi International Airport’s Terminals 2 and 3.

From the ASEAN Studies Centre, we wish all ASEAN people a very happy 50th anniversary. We also wish all our sporting heroes a successful SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur. ■

Striving to Stay United

HOANG THI HA gives her take on what transpired at the recent 50th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting and related meetings.

As ASEAN Foreign Ministers gathered in Manila from 5-8 August for the 50th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) and related meetings, which auspiciously coincided with ASEAN's golden jubilee, their top priority was to preserve the grouping's unity in dealing with major security challenges and geostrategic uncertainty in the region. For this reason, the Ministers convened two informal retreats during the AMM to coordinate ASEAN common positions.

These hands-on efforts reaped dividends, as manifested in the AMM's outcome documents. A strong ASEAN statement was issued on the developments in the Korean Peninsula following the two intercontinental ballistic missiles tests by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 4 and 28 July. The statement for the first time reminded Pyongyang to live up to the objectives of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to which it is a participant.

Nevertheless, ASEAN made the right call in not taking up the issue of the DPRK's ARF membership since it would only further isolate Pyongyang while being of little effect in persuading the country to denuclearise. It also goes against

ASEAN's credo of engagement and dialogue. Instead of burning the bridge with Pyongyang, ASEAN has used its convening power to build bridges, as seen in a flurry of bilateral meetings between the parties concerned on the sidelines of the ARF. Unfortunately, there was no bilateral meeting between the US and DPRK foreign ministers. The current war of words between Washington and Pyongyang highlights the urgency to bridge this glaring absence of communications.

On the South China Sea (SCS) issue, internal negotiations for an ASEAN common position were more intense, with Vietnam now leading the charge. Eventually, a spirit of compromise helped preserve ASEAN unity by returning to the middle-way approach of last year's AMM. While recognising the improving cooperation between ASEAN and China, the Joint Communique reiterated the principle of non-militarisation and voiced concerns over land reclamations and other tension-raising activities in the SCS. It reinstates a balanced and principled ASEAN position on the SCS which has drifted away since early this year.

Against this backdrop, what does the future hold for the Code of Conduct in the SCS (COC), the framework of which has

ASEAN Foreign Ministers at the 50th AMM



ASEAN Secretariat

“On the South China Sea (SCS) issue, internal negotiations for an ASEAN common position were more intense, with Vietnam now leading the charge. Eventually, a spirit of compromise helped preserve ASEAN unity by returning to the middle-way approach of last year’s AMM.”

been adopted as a basis for future negotiations? To be of any effect, the COC must have strong elements of self-restraint upon the parties to prevent and manage incidents. Another key parameter for an effective COC is its legal status. China has however hinted in many ways its reluctance to embrace a legally binding COC. Building ASEAN consensus on the COC’s legal standing is therefore expected to become even more strenuous.

Furthermore, Beijing remains ambivalent about the timeline for the COC’s conclusion, putting the onus on ASEAN countries to ensure that there is no major outside interference and the SCS is generally stable. Broad and ambiguous, these conditions could subject the COC process to any ‘double-standard’ interpretation that Beijing deems expedient. China is in effect using the COC process to dictate its terms – preempting outside countries’ involvement and nudging ASEAN countries towards ‘good behaviour’ – thereby imposing a ‘peaceful SCS in Beijing’s image’ that is not necessarily in the interest of smaller claimant states.

The SCS issue aside, one would come out of the AMM and related meetings with another mixed bag about ASEAN’s international standing. On the one hand, the global interest to engage with ASEAN remains strong, with 88 countries accrediting their Ambassadors to ASEAN. Turkey just joined the club of ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partners. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation would soon include Argentina and Iran in its fold, on top of its 35 parties.

Yet, there is a lot of anxiety over ASEAN’s resilience in the face of a rapidly-shifting balance of power in Asia as a result of the US’ retreat. The assurance of continued American engagement by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson at the ASEAN-US Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) is comforting but not assuring enough. One does not have to look beyond his ‘hollowed-out’ State Department to see a US with dysfunctional politics and distracted foreign policy which puts primacy on military and invests little in diplomacy. At the 40th anniversary of ASEAN-US dialogue relations, the future trajectory is hazy at best.

Another important agenda at the ASEAN-US PMC was economic cooperation, but ASEAN ‘free trade’ narrative does not seem to gain traction with the Trump administration pre-occupied only with ‘fair trade’. The US’ diminished economic footprint in the region, both perceived and real, is all the more accentuated when compared with China. While the US-included Trans-Pacific Partnership faded away, the Protocol upgrading the ASEAN-China free trade agreement entered into force in July, binding ASEAN economies closer to that of China.

Fortunately, ASEAN has other choices to cushion itself between the two big powers. All other Dialogue Partners help expand ASEAN’s opportunities and diversify its menu to avoid dependency on any single major power. For example, the expansion of Australia’s New Colombo Plan and Canada’s US\$10 million scholarship program open new opportunities for aspiring ASEAN students and scholars amidst dwindling access to the US’ Fulbright Program which is going through a budget cut. Japan’s “Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure” offers an alternative amidst the Belt and Road fever.

The gatherings in Manila also witnessed the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of ASEAN-India relations, 20th anniversary of the ASEAN Plus Three, and 40th anniversary of ASEAN-Canada and ASEAN-EU relations. In this regard, having Canada and the EU attend the East Asia Summit in November as Guests of the ASEAN Chair is a positive gesture that attests to the diverse spectrum of ASEAN external relations.

To stand tall in embracing these external tailwinds or headwinds, ASEAN countries must stay firmly together. At 50 years old, the hard choice facing each ASEAN member is not the binary one between Washington and Beijing. It is the one between keeping ASEAN unity or leaving it to wilt and wither with the major powers pushing their narrow agenda on the region. ■

Ms. Hoang Thi Ha is Lead Researcher II (Political and Security Affairs) at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Is ASEAN a Community?

BARRY DESKER looks at the challenges that remain in building a true ASEAN Community.



On 8 August, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Bangkok Declaration commemorating the founding of ASEAN. ASEAN's signature achievement is that it has created an environment of regional security and growing mutual confidence among member states, which promoted economic growth and internal stability. It has also facilitated regional relationships with the major powers as well as international and regional organisations.

Initially, ASEAN provided the gel which helped the pro-Western governments in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand broaden their international support in response to the threats of domestic communist insurgencies and a widening war in Indochina. But progress was slow. As newly independent states, the focus was on building a sense of nationhood, not creating a commitment to a broader regional identity. This changed in 1975 following the emergence of communist regimes in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and an awareness that the United States was unlikely to intervene to combat the threat posed by communist insurgencies after its defeat in Vietnam.

While strengthening economic cooperation provided the public rationale for the first ASEAN Summit held in Bali in February

1976, security considerations shaped the internal dynamics of the process leading to the Summit. The Bali Declaration of ASEAN Concord was the key document arising from the Summit. Its political provisions included a commitment to settle intra-regional differences by peaceful means as well as agreement on the establishment of the ASEAN Secretariat.

A major outcome of the Summit was the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), which became the foundational instrument for ASEAN in the ensuing decades. As the Treaty is open for accession by other States in and outside Southeast Asia, it now boasts 35 states parties, including all ASEAN countries and major powers.

The Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia in December 1978 provided the sternest test for ASEAN. The effective ASEAN response at the United Nations led to the 1991 Paris Peace Accords, Vietnam's military withdrawal from Cambodia and prevention of a Vietnamese *fait accompli*. This resulted in international recognition of ASEAN as the most successful regional organisation after the European Union.

Nevertheless, the underlying reality is that ASEAN succeeded because of the consensus among the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. This was facilitated by the

end of the Cold War, highlighted by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, as well as China's efforts to break its diplomatic isolation following Western sanctions after the 1989 Tiananmen massacres. This paved the way for Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia to join ASEAN from 1995 to 1999.

Until the adoption of the ASEAN Charter in November 2007, ASEAN was essentially a diplomatic community linking the foreign ministries of the region. As the ASEAN states, with the exception of Singapore, were commodity producers, their economies were competitive, not complementary.

Substantive ASEAN economic cooperation was only agreed at the fourth ASEAN Summit held in Singapore in 1992, which declared that an ASEAN Free Trade Area would be established within 15 years. Although ASEAN has played an important role in promoting trade liberalisation, the most significant deregulatory measures took place at the national level when ASEAN states were faced with collapsing economies during the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98.

But the lack of pre-conditions for membership has resulted in a 'two-tier' ASEAN. While the six earlier members plus Vietnam could meet the demands for greater economic integration, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos remain mired in their least developed status.

The conclusion of the ASEAN Charter in November 2007 marked the institutionalisation of a hitherto loosely structured organisation. The creation of a legal personality, an enhanced role for the Secretariat, the establishment of an inter-governmental human rights body, promotion of a 'people-oriented' ASEAN and adoption of the principle of 'shared commitment and collective responsibility' were significant outcomes contained in the Charter.

Supporters of ASEAN see the establishment of the ASEAN Community at the end of 2015 as a demonstration of its institutional maturity. Considerable attention within ASEAN

“A commitment to ASEAN only exists among policymakers, academics, journalists and those who participate in ASEAN-centred activities. By contrast, for most of the diverse peoples living in Southeast Asia, the idea of an ASEAN Community with shared values and a common identity looking towards a common destiny is a wish still to be fulfilled.”

is given to the three community pillars – political-security, economic and sociocultural. However, there is poor cross-sectoral interaction and the lack of a 'whole of ASEAN' approach. The focus of ASEAN policymakers is on their own sectors and enhancing cross-sectoral coordination is a work in progress. One cause is that the ASEAN Secretariat continues to be poorly funded and is ineffective in playing a bridging role. The gap between rhetoric and commitment is seen in the humble budget for the ASEAN Secretariat at US\$20 million in 2017.

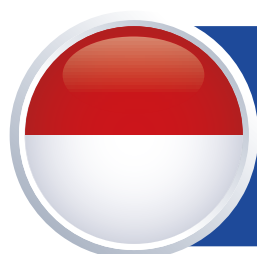
More importantly, those of us who participate actively in ASEAN activities need to

recognise the limits to regional institution building. Aside from Thailand, other ASEAN countries only became independent after World War II. Although ASEAN states are old societies (except for Singapore), they are new states. Loyalties are centred on the local level. Clan, village, religious, language and ethnic ties tend to be emphasised. Only in recent years is commitment to the nation-state receiving greater support, especially in the urban areas, with better education, improved connectivity and greater capacity of the central government.

