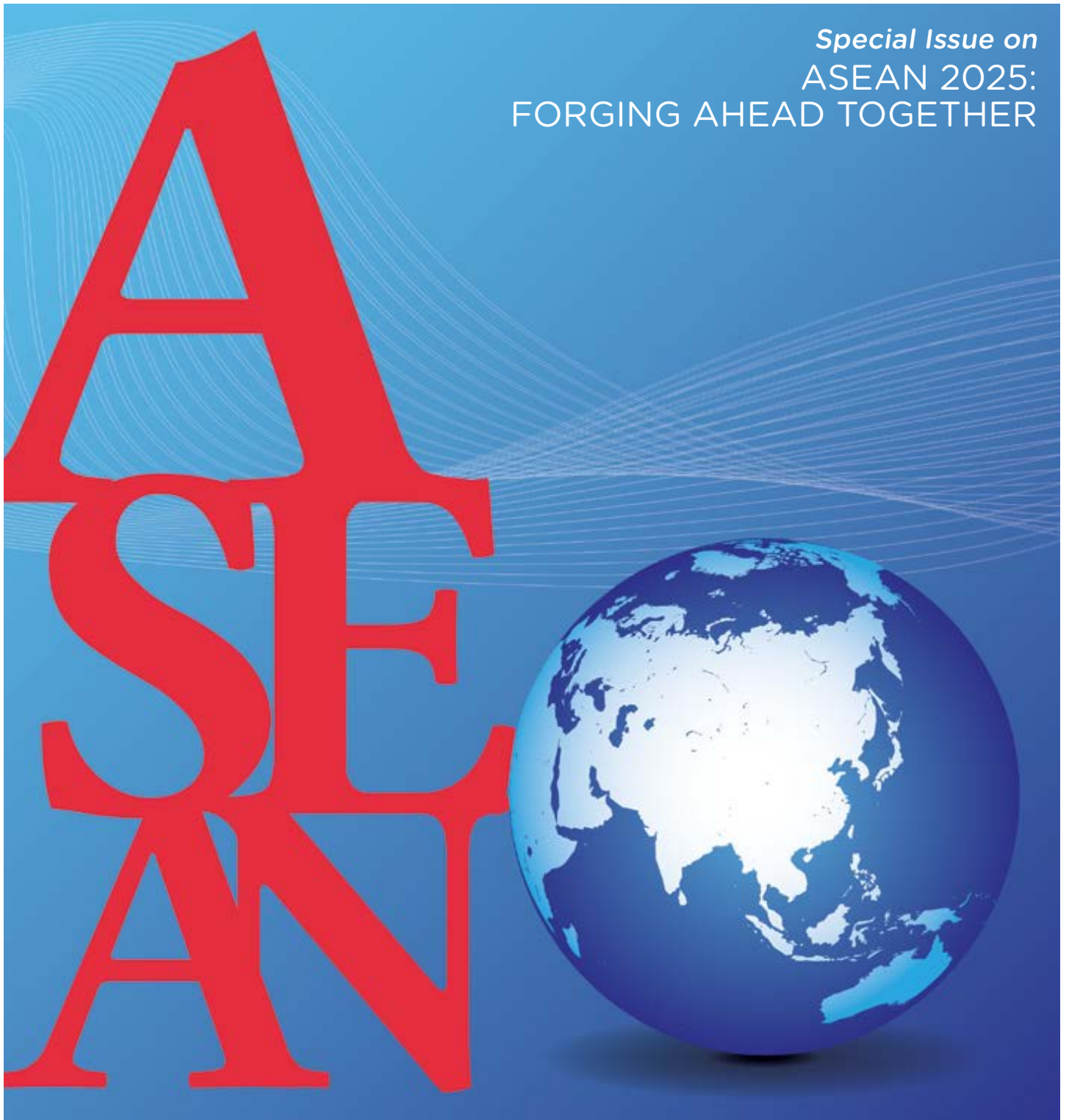




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ASEANFocus

Special Issue on
ASEAN 2025:
FORGING AHEAD TOGETHER



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and consolidating. Having seen 2015 come and gone, we now look forward to the new milestone year of 2025 with the new agenda document *ASEAN 2025: FORGING AHEAD TOGETHER*.

Celebrations aside, much more still needs to be done to address extant teething issues behind this grand project of an ASEAN Community. No doubt, ASEAN is not by a long shot a perfect community. It is an evolving project, and will remain so for the immediate future. The full impact of the ASEAN Economic Community, for example, will only be felt in 2018 when its full implementation comes online in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

The ASEAN 2025 documents are an affirmation of ASEAN's resolve to continue along the path of regional integration and provide an insight as to the regional organisation's priorities, focus and goals. Critics have panned the documents as "uninspiring" and bereft of grand ideas. This analysis misses the point that the ASEAN 2025 agenda was intended to be expansive for ASEAN to better respond and adapt to changes in the coming years, while providing space for member states to work out the finer details to realise the agreed goals. The three new 2025 Blueprints are also not set in stone as they will, in due course, incorporate key elements of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan III and the ASEAN Connectivity 2025 Master Plan due in 2016.