The challenge for each of the ASEAN states is to build a sense of loyalty and commitment to the state. Ethnic, religious and class cleavages test the stability of ASEAN states. ASEAN has helped to ensure a more secure external environment but we need to recognise that the greatest challenges confronting member states at this time are internal.

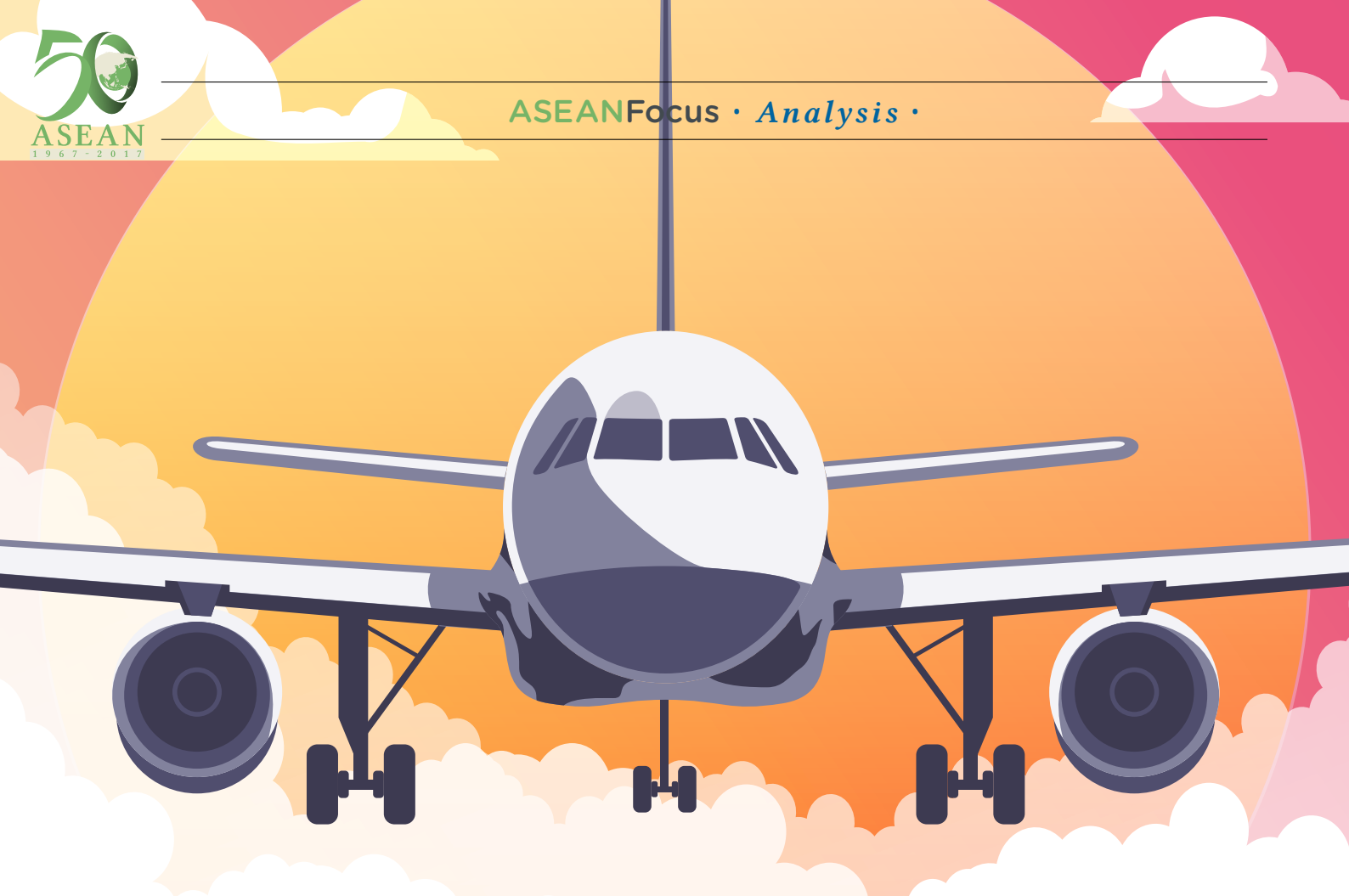
A commitment to ASEAN only exists among policymakers, academics, journalists and those who participate in ASEAN-centred activities. By contrast, for most of the diverse peoples living in Southeast Asia, the idea of an ASEAN Community with shared values and a common identity looking towards a common destiny is a wish still to be fulfilled. ■

Ambassador Barry Desker is Distinguished Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, and its founding dean from 2007 to 2014.



Did You Know?

Unlike many other countries, Indonesia has three national flowers: the jasmine (*Jasminum sambac*), the moon orchid (*Phalaenopsis amabilis*) and the rafflesia (*Rafflesia arnoldii*) flowers.



ASEAN's future is in the skies

JASON SALIM explains why air travel can be a powerful way to further ASEAN integration.

When I took my first flight as a young boy more than 20 years ago from my home country to another Southeast Asian country, it was an age of dial-up modems, exorbitant IDD rates and analogue mobile phones complete with antenna. To fly abroad, one would have to go to their neighbourhood travel agency and have travel agents navigate their way through some of the most difficult computer interfaces known to man. They would then issue paper tickets from clunky printers that churned out what might seem like unintelligible codexes to the layman.

Fast forward two decades and it would be hard to ignore what a revolution air travel has undergone. This is especially so in Southeast Asia, which has unexpectedly been a trend-setter in global aviation. This region is home to some of the world's best airlines such as Singapore Airlines, Garuda Indonesia, Malaysia Airlines and Thai Airways. Singapore's Changi and Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi regularly battle each other for the accolade of the world's best airport. Indonesian travel search engine Traveloka is one of the world's most valuable start-ups, recently securing a US\$350 million investment deal with Expedia. Intra-ASEAN air travel has grown more than two-fold from 22.2 million arrivals in 2004 to 46.0 million in 2015.

Southeast Asia was also among the first regions to witness the rise of budget travel. Originating from Malaysia, AirAsia – a trailblazing pioneer and market leader in low-cost carriers

(LCC) – has redefined regional air travel by making it affordable and accessible to so many more people. It has even ventured into low-cost hotels and budget long-distance travel as if to 'stretch the sky to the limit'. The region now also hosts other budget carriers such as Cebu Pacific (the Philippines), Lion Air (Indonesia), Nok Air (Thailand), Scoot (Singapore) and VietJet (Vietnam). The share of LCCs in the region's total seat capacity saw a marked increase from 13.2% in 2003 to 57% in 2014. The proliferation of budget carriers – a total of 21 in Southeast Asia with around 600 aircrafts – has boosted the regional economy by spawning growth in the support services such as aircraft servicing, ground handling, cargo transportation and airport construction.

In fact, air travel has become one of the few tangible things that makes ASEAN integration efforts felt at the grassroots level. As remarked by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the ASEAN Tourism Forum in January this year, "tourism is one area where by working together, we can get win-win benefits, growing our economies, creating jobs, and drawing our peoples together." The ASEAN Single Aviation Market has become a hallmark of the ASEAN Economic Community, connecting people and places through airports beyond those serving capital cities. This helps disseminate the economic benefits of tourism across a country and the whole region. Made more accessible by air travel through the ASEAN Single Aviation Market, places like Makassar, Kota Kinabalu, Cebu,

“Travel is more than just about economics. The liberalisation of air travel and intense competition between the many regional carriers have brought Southeast Asian peoples closer with the world and with each other.”

Mandalay, Da Nang and Chiang Mai would now have the opportunity to reap the benefits that come with tourists seeking to escape the crowd and bustle of major cities.

Travel is more than just about economics. The liberalisation of air travel and intense competition between the many regional carriers have brought Southeast Asian peoples closer with the world and with each other. This achievement holds special importance to the Southeast Asian region – the epitome of diversity that stretches from mainland to archipelagos and home to vast linguistic, cultural and civilisational divides not only across borders but also sometimes within national boundaries. Air connectivity has been bridging the different cultures, histories and backgrounds that are peppered across the region. By immersing in local attractions and delicacies, spending different currencies and interacting with local people, one would be able to better understand and appreciate each other’s way of life. This sense of mutual bonding amidst diversity is a key asset as we move towards an ASEAN Community.

To be fair, air travel in the region has had its ups and downs, including a chequered safety record. Some of the most tragic air accidents in recent years involved Southeast Asian airlines. This is one policy aspect where ASEAN can make its mark too. ASEAN should consider complementing the Single Aviation Market with perhaps a Single Aviation Safety Protocol that can better synchronise aviation safety standards and requirements across all member states. Another potential platform for cooperation would be in cross-border security, in which the ease of travel that comes with the air travel liberalisation is accompanied with strengthened security and

immigration procedures to weed out transnational crime and terrorism. If done properly, cooperation on aviation safety and security would be solid foundations on which collaborations on other aspects can be strengthened.

There is also much to be desired about liberalisation of air services in the region. Even though Indonesia, Laos, and the Philippines have overcome their initial reservations to ratify the ASEAN Open Skies Agreement, many obstacles still stand in the way to achieving a truly single ASEAN aviation market. Recent research by the CAPA Centre for Aviation showed that the Agreement has, to a great extent, dealt with third, fourth and fifth freedoms, but there remains insurmountable reluctance among many ASEAN countries to allow seventh, eighth and ninth freedoms due to uneven levels of competitiveness among ASEAN carriers. Business aside, national airlines are often regarded as the pride of a country and therefore jealously protected by their governments.

Further liberalising air travel will unleash a lot of development potential for the region’s aviation industry, tourism and especially people-to-people connectivity. With more and more people in the region taking flights, air travel would be the accessible and significant thread that both binds ASEAN citizens together and strengthens regional cooperation. ASEAN would do well to seize on this opportunity and make its mark, thereby giving us the chance to understand and connect one another in the spirit of true regionalism. ■

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

Did You Know?

According to the International Civil Aviation Organisation, the nine freedoms of the air are:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 1st | Fly over a foreign country without landing. |
| 2nd | Refuel or carry out maintenance in a foreign country without embarking or disembarking passengers or cargo. |
| 3rd | Fly from one’s own country to another. |
| 4th | Fly from another country to one’s own. |
| 5th | Fly between two foreign countries on a flight originating or ending in one’s own country. |
| 6th | Fly from a foreign country to another while stopping in one’s own country for non-technical reasons. |
| 7th | Fly between two foreign countries while not offering flights to one’s own country. |
| 8th | Fly inside a foreign country, continuing to one’s own country. |
| 9th | Fly between foreign countries without continuing to one’s own country. |

The Game of High-speed Rail Diplomacy

AGATHA KRATZ and **DRAGAN PAVLIĆEVIĆ** explain how China and Japan are competing to export their high-speed rail technology to Southeast Asia.

Japan is keen to export its high-speed technology to Southeast Asia



Over the past five years, China and Japan have been vying for high-speed rail (HSR) projects in Southeast Asia, both with some degree of success. China, which is feverishly pushing through its One Belt One Road (OBOR) strategy, has secured contracts to build lines in Indonesia, Laos and Thailand. Japan meanwhile has launched the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (PQI) and is currently involved in a project in Thailand.

As high-profile and very large deals, HSR projects are important not only to infrastructure exports but also to key economic development and foreign policy goals of Beijing and Tokyo. To secure such projects, the two countries have deployed strategies that share both similarities and differences.

China has mobilised exceptional political and diplomatic resources for this purpose with Chinese leaders regularly promoting HSR in meetings with foreign counterparts. Bilateral and multilateral platforms, including those with ASEAN and the OBOR initiative, are utilised to advertise Chinese HSR capabilities to foreign audiences. Also throwing enormous financial resources behind its HSR exports, Beijing offers a combination of lower overall costs for project procurement, preferential interest rates (usually 2-3%) and long grace periods on loans provided by China's policy banks such as the China Development Bank and China Exim Bank. In some cases, China even offers fewer liabilities for host governments – a favourable condition that most competitors find hard to match.

Furthermore, China's HSR deal is often bundled with additional investment projects, which are intended to increase the overall attractiveness of HSR lines to host countries and improve the potential of tangible economic benefits from these lines. Finally, China has shown a great deal of flexibility in terms of technological specifications, ownership and operational models, financial structuring, and skills transfer.

Japan also provides substantial financial support for its HSR exports through two main channels: Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). Although figures put forward under the PQI are significantly lower than those officially committed under OBOR, these two Japanese institutions are able to provide massive financing packages to host countries.

While Japan's financial terms are often better – with interest rates at around 0.1-0.2%, way below market levels – their coverage of a given project is not as much as what is offered by Beijing. Besides, Japan has never waived a government guarantee requirement on a preferential loan – which China accepted to do in Indonesia. Finally, since their bids involve a higher price and longer construction periods, Japanese companies tend to emphasise their spotless quality and safety track record, as well as lower life-cycle costs, skills transfer and local benefits.

Mounting competition between the two players, especially their head-to-head race for the Jakarta-Bandung line in Indonesia in 2015, has prompted a recalibration in both China and Japan's approaches to better address each other's competitive advantage. For example, to deflate criticism on quality, economic sustainability and the lack of transparency of its HSR exports, Beijing has sought to emphasise the affordability of its HSR offer, its safety and allegedly far-reaching and positive economic impact.

Japan, on the other hand, is promoting higher risk tolerance for such projects by speeding up approval processes and shortening delivery times. The Japanese government is also stepping up diplomatic and financial support to the railway sector in all stages of the project cycle. These adjustments are setting the stage for increased competition in Southeast Asia, especially as the two countries prepare to lock horns in the upcoming Singapore-Kuala Lumpur HSR bid.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo looks at models of Chinese high-speed trains



Despite a general consensus that infrastructure projects, including HSR lines, can improve their regional and national economic prospects, Southeast Asian governments need to be aware of the significant economic risks involved. High-speed railways are expensive to build and operate, and the jury is still out on whether some HSR projects are economically justified. Only two HSR lines in the world are widely believed to be profitable – Japan’s East China Sea Line, and parts of China’s Beijing to Shanghai axis – although comprehensive data is not available.

The success or failure of HSR projects in Southeast Asia is ultimately borne by the host governments, which must be willing to subsidise them heavily should traffic volumes not reach the target. These countries therefore need to carefully weigh advantages and drawbacks, and incorporate these projects into a wider consideration of national economic and transport objectives and priorities. In some if not most countries in the region, investing in conventional rail or road networks might bring just as much benefits at lower costs.

Finally, regional countries should structure HSR projects in a way that minimises the financial and political risks attached. As part of their re-calibration, both China and Japan are likely to push the limits of their flexibility to beat

each other to secure projects of strategic importance. This provides Southeast Asian countries with a strong negotiating position. As Indonesia did, countries in the region could push for a concrete and longer-term shareholding of China and Japan in these projects (i.e. direct capital investment in the project company), rather than simply accepting concessional government-backed loans. Otherwise, projects could end up weighing heavily on host countries’ budgets. For example, the Boten-Vientiane US\$5.8 billion rail line amounting to almost half of Laos’ GDP could push its indebtedness to unprecedented heights, amidst widespread doubts about the project’s economic viability.

Economics aside, Sino-Japanese competition in HSR exports is also a telling measure of rising geo-strategic rivalry among the two major powers in the region. Thus there will be mounting pressure on Southeast Asian countries to accept HSR projects even though their economic benefits and risks have not been fully grasped. Laos’ willingness to take on the Boten-Vientiane project with a potential debt trap is often seen as an illustration of China’s influence in the country. Favoring either China or Japan will put pressure on bilateral relationships and possibly require “compensations” (such as awarding the unlucky bidder with other lucrative projects) to avoid upsetting either Beijing or Tokyo.

Southeast Asian countries should seek to defuse the tension inherent in this competition through a delicate balancing act between the interests of the two major powers. A viable way forward could be structuring projects in a way that involves both Japan and China by, for example, breaking up projects in lots and allocating them to both countries; or encouraging cooperation among the two when possible. Relying on multilateral frameworks, such as the ASEAN Plus Three, could also moderate pressure, provide regional countries with further leverage, and at the same time ensure that the projects conform with the broader regional development plans. ■

Ms. Agatha Kratz is an Associate Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations and PhD candidate at the Lau China Institute, King’s College London, and Dr. Dragan Pavličević is Lecturer in China Studies at the Department of China Studies, Xi’an Jiaotong – Liverpool University.

ONGOING HIGH-SPEED RAIL PROJECTS IN ASEAN

COUNTRY & LINES	WON BY	PROJECT STATUS
Indonesia (Jakarta-Bandung)	China	Project preparation started
Thailand (Bangkok-Nakhon Ratchasima, previously Bangkok-Nong Khai)	China	Project preparation started
Thailand (Bangkok-Chiang Mai)	Japan	Negotiations on-going
Laos (Boten-Vientiane)	China	Construction started
Malaysia & Singapore (Kuala Lumpur-Singapore)	Japan and China preparing to bid	Bid upcoming
Vietnam (several options discussed)	China	Shelved
Myanmar (Muse-Rangoon)	China	Shelved

Demographic Trends in Southeast Asia

WEI-JUN JEAN YEUNG provides an overview of ASEAN’s population in telling numbers.

Home to 640 million people in 2016, about 8.5% of the world’s total population, Southeast Asia has undergone tremendous demographic transformations over the past five decades. Despite common features shared in history and culture, diversity among these countries has always been part of the region’s defining characteristics.

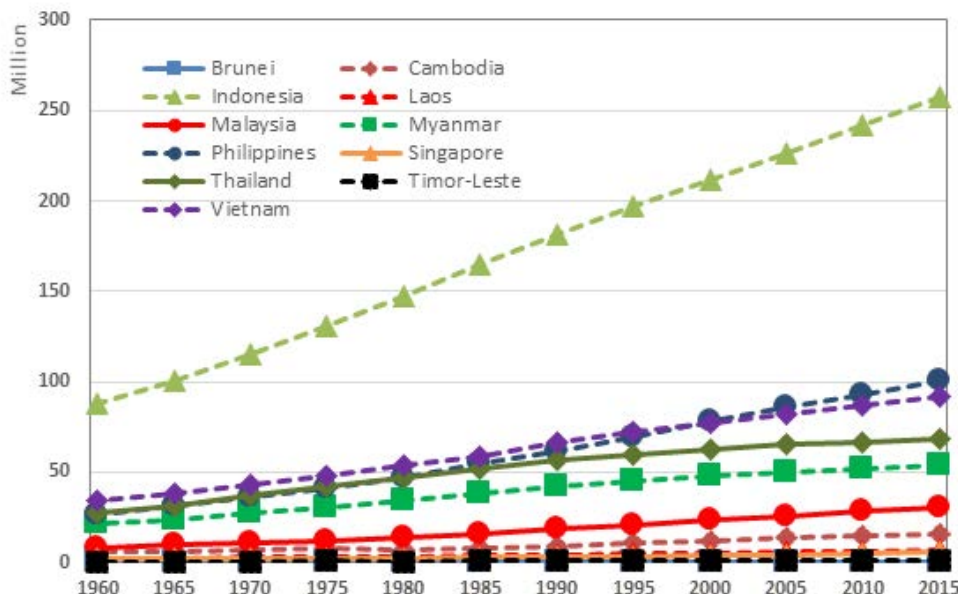
Since 1970, the region’s population has expanded as much as thrice its size though at different rates across the countries. Five ASEAN countries are now among the world’s 20 most populous. Indonesia takes the lead, accounting for 41% of the region’s population. From 1970 to 2015, Indonesia’s population grew from 115 to 257.6 million. The Philippines and Vietnam follow at around 100 million, and Thailand and Myanmar above 50 million. The rest are much smaller in size. Brunei Darussalam, Laos, Singapore and Timor-Leste, each accounting for 1% or less of the region’s total, also saw their population size triple in the same period. The population growth over the last five decades is attributed to the large decline in infant and maternal mortality rates, the population momentum from the baby-boom generation after World War II when a women on average had 6-7 children in her lifetime, and lengthened life expectancy.