This Special Issue of the *ASEANFocus* aspires to initiate discussions on the ASEAN 2025 agenda, as well as to provide some reflection on the progress of community-building thus far. The ASEAN Studies Centre team starts off the discussion with an overview of the community-building process and early assessments on the Political-Security, Economic and Social-Cultural blueprints. This is followed by informed and expert views from the former Secretaries-General of ASEAN, Tan Sri Ajit Singh, Mr. Rodolfo C. Severino, Ambassador Ong Keng Yong and Dr. Surin Pitsuwan on the ASEAN community-building process. Recognising the important role played by extra-regional parties, *ASEANFocus* invited perspectives from Canada, China, the European Union, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand and the United Nations to reflect on efforts by these entities to deepen their engagements with ASEAN. Perspectives from within the ASEAN Community were provided by Dr. Robert Yap, HRH Tunku Abidin Muhriz and Mr. Abdul Qowi Bastian, representing viewpoints from the business, think-tank and media sectors respectively. Mr. M.C. Abad, Jr. and Mr. Pou Sothirak round up this Special Issue with a summation of ASEAN operating in a new brave new world marked by strategic, environmental and political challenges.

After 48 years in existence, ASEAN member states have finally deigned to come together as an integrated community. Much has been achieved since the signing of the ASEAN Declaration in Bangkok in 1967 – ASEAN has doubled its membership from 5 to 10, and its original ambit as a political-security cooperative organisation has been expanded to encompass a much more diverse range of cross-sectoral cooperation. ASEAN has seen rapid economic development and equally commendable progress in each country's socio-political dynamics, all against a backdrop of relative peace and stability in the region. It will not be appropriate for ASEAN to claim all the credit in ensuring a harmonious neighbourhood, but it has certainly been an effective conduit for dispelling suspicions and building trust among the 10 ASEAN countries.

The establishment of the ASEAN Community in the recently concluded 27th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur is another milestone in ASEAN's history worthy of some reflection. Having met the expectations set by the Cebu Summit in 2007 of building an ASEAN Community by 2015, ASEAN is now well-poised to embark on a new phase of not just community-building, but also community-strengthening

ASEAN COMMUNITY Vision 2025*

1. We, the Heads of State/Government representing the peoples of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (hereinafter referred to as ASEAN), gather here today at the 27th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to celebrate the formal establishment of the ASEAN Community 2015 and to chart the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

2. We recall the ASEAN vision of an integrated, peaceful and stable community with shared prosperity built upon the aspirations of and commitment to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Vision 2020, the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, the ASEAN Charter, the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community (2009-2015) and the Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations.

3. We are pleased that the positive progress made since 2009 in implementing the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community comprising the ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprints, as well as the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Strategic Framework and the IAI Work Plan II (2009-2015) and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity has led us to another important milestone in ASEAN development, namely, the formal establishment of the ASEAN Community 2015.

4. We resolve to consolidate our Community, building upon and deepening the integration process to realise a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN Community, where our peoples enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms, higher quality of life and the benefits of community building, reinforcing our sense of togetherness and common identity, guided by the purposes and principles of the ASEAN Charter.

5. We envision a peaceful, stable and resilient Community with enhanced capacity to respond effectively to challenges, and ASEAN as an outward-looking region within a global community of nations, while maintaining ASEAN centrality. We also envision vibrant, sustainable and highly integrated economies, enhanced ASEAN Connectivity as well as strengthened efforts in narrowing the development gap, including through the IAI. We further envision ASEAN empowered with capabilities, to seize opportunities and address challenges in the coming decade.

6. We underline the complementarity of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with ASEAN community building efforts to uplift the standards of living of our peoples.

ASEAN Political-Security Community

7. Our ASEAN Political-Security Community by 2025 shall be a united, inclusive and resilient community. Our peoples shall live in a safe, harmonious and secure environment, embrace the values of tolerance and moderation as well as uphold ASEAN fundamental principles, shared values and norms. ASEAN shall remain cohesive, responsive and relevant in addressing challenges to regional peace and security as well as play a central role in shaping the evolving regional architecture, while deepening our engagement with external parties and contributing collectively to global peace, security and stability.

8. We, therefore, undertake to realise:

8.1. A rules-based community that fully adheres to ASEAN fundamental principles, shared values and norms as well as principles of international law governing the peaceful conduct of relations among states;

8.2. An inclusive and responsive community that ensures our peoples enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as thrive in a just, democratic, harmonious and gender-sensitive environment in accordance with the principles of democracy, good governance and the rule of law;

8.3. A community that embraces tolerance and moderation, fully respects the different religions, cultures and languages of our peoples, upholds common values in the spirit of unity in diversity as well as addresses the threat of violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations;

8.4. A community that adopts a comprehensive approach to security which enhances our capacity to address effectively and in a timely manner existing and emerging challenges, including non-traditional security issues, particularly transnational crimes and transboundary challenges;

8.5. A region that resolves differences and disputes by peaceful means, including refraining from the threat or use of force and adopting peaceful dispute settlement mechanisms while strengthening confidence-building measures, promoting preventive diplomacy activities and conflict resolution initiatives;

8.6. A region that remains free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, as well as contributes to global efforts on disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy;

8.7. A community that enhances maritime security and maritime cooperation for peace and stability in the region and beyond, through ASEAN and ASEAN-led mechanisms and adopts internationally-accepted maritime conventions and principles;

8.8. A community that strengthens our unity, cohesiveness and ASEAN centrality as well as remains the primary driving force in shaping the evolving regional architecture that is built upon ASEAN-led mechanisms; and

8.9. A community, in the interest of developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations, that deepens cooperation with Dialogue Partners, strengthens engagement with other external parties, reaches out to potential partners, as well as responds collectively and constructively to global developments