All Southeast Asian countries have experienced a rapid decline in the total fertility rate (TFR). By 2000, the TFRs in half of the countries have reached or gone below the replacement level. Singapore has led the trend, reaching the replacement level in 1975 which continues to fall, followed by Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam and Vietnam. The TFRs in the Philippines, Laos and Cambodia hovered around 4, and stood as high as 7.1 in Timor-Leste. Today, the TFRs in most Southeast Asian countries are close to an ideal replacement level, except for an ultra-low level in Singapore (1.2), and a high outlier in Timor-Leste (5.6).

All countries have made impressive improvement in life expectancies at birth from about 33-65 years in 1960 to about 65-82 years in 2015. Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Indonesia have increased their life expectancy at birth by more than 20 years. Singapore currently has the highest life expectancy at 82.6 years, followed by Brunei Darussalam at 78.8 years, whereas Myanmar has the lowest life expectancy at 65.9 years.

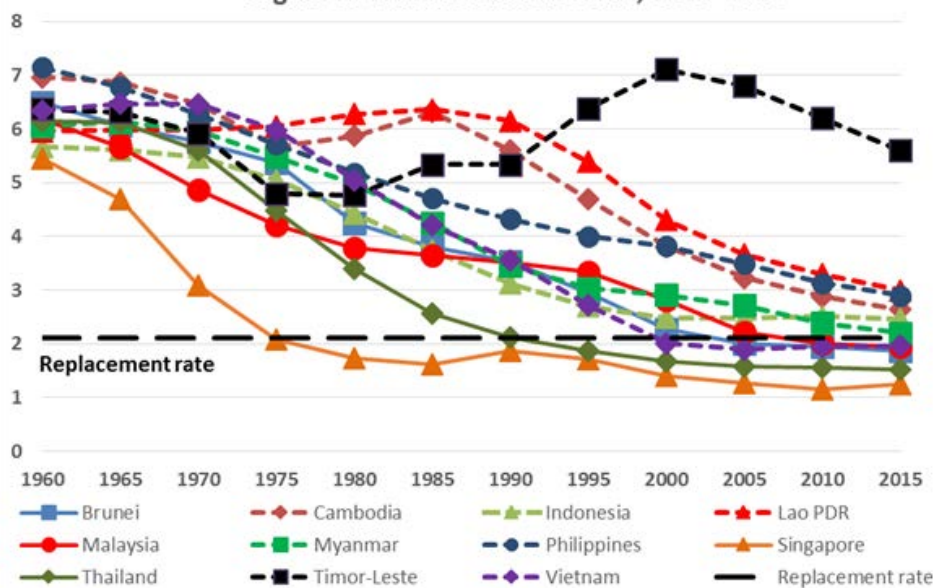
As a consequence of these changes, the age structures in Southeast Asia look very different now. Some countries are starting to age rapidly, particularly in Singapore and Thailand where those at 65 and above have risen exponentially

Figure 1: Total population of Southeast Asian countries, 1960-2015



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

Figure 2: TFR in Southeast Asia, 1960-2015



Source: World Bank Health Nutrition and Population Statistics

“Given the uneven state of development, ASEAN countries face different challenges in the next few decades including human capital development, care of aging population, urban environmental degradation, poverty and inequality in many areas.”

from 2-4% in 1960 to above 10% at present. The old-age dependency ratios in Singapore and Thailand were 16.1 and 14.6 respectively, higher than the world average of 12.6. The rest of the countries have a more gradual increase though the speed has also picked up particularly in the last decade to 4-7% currently.

On the other hand, the proportion of children has decreased in all countries. The working-age population in all countries has been rising as a consequence of the baby-boom cohort, and immigration in Singapore and Malaysia, ranging around 60-70% of the total population in the last two decades. Southeast Asia has thus been enjoying the “demographic dividends” which have benefited economic development. Currently, with a median age of 29, it is younger than most other regions. However, several factors are worth noting for the population to continue to benefit development in the region.

The ASEAN population are very unevenly distributed. While population density in Singapore registers about 8,000 people per square kilometre (sq. km), Thailand and Vietnam have 300 people per sq. km, and Laos has the lowest density at 30 people per sq. km. Within each country, population has increasingly been concentrated in the cities. Currently, about half of the regional population live in urban areas. In the next few decades, even higher urbanisation rates are expected, which will impose increasing demands for infrastructure, environment, and public services.

Given the uneven state of development, ASEAN countries face different challenges in the next few decades including human capital development, care of aging population, urban environmental degradation, poverty and inequality in many

areas. There has been a large reduction in poverty rates in the region. At the turn of the century, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Timor-Leste had poverty rates ranging between 40% and 50%, but by 2010, the rates had dropped to lower than 30% and continued to decline to 20%-10% by 2015. Currently, while Singapore and Brunei Darussalam are among the world’s wealthiest, GDP per capita for the rest of the countries remains lower than US\$25,000, with the levels in Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam under US\$5,000 and Timor-Leste under US\$2,000.

Low financial resources impose serious constraints to these less developed countries to invest in the large young population. While there has been an impressive decline in illiteracy rates and an overall increase in educational attainment across the region, some countries have made much more progress than others. Singapore and Thailand have done extremely well in raising the educational achievement of its population, with around 90% and 50% of their young population aged 18-22 enrolled in tertiary education respectively in 2015.

For the rest of the countries, the gross college enrolment rates are about one-third and only less than 20% for Laos. Malaysia has even seen a decline in tertiary enrolment from 37% in 2010 to 29% in 2015. In the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, the gross enrolment rate in secondary education has now reached 80%, but it is still around 40-50% in Laos, Myanmar and Timor-Leste. There is also room for improvement for children’s vaccination in countries like Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Timor-Leste. An increased number of HIV-infected children since the 1990s in Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam is also a cause of concern.

Another important concern is that Southeast Asia has the highest youth unemployment rates among all regions in the world, particularly after the 1997 financial crisis hitting about 17% in 2005. Today it is still above 12%. The youth unemployment rates in Indonesia and the Philippines are particularly high at about 20% and 15% in 2015. This can be attributed to the low skills and education of youth and a lack of employment opportunities in these countries. Female youth have a significantly higher unemployment rate than their male counterparts. As females tend to work in low-paid, informal, or temporary jobs, they are in more precarious situations than men in the labour market.

Countries at a high developmental stage face a set of different challenges. Brunei Darussalam seems to be at a happy equilibrium now in its demographic and socio-economic development. Singapore's rapidly aging population, a shrinking family support network, high density, and a high proportion of immigrants challenge the country's population sustainability and social integration. Fortunately, Singapore has high economic and human resources to meet these challenges given proper planning and preparation. Thailand and Vietnam will face similar challenges for elderly care but with much less resources to manage.

Traditionally, elderly care relies on family members, especially the women. As female employment has risen, migration increased, and fertility rates declined, family carers for the elderly population will become increasingly less available. Government, community, and private sectors will need to play a much greater role in care work. Currently elderly poverty rates are high and most countries have weak social

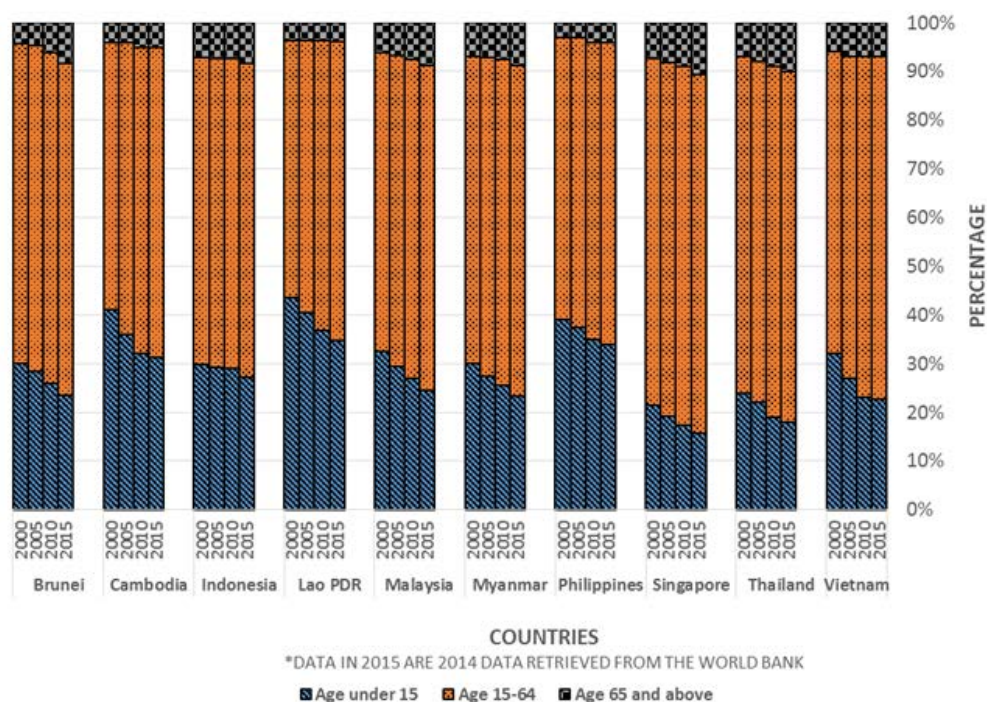
safety nets for the elderly. Population aging is inevitable, even in poorer countries, in a few decades. There is a need for all countries to prepare for the increasing demand of health care, particularly long-term care, and increase the support scheme for disadvantaged older adults.

ASEAN population is currently growing at an annual rate of 1.1% and is projected to continue to grow for about four more decades to reach approximately 800 million before it starts to decline. While the largest absolute increase will be in Indonesia, the largest relative increase will be in the Philippines, Malaysia, Laos and Cambodia. Given their high poverty and unemployment rates and low economic resources, the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia and Timor-Leste may consider reducing the fertility rates further. At the same time, devoting more resources to increasing high school education and training in a wide range of skills will enable the relatively young population in ASEAN to become powerful resources rather than a burden for development.

Moving forward, attention should be placed on improving the quality and distribution of the population. Developmental strategies including cross-border solutions for facilitating the flow of labour force, markets, natural and human resources, cultural exchanges and cooperation can enable the population to be useful resources for healthy socio-economic development in Southeast Asia in future decades. ■

Dr. Wei-Jun Jean Yeung is Provost's Chair Professor at the Department of Sociology, Director of the Centre for Family and Population Research, and Research Leader of the Changing Family in Asia cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.

Figure3: Age structure of Southeast Asian countries, 2000 - 2015



Source: World Bank, Health Nutrition and Population Statistic. Data for Singapore (2000) sourced from UN Population Division (UNPD) World Fertility Data 2015.

Young and Restless in ASEAN

MOE THUZAR outlines the socio-economic challenges facing youths across the region.

From 640 million in 2016, ASEAN's population is projected to reach 795 million by 2050. Medical advances, improved basic healthcare and better living standards have halved infant and maternal mortality rates from 1990 to 2010 and extended life expectancies across the region. While ASEAN countries like Singapore and Thailand are facing ageing societies, the bulk of the region's population are now in their working-age, i.e. 15 to 64 years. This accounted for about 68% of ASEAN's total population in 2016.

There are economic benefits to be reaped from a more youthful regional workforce and a burgeoning middle class across the region, which is expected to reach 163 million households by 2030. On the flipside, this demographic dividend could well turn into demographic stress if education systems and businesses are unable to adapt to the needs of the larger, younger working-age population.

New technologies and the evolving work environments are affecting employment opportunities worldwide. Increasing use of robotics, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things (IoT) are challenging future entrants to the workforce, especially low-skilled young workers. Many regional countries which have relied on low-skilled and cheap labour abundance for economic growth will be hard hit by these technological transformations. Key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and retail – where younger workers can find employment now – will be at high risk of automation. In a 2016 study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 60% of workers in Indonesia's auto industry and 88% of retail workers in the Philippines could be displaced due to automation.

The “fourth industrial revolution” requires different skill sets and qualifications, ranging from technological expertise, innovation to communications and creativity. Young job-seekers in the region will increasingly face the job-skill mismatch that has beset more developed economies. The challenge for ASEAN policy makers will be to help workers re-train and re-skill to adapt to the changing structures of the economies.

The rising trend of re-shoring to bring jobs back to developed countries, driven by economic nationalism and new technologies, also bears watching. The United States – one of the largest investors in Southeast Asia – is leading the charge on this front. If this trend takes hold, the youth employment in ASEAN countries will be adversely affected, especially those with large manufacturing sectors and higher shares of FDI such as Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia. ASEAN's overreliance on FDI-

driven manufacturing may leave the region in a lurch when such jobs are made obsolete.

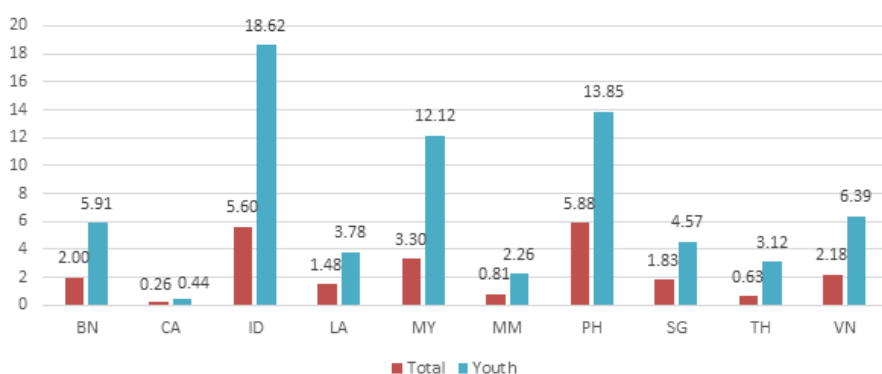
Youth unemployment is high across ASEAN, with Indonesia and the Philippines registering the highest rates at 18.62% and 13.85% respectively in 2016. Unemployment rates among persons with tertiary education are also high in Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. Even when employed, young people mostly find themselves in temporary or part-time jobs with little assurance of career advancement, proper remuneration or social protection. These, combined with poverty, disasters or conflicts, are pushing more young people to migrate within and across borders.

The “urbanisation wave” in ASEAN countries is creating stress on state capacity to balance human and ecological needs. Drove of young people leave their villages or small towns in search of better job opportunities, hollowing out the countryside and crowding densely-populated cities. The region is expected to see nearly 60% of its populations in urban areas by 2050. Food, energy, healthcare, education, housing and transportation needs of these growing populations will place additional pressures on already strained infrastructure, environmental and natural resources. Left unaddressed, the quality and length of peoples' lives will ultimately suffer.

ASEAN governments are trying to tackle these issues, including through policies to improve living conditions of the urban poor, develop rural infrastructure and facilities, and reduce rural-urban migration. Except for Cambodia and Laos where urban populations remain modest, other ASEAN governments have made efforts to shift industries from large urban centres to rural areas. These actions illustrate the governments' recognition that population issues and development efforts are inter-related, and the increasing need for sustainable practices in charting future development trajectories. ■

Ms. Moe Thuzar is Lead Researcher (Socio-Cultural Affairs) at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Unemployment rate, total and youth, 2016 (%)



Source: World Bank (2016), World Development Indicators

ASEAN's Demographic Trends

BY PHAM THI PHUONG THAO AND ZUL HAZMI NORDIN



POPULATION GROWTH



The ASEAN region's population was **640 million** in 2016, and is projected to reach **726 million** by 2030 and **795 million** in 2050. (WB 2016; UN 2017)



Average population growth in ASEAN decelerated from **2.5%** annually in the early 1970s to **below 2%** in the mid-1990s, and is projected to drop further to **0.7%** by 2030. (ADB 2014)



Every minute, **22** babies are born in ASEAN. Indonesia's total annual babies born almost equals Singapore's population. (Compiled from WB 2015; The Jakarta Post 2015)



The infant mortality rate in Southeast Asia is projected to decline from **40 per 1000 live births** in 1995-2000 to **21** in 2015-2020. (UN 2017)



The Philippines has the highest fertility rate at **2.94** births per woman whereas Singapore has the lowest at **1.24**. (WB 2015)



The total fertility rate in Southeast Asia is projected to drop from **2.4** children per woman in 2010-2015 to **2.1** in 2025-2030. (UN 2015)



The life expectancy in ASEAN ranges from **65.4** years in Laos to **82.7** in Singapore. (ASEAN Secretariat 2016)

AGE STRUCTURE

1 Over **58%** of ASEAN's citizens in 2014 fall into the 20-64 age bracket while **6%** are above 65 years. (ASEAN Secretariat 2016)

2 The median age of ASEAN's citizens in 2015 is **28.9** years, younger than Japan (46.5) and China (36), and will increase to **33.6** years by **2030**. (UOB 2015)

3 The population aged 60 years and above in Southeast Asia accounts for **9.3%** of the total population in 2015 and is expected to reach **14.7%** in **2030** and **21.1%** in **2050**. (UN 2015)

4 The ratio of working-age persons to the elderly in Singapore will be **2.7** in **2030** and **1.7** in **2050**. (ADB 2012)

5 The ratio of both younger and older dependents (below 15 or above 64) to the working-age population among ASEAN countries ranges from **37%** in Singapore to **63%** in Laos. (WB 2015)

6 Singapore has the highest ageing population in ASEAN with **12.3%** of the total aged 65 and above, and the highest ratio of older dependents to the working-age population at **16%**, while Laos has the youngest population in ASEAN with only **3.9%** of the total aged 65 and above, and the highest ratio of younger dependents at **57%**. (WB 2015-2016)

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS



The working-age population in Southeast Asia contributes nearly **70%** of consumption growth in the region. (WEF 2016)



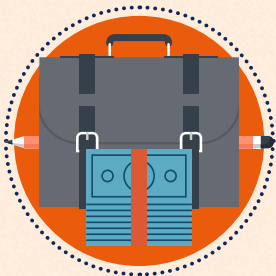
The number of households in ASEAN who can afford significant discretionary purchases is expected to **almost double to 125 million by 2025**. (McKinsey 2014)



65% of ASEAN population is projected to be in the middle-income class in **2030**. (UOB 2015)



Only **18%** of the total population of ASEAN has contributory pension after reaching retirement age. (ASEAN Secretariat 2012)



Only **14%** of private formal sector workers are covered by the pension system in Indonesia. (ADB 2012)



Public pension spending in Vietnam as a share of its GDP is projected to increase by **7.4%** from 2013 to 2030 - one of the highest in ASEAN. This figure is 0.4% in Cambodia, 1.1% in the Philippines, 1.4% in Indonesia and 2.7% in Laos. (ADB 2017)



Most of ASEAN countries spend **less than 1%** of GDP for social security and welfare, with Brunei and Singapore being the exception. (ADB 2014)



Elderly healthcare costs in Singapore is projected to increase ten-fold to reach **US\$49 billion** annually by **2030**. (Marsh & McLennan Companies 2016)

LABOUR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT



The female workers in Laos accounts for **more than half** of its labour force. Only **37.6%** of the labour force in Malaysia and **37.8%** in Indonesia are women. (WB 2015)

The proportion of unemployed labour force in ASEAN countries in 2016 ranges from **0.3%** in Cambodia to **5.9%** in the Philippines. (WB 2016)

Within ASEAN, Cambodia has the highest labour force participation rate (the percentage of working-age population economically active) at **81%**, followed by Vietnam at **78%**, whereas Brunei and Malaysia have the lowest at **63%**. (WB 2016)

More than half of ASEAN population participated in the labour force in 2015, accounting for nearly **10%** of the global labour force. (Compiled from WB 2016)

Ms. Pham Thi Phuong Thao and Mr. Zul Hazmi Nordin are respectively Research Officer and Intern at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.



Coping with an Ageing ASEAN

LEE HOCK GUAN analyses what an older population would mean for economies and societies across the region.

Ageing population is poised to become a major social transformation of the 21st century in the region. Every ASEAN country is experiencing rapid increase in the number and proportion of elderly persons, as a result of declining fertility rates and improved life expectancies.

Fertility rate is declining but varies widely across the region, ranging from 1.23 in Singapore and 1.53 in Thailand to 3.04 in the Philippines and 3.1 in Laos in 2015. Accordingly, there has been a region-wide declining trend with the overall fertility rate falling from a high 5.0 (children per woman) in 1980 to 2.35 in 2015. The fertility rates in all ASEAN countries are projected to reach the replacement level of 2.1 or lower by 2030.

These lower fertility rates can be attributed to major gains made in education, gender equality, employment and living standards, combined with dramatic breakthroughs in health and family-planning technology and their improved accessibility. The phenomenon of women either marrying late or remaining single to pursue their life goals is fast becoming the norm rather than the exception. It is also not uncommon for married couples to make the conscious decision not to have children. As stated by Lee Kuan Yew in his book *One Man's View of the World*, changed lifestyles and mindsets also contribute to lower birth rates.

With advancements in public health and medical technologies and improved living conditions, people in the region are living longer. In 2015, life expectancy in the region ranges from 65.4 years in Laos to 82.7 in Singapore. The combined decline in mortality and fertility levels has contributed to a rapidly increasing proportion of persons surviving into the advanced stages of life.

The estimated number of elderly people (aged 65 years and above) in Southeast Asia was 37.5 million, or 5.9% of the total population, in 2015. This number is projected to double to 71.4

million (or 9.8%) in 2030, and reach 123.6 million (15.5%) in 2050. Specifically, from 2015 to 2050, while the region's total population is expected to increase from 633.3 to 795.2 million or by 25.6%, the number of elderly people would increase more sharply by 229.6%. As a result, the regional old-age dependency ratio – the number of elderly people as a share of the working-age population – is expected to increase from 8.8 in 2015 to 14.6 in 2030 and 23.9 in 2050.

Even though all ASEAN countries will gradually have ageing populations, their prospects vary considerably in intensity and with different time-frames. Early ramifications of an ageing society are being felt in Singapore and Thailand, where elderly people account for 12% and 11% of the population in 2015, and dependency ratios stand at 16 and 14.8 respectively. By 2030, in less than a generation, elderly people will make up 23.2% of Singapore's population with the old-age dependency rate rising to 36.3. Thailand will catch up closely with 19.4% of its population being older persons and the dependency rate climbing to 29.1.

Other ASEAN countries have not reached a critical stage of ageing yet, but the share of older population and the dependency ratio are rapidly increasing due to the much faster rise in life expectancy coupled with faster fertility decline. By 2050, all ASEAN countries will have reached a critical ageing stage. The number of working adults to support an elderly person in the region will drop from 10 in 2015 to only 6 in 2030. That means the younger population might have to pay higher taxes to cover increased social spending for the elderly and take home lower pay for themselves.

Ageing population have implications for nearly all sectors of society including labor and financial markets, the demand for public services such as health, housing, transportation and social protection, family structures and inter-generational ties. ASEAN countries will have to deal with much smaller,



and older, workforces. Immigration is one way to offset the shrinking working-age population, which is a measure adopted by Singapore and, to a lesser extent, Malaysia and Thailand. However, this approach has discernible political costs and social strains, and regional governments have become more cautious in increasing their foreign workforce to avoid the potential anti-immigration backlash.

With the burgeoning elderly population comes greater stress on pension schemes and governments' social security responsibilities. Vietnam, which is seeing a rapid shift from demographic dividend to demographic burden, is trying to amend its Labor Code to raise the retirement age so as to avert an impending implosion of the pension system. To maintain the system, it might

be unavoidable to cut down on pension benefits or increase pension contributions. Striking a balance between adequacy and sustainability of pension schemes remains a big challenge.

Prejudice towards older people, such as viewing them as an "unproductive, dependent" population, should be shunned especially since it has debilitating effects on the well-being of older people, and may lead to unconstructive ageing policies. Older people should be encouraged to practice active ageing, including through extension of their working life so as to enhance their economic protection and social security. This would also lessen the financial burden on elderly care, and in fact enable them to contribute to society both as productive individuals and still active consumers.

Regional governments have been adjusting their laws and regulations to delay retirement and re-tool older workers for

new jobs. Malaysia, which will become an ageing society by 2020, has raised the minimum retirement age from 55 to 60 since 2013. Thailand last year adopted financial incentives to encourage businesses to hire the elderly. Singapore is the most active in expanding employment opportunities for older workers by increasing the re-employment age from 65 to 67, and extending its SkillsFuture Credit scheme to older workers for retraining purposes. As a result, the share of workers aged 60 and over in Singapore's workforce increased from 5.5% in 2006 to 12% in 2015.

While most ASEAN countries, except for Singapore, are not as aged as the developed world, some indicators point to the region ageing at a faster pace than anticipated. Southeast Asia therefore does not have the luxury of time for the gradual evolution of social and structural support systems for older people. This is further complicated by the traditional reliance on family members for elderly care while regional societies are increasingly shifting towards nuclear families.

A whole-of-society approach is therefore necessary to meet the care needs for the ageing population. For example, Singapore has applied the "Many Helping Hands" model, where the well-being of the elderly people is the responsibility of the individual, family, community and state. Apart from the traditional family support, greater emphasis is being given to community-based care. In addition, the burgeoning older population are opening new opportunities to emerging industries and services for senior care. The booming silver economy stands poised to meet the medical and lifestyle needs of this growing segment of the population across the region.

Ageing is an inevitable trend that the whole Southeast Asia must cope with in the near future. Therefore, the whole concept of ageing needs to be re-calibrated for necessary adaptation and resilience in the coming decades. ■

Dr. Lee Hock Guan is Senior Fellow and Co-Coordinator of the Regional Social and Cultural Studies Programme & the Malaysia Studies Programme at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

AGEING IN NUMBERS

Year	Total population (millions)			Share of population, 65 years and Older (%)			Old-age dependency ratio (ratio of people aged 65+ per 100 people aged 15-64)		
	2015	2030	2050	2015	2030	2050	2015	2030	2050
Brunei Darussalam	0.42	0.49	0.54	4.0	10.2	15.3	5.67	14.68	35.05
Cambodia	15.52	18.80	22.02	4.1	6.7	12.2	6.41	10.18	18.45
Indonesia	258.16	295.6	321.55	5.1	10.5	18.6	7.60	12.11	20.73
Laos	6.66	8.05	9.16	3.9	5.1	10.6	6.23	8.27	15.33
Malaysia	30.72	36.82	41.73	5.7	9.6	16.3	8.48	14.13	24.40
Myanmar	52.40	58.92	62.35	5.3	8.6	13.1	7.96	12.55	19.25
Philippines	101.72	125.37	151.29	4.6	6.7	12.7	7.23	10.40	14.81
Singapore	5.53	6.34	6.57	11.7	23.2	33.6	16.05	36.30	60.59
Thailand	68.66	69.62	65.37	10.6	19.4	29.0	14.79	29.09	49.98
Vietnam	93.57	106.28	114.64	6.7	12.4	21.5	9.61	18.49	34.93
Southeast Asia	633.34	726.29	795.23	5.9	9.8	15.5	8.79	14.61	23.85

Source: UN 2015

Building ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership amidst Global Uncertainties



FEDERICA MOGHERINI is the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission. Previously, she was the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs from February to October 2014 and a Member of the Italian Parliament (Chamber of Deputies), where she was elected for the first time in 2008. Ms. Mogherini studied Political Science in the University of Rome “La Sapienza”.

AF: How do you assess the evolution of ASEAN-EU dialogue relations over the past 40 years?

FM: Over these forty years, opportunities and threats have gone global. Europe and Southeast Asia are closer than ever; what happens on our side of the world matters to you, and vice versa. Trade routes are global, and a security issue in Asia-Pacific can affect the whole world: just think of the situation in the Korean peninsula. Against these great changes, we are also moving fast. Cooperation between the European Union (EU) and ASEAN has never been closer – both bilaterally and in the international institutions. The EU has, since August 2015, a dedicated Ambassador to ASEAN – currently Francisco Fontan. Our common work spans from trade to counter-terrorism, from protecting our environment to defence issues. It is time to move to the next stage, working on a strategic partnership between our organisations.

AF: Will the EU have any new initiatives to mark the 40th anniversary of ASEAN-EU dialogue relations this year?

FM: I was delighted to be in Manila, at the beginning of August, for the EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and the ASEAN Regional Forum. We have organised several events and initiatives this year, jointly with the ASEAN Secretariat,

with Thailand as our current Country Coordinator, and with the Philippines as ASEAN Chair. We have launched several new projects under the EU’s €200 million-strong cooperation with the ASEAN Secretariat, and organised a whole host of events for public participation such as the first ever EU-ASEAN Run, and the first EU-ASEAN music concert. Events to move forward on our sustainable development agenda and to increase our interconnections through improved transport links, for example, will also be organised. I am also pleased that at this occasion the EU has been invited to join the East Asia Summit in November as a guest of the ASEAN Chair.

We do not want just to celebrate 40 years of cooperation, but also build a stronger relationship in the future. A good example of this is increased trade between our regions, where we hope to move forward in negotiating a comprehensive and ambitious trade agreement, to bring down barriers and open new doors for business people and investors. This year we also celebrate 60 years since the EU took its first steps: the celebrations were an opportunity to recommit to our Union and relaunch the process of European integration. Likewise, this EU-ASEAN anniversary can be an opportunity to bring our partnership to the next level.

AF: What are the immediate priorities of the EU's External Action Service (EEAS) for partnership with ASEAN for 2018?

FM: I mentioned already our common aspiration to define a framework for a trade and investment agreement. We also want to advance on our on-going negotiations for a Civil Aviation Agreement. It is clear that increased economic ties and connections between our populations will have significant benefits for us all. But if we want to reach the full potential of our partnership, we also need to continue deepening our cooperation on security. Europe and Southeast Asia face some common threats: cyber-crime and terrorism, for example. We could and should have much closer and more operational cooperation between our respective agencies and processes. I hope that we can make this happen very soon.

AF: What are the fundamentals for a strong and robust ASEAN-EU partnership going forward?

FM: At the moment, interactions and connections between our populations, as well as economic and trade links are the fabric of our partnership. Common work to increase our collective security should be next.

AF: The EU is ASEAN's largest foreign direct investor (FDI) but this influence is not felt in the political-security domain. What can the EU do more to improve its political-security presence in the region to be commensurate with its substantive economic strength?

FM: The EU has already become a global security provider. Our diplomatic engagement on the situation in the Korean peninsula is constant and intense. The EU is already applying real pressure on the DPRK to comply with its UN Security Council-based obligations through sanctions, and we are also ready to support a process to reduce tensions and enable steps to be taken towards the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. We signed the national ceasefire agreement in Myanmar as an international observer. And last year, for the first time, the EU took part in an "ASEAN plus" multilateral naval exercise. I believe most countries in Asia, today, recognise our EU as a global security provider. This is a role we are ready and willing to take over.

Also for this reason, we are working to strengthen the EU as a Union of security and defence. We have, for example, improved our command structures for our military missions, launched a European Defence Fund which aims at supporting our EU Member States in investing more efficiently on defence, and have increased our joint work with NATO significantly. As I said before, we need to bring our EU and ASEAN defence structures closer together. We need to invest more to ensure that common threats receive common answers; make our critical infrastructure resilient and resistant to cyber-attacks; disrupt and break up extremist networks so as to prevent terrorism. I think this is something on which we should work closer together.

AF: With the US appearing to lose its strategic ground in Asia, does the EU have the political will to up its game in the region, and if yes, through what means?

FM: Engaging with Asia and in Asia is a strategic priority for the EU, whatever other powers may do. The EU will continue to be a strong and reliable partner for our friends in Asia and around the world. Our level of engagement does not depend on the engagement of others, and it is clearly there to stay. We want to increase our cooperation and ties with ASEAN because we see a mutual interest in doing so; our cooperation is win-win. There is a clear will from our side and I believe also from the ASEAN side.

AF: How is the EU going to contribute to the rules-based order in Asia-Pacific?

FM: The respect of international norms is not only one of our driving principles: we also have a strong interest in protecting a rules-based order in a crucial region for international trade and global peace. Different challenges and situations require different approaches, but our commitment to international law, for example the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or fundamental freedoms such as of expression and of assembly, will always remain, for us, the essential part of any solution. Some see international rules as a constraint: we consider them a guarantee for all.

AF: In light of the US' withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) in deep freeze, what do you think of the future of inter-regional multilateral trade deals? Would the EU see a greater urgency for an ASEAN-EU Free Trade Agreement?

FM: Yes, there is an urgency: not because of others, but because of the benefits that freer and fairer trade can bring to our citizens. We want to move forward on our agreement with ASEAN quickly and are working to do so.

AF: How does the EU manage what appears to be "external interferences" from major powers in making decisions that require consensus?

FM: The EU is big enough and strong enough to take decisions by itself, just as our citizens are wise enough to choose with their own minds - and have demonstrated this time and again, even in recent months. There are always different points of view among the Member States - I often see this when I am chairing the monthly meeting of Foreign Ministers - but this is our richness: that we are diverse. It is a point of strength, not a weakness, as out of diversity we always manage to agree on what our common interest is and to take decisions together - in particular when it comes to foreign policy, we always take decisions by unanimity. This provides us with a strong common ground. One year ago we have agreed all together on a Global Strategy for our foreign and security policy, and its implementation is moving on smoothly and fast. We share the same interests and values, and my daily

“Engaging with Asia and in Asia is a strategic priority for the EU, whatever other powers may do. The EU will continue to be a strong and reliable partner for our friends in Asia and around the world. Our level of engagement does not depend on the engagement of others, and it is clearly there to stay.”

experience tells me that we are much more united than it is sometimes perceived.

AF: There are concerns that the EU will be too distracted by Brexit negotiations to focus on other fronts of its external relations. How is the EU going to address these concerns?

FM: I have no worries at all about this. Since the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU over a year ago, we have taken bigger steps in our common security and defence policy, for example, than ever before. And we have done so all together, with all 28 Member States, by unanimity. Let me tell you that, after the British referendum and the beginning of the Brexit negotiations, our common work has not changed: we are still engaged in the global arena, as a global power. Even when the UK leaves the Union, we will continue to be the number one donor of development and humanitarian aid in the world, the largest global market and foreign investor, and we will continue to lead the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change, supporting other countries to do the same. We are a more confident, more agile, more reliable Union than in the past, and we will continue to invest in our global role.

AF: What would be the EU's strategy in dealing with the rise of nationalism and scepticism towards multilateral institutions?

FM: The best way to defend and strengthen our multilateral institutions is to make them deliver on our citizens' needs. Our citizens today need protection and need better opportunities: protection from today's security threats and from the imbalances generated by globalisation. But globalisation also



has an immense economic potential, which we can only fulfil if we engage together, cooperatively. The only effective answer to our citizens' needs is international cooperation: we need to work together against common threats and to grasp opportunities, and we need better rules for our international economy. Isolation is not the answer to any of the challenges of our times. But through cooperation – both within our continents and on a global scale - in the EU,

within ASEAN and in the United Nations' framework – we can provide our citizens with better opportunities, we can foster peace, security, and stability, at home and internationally.

AF: What is your most memorable moment in your many interactions with ASEAN and its Leaders?

FM: I met regularly with ASEAN leaders, in Asia, in Europe and on the occasions of our joint participation in international events, and I have many excellent memories with them. But I also have other important moments in my heart: whenever I travel to Asia I really enjoy the opportunity to meet citizens, religious leaders, young students, and civil society organisations. If I have to choose one moment, I have great memories of a meeting last year with leaders of religious communities in Jakarta. We discussed diversity in Indonesia, and the various paths for civil engagement of people with different religious backgrounds. Europe and Southeast Asia are a world apart, but many of the challenges we face are similar. We all want to create new channels for engagement for all sectors of our societies. We all want to make sure that all of our citizens preserve their diversity and enjoy the same opportunities, making our societies prosper. ■

1

The EU has the largest share of total FDI inflow into ASEAN in 2015 (16.7%), followed by Japan (14.5%) and the US (11.3%). Of the EU's 28 member states, the Netherlands is the single largest FDI contributor into ASEAN, with US\$7.9 billion in 2015.

2

Singapore received 65.7% of the EU's FDI stock in the ASEAN region, followed by Indonesia (12.9%) and Malaysia (8.15%). Singapore also takes the lead ahead other ASEAN countries in investment in the EU, becoming the 9th largest direct investor in the EU in 2015.

3

In 2016, ASEAN was the third largest trading partner of the EU – after only the US and China – accounting for 6% of the EU's total merchandise trade globally.

4

Total trade in goods between ASEAN and the EU has been dominated by three product categories in 2016 – machinery and transport equipment, miscellaneous manufactured goods, and chemicals and related products – constituting almost 76% of the total value of trade in goods between both sides.

5

The EU is the second largest external source of tourists into ASEAN, with its 9,570 visitors (or 8.8% of all tourist arrivals) to the region in 2015.



10

Interesting Facts about ASEAN-EU Relations



6

€170 million have been allocated to the development cooperation fund for the ASEAN-EU Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, more than double the amount previously allocated for the years 2007-2013.

7

Every year, approximately more than 4000 ASEAN students travel to Europe through scholarships funded by the EU and its member states.

8

Of the 76,400 EU citizens residing in ASEAN, 48.7% live in Indonesia, and close to 95% live in either Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia or Thailand.

9

The EU is the first regional organisation to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) in 2012. The TAC, which was previously open to accession by states only, had to be amended to enable the EU's accession.

10

ASEAN and the EU are currently negotiating the first ever bloc-to-bloc aviation agreement – the ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA). Aimed at increasing connectivity and promoting people-to-people ties, the agreement will replace existing bilateral aviation agreements between member countries of the two groups.

SEA Games: Living Proof of Regional Unity

NUR AZIEMAH AZIZ and ZUL HAZMI NORDIN uncover the history behind the SEA Games and the ASEAN Para Games.



**KUALA
LUMPUR
2017**

29TH SEA GAMES 
9TH ASEAN PARA GAMES 

The 29th Southeast Asian (SEA) Games will be held on 19-30 August in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Every two years, sportsmen and sportswomen from all across the region come together in a celebration of regional unity, to renew their bonds of friendship through healthy competition in the different sporting events. This year, 4,888 athletes from 11 countries will take part in 404 events covering 38 sports. However, the grand spectacle that it has become today belies its humble beginnings in an age gone by.

Back in the 1950s, Southeast Asia was facing a lot of uncertainties fuelled from the decolonisation process, the early rumblings of the Cold War as well as intra-mural tensions among regional countries. The then Vice-President of the Thailand Olympic Committee Luang Sukhum Nayapradit saw sports as a means to strengthen ties within the Southeast Asian neighbourhood. He thus conceptualised the South East Asian Peninsular Games (SEAP Games), the regional sporting event which was the precursor of the Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games). The SEAP Games was then established in a meeting on 22 May 1958 between the Southeast Asian Peninsular founding members, namely Thailand, Malaya, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and South Vietnam. Singapore was later included as a founding member as well.

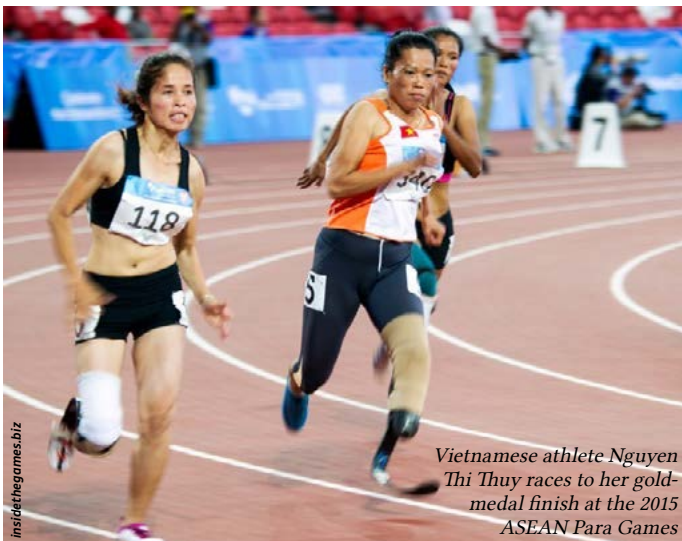
The biennial SEAP Games was first held in Bangkok on 12-17 December 1959, with 12 sports up for competition and over 700 participants from all of the founding member countries except Cambodia. The 8th and last SEAP Games was held on

9-16 December 1975 in Bangkok. In 1977, it was renamed as the SEA Games with Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and the Philippines joining its fold. The Games went one step ahead of ASEAN by admitting Timor-Leste as a new participating country at the 22nd SEA Games in 2003.

Starting from 2000, the ASEAN Para Games (APG) was introduced for special needs athletes in the region. If the SEA Games predated ASEAN, the conception of the ASEAN Para Games was closely intertwined with ASEAN's efforts to empower and integrate persons with disabilities into the mainstream society through sports. One of the APG's best moments was when Singapore swimmer Yip Pin Xiu broke the world record in women's 50m backstroke final at 1 minute 1.61 seconds at the 2015 APG.

The SEA Games has grown from strength to strength since its first meet in 1959. The quality of sportsmanship has improved vastly with standards being uplifted and records broken over the years. For instance, the 28th SEA Games in 2015 in Singapore featured 36 sports with 4370 athletes, breaking 11 SEA Games records, 3 Southeast Asian records and 42 national records.

The SEA Games has also groomed many Southeast Asian athletes to pursue their 'faster, higher, further' dreams at the global arena. From the SEA Games' stepping board, many Southeast Asian athletes have reached greater heights in more prestigious competitions such as the Asian Games and



Vietnamese athlete Nguyen Thi Thuy races to her gold-medal finish at the 2015 ASEAN Para Games

In Southeast Asia – a region most diverse in its mix of ethnicities, languages and cultures – sports can play the indispensable role of a unifying force to foster mutual respect, friendship and camaraderie amongst the peoples of the region. In this upcoming SEA Games, we all look forward to the impressive record-breaking performances and high-quality sportsmanship from our athletes. As the outstanding competitors proudly display their winner medals, the biggest victory rests with the peoples of ASEAN and Timor-Leste who would once again demonstrate that the bond of sportsmanship will hold the region united and strong. ■

Ms. Nur Aziemah Aziz and Mr. Zul Hazmi Nordin are respectively Research Officer and Intern at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.



Silat athletes competing in the 2011 SEA Games

the Olympic Games. They include weightlifter Tan Howe Liang (1960 Olympic Games silver medallist); shuttlers Susi Susanti (1992 Olympic Games gold medallist); Lee Chong Wei (2008, 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games silver medallist); and shooter Hoang Xuan Vinh (2016 Olympic Games gold and silver medallist).

Beyond the glory found in the largest haul of medals, the SEA Games also fosters a sense of regional identity and affinity. A rich mixture of sports unique to certain countries allows both the athletes and audiences of the SEA Games to immerse themselves in the regional diversity and peculiarities. In a similar vein, the opening and closing ceremonies of the Games always parade the traditions of the host country with spectacular performances and costumes, featuring their rich cultures to their neighbour fellows.

“In Southeast Asia – a region most diverse in its mix of ethnicities, languages and cultures – sports can play the indispensable role of a unifying force to foster mutual respect, friendship and camaraderie amongst the peoples of the region.”

Did You Know?

The SEA Games has uniquely featured several sport reflecting the distinctive culture of Southeast Asian countries, including Arnis (Philippine martial art) at 2005 SEA Games, Shuttlecock Kicking at 2003 and 2009 SEA Games, and Chinlone (Myanmar caneball) and Vovinam (Vietnamese martial art) at 2013 SEA Games.

From the Streets to the Stage

Arnel Pineda's unlikely journey from club gigs to becoming Journey's lead singer is nothing short of extraordinary.

BY NUR AZIEMAH AZIZ

Arnel Pineda's path to be the frontman of *Journey*—the famous American rock band—is unlike the many rags-to-riches tales we have heard before. Born in Manila's Sampaloc district, Arnel was the eldest son of the family. His mum introduced him to the world of music with tunes of the Carpenters and Barbra Streisand. As his passion for music grew, he participated in various singing competitions, joined the school's rondalla troupe and sang in the glee club.

Sadly, Arnel lost his mum when he was 13 after her long battle with heart disease. His family was left with huge debts arising from medical bills and other expenses. His three siblings went to live with their relatives while Arnel was forced to the streets, sleeping in parks or at his friends' houses. He had to clean docked ships or collect recyclable items like glass bottles, scrap metals and newspapers for some hard earned pesos. Arnel stopped schooling to focus on providing for his siblings. He would sometimes perform as a way of payment for his friends who gave him shelter.

After spending two years on the streets doing odd jobs, Arnel joined a local band called Ijos in 1982. This was the start of his music career which would take on many twists and turns over the next two and a half decades. Arnel band-hopped from one gig to another, singing at clubs



Arnel Pineda (3rd from left) with his Journey bandmates

and bars all over Asia. He won several national and international singing contests, including the Best Vocalist award at the Yamaha World Band Explosion. He even produced songs for some famous record labels such as Warner Bros and Universal Music Group. But Arnel's career would only truly take off after his encounter with Neal Schon, *Journey's* lead guitarist who was desperately looking to revive the band by recruiting a new vocalist.

While surfing the internet, Neal Schon found a YouTube video of Arnel singing their hit songs, hitting all the right notes and sounding almost similar to their former vocalist, Steve Perry. Schon showed the clip to his bandmates who were rendered in disbelief. Schon tried to connect with Arnel via email which Arnel originally thought was a hoax, as he would later confess. After a couple of calls, Arnel flew to San Francisco for an audition and became the band's leading man with a debut performance in a Chilean music festival in February 2008, and never looked back.

Arnel's music life got rebooted and *Journey* saw its own revival, reconnecting with old fans while winning the hearts of new followers with fresh and old hits. As remarked by Schon, Arnel and the band share an excellent chemistry and a strong teamwork which allow them to create new music. For the other band

members, they felt fortunate to find Arnel to continue their *Journey* franchise and connect with future generations. *Journey* has produced two new albums with Arnel and both found great success in the Billboard charts—an amazing feat for a band that debuted more than four decades ago and remains resilient in the fast changing music industry. The band went on countless tours all over America over the last decade. Recently, as part of their 2017 Asia tour, *Journey* visited Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Taiwan, Japan and yes, Arnel's home country, the Philippines.

With all the accolades and praises for becoming the voice of *Journey* during the last decade, Arnel remains grateful and humble. He has never thought or dreamt of replacing *Journey's* original frontman, Steve Perry. Being no stranger to loss, hardship and poverty, he has set up the Arnel Pineda Foundation to provide underprivileged children with access to education, health services and medical attention. A devoted and talented musician, Arnel is an inspiration to many for emerging stronger from childhood adversity, for believing in the power of music and for pursuing his dreams until they come true. ■

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Grandeur Redefined

At the heart of royal Bangkok lies Vimanmek Mansion, the world's largest structure made entirely of teak.

BY ZUL HAZMI NORDIN

Nestled amongst the numerous halls and villas of the majestic Dusit Palace in Bangkok – with handsome golden teakwood forming the entirety of its elegant structure – the grandiose form of the Vimanmek Mansion will leave many in amazement. One of the palace's crown jewels, the Mansion evokes a sense of magnificence and reverence. But the Mansion's grandeur also belies its relatively chequered past. Commissioned by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), the Mansion once lingered in obscurity for decades before being restored to its current glory.

The history of the Vimanmek Mansion dates back to the 19th century. It was originally constructed in 1868 in Ko Sichang, a small island off the Gulf of Thailand in the province of Chonburi. Known as the Munthaturattanaraj Residence, this summer place served as a holiday retreat for King Rama V. In 1900, upon the request of the King, it was dismantled and reconstructed at its current location as the Vimanmek Mansion – the first permanent structure of the Dusit Palace.

The reconstruction order was inspired from a tour of Europe in 1897 by King Rama V – the first Thai monarch to visit the old continent where he was enchanted with the architecture of European palaces. The King was then convinced of the need for a new palace to complement the Grand Palace. The construction of the new Dusit Palace thus began in 1899, followed by the reconstruction of the Vimanmek Mansion in 1900 which was completed on 27 March 1901.

An architectural marvel, the Mansion boasts several unique elements. Being 60 metres long and 20 metres high, it is the largest golden teakwood mansion in the world which was assembled without a single nail. It features a distinctively elaborate architectural style reflecting both European and Thai influences, with some Chinese flavours in interior décor.

Despite its splendour, the Vimanmek Mansion was not always the primary place of residence in the Dusit Palace. After its reconstruction in 1901, King Rama V moved into the Mansion and made it his place of residency for the subsequent five years until 1906, whereupon he moved into the Ambara Villa until his passing in 1910. It was not until towards the end of King Rama VI's reign in 1925 that the Mansion was occupied again by Queen Consort Indharasaksaji. But upon King Rama VI's death, she too moved her residency away from the Mansion to the Suan Hong Royal Villa.

The following decades saw the Mansion fall further into obscurity. After the 1932 coup d'état, which transformed Thailand's political system from absolute monarchy into constitutional monarchy, the Vimanmek Mansion was then turned into a storage space for the royal household. It remained largely forgotten until 1982, when Queen Sirikit, on the occasion of the Royal Bicentennial Celebrations of Bangkok and with the blessing of King Rama IX, ordered the renovation and repurposing of the Mansion as a museum to commemorate King Rama V.

The Mansion has since flourished to become a popular tourist spot, featuring 31 exhibition rooms hosting priceless artefacts from the monarchy, with many rooms preserved as they were originally. A visit to the Mansion provides a glimpse to the grandeur and majesty of the royal court and its colourful life, including priceless photographs, antique furniture, traditional porcelain and many other memorabilia dating back to a century ago.

Without Queen Sirikit's intervention, the beauty of the Vimanmek Mansion as well as its historical and architectural values may have fallen into oblivion for some more time. Her initiative thus holds lessons on the importance of preserving heritage lest it be forgotten. In the years ahead as Thailand continues to embrace modernity, the Vimanmek Mansion remains a significant monument of not only the monarchy but also the rich history and culture of the Thai kingdom.

■ *Mr. Zul Hazmi Nordin is an Intern with the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute and a final year undergraduate in Public Policy and Global Affairs at Nanyang Technological University.*

The Vimanmek Mansion glimmering in the sunlight





The national flowers of Indonesia (L-R): jasmine, moon orchid, and rafflesia



The national flowers of Malaysia and Singapore (L-R): hibiscus, and Vanda Miss Joaquim

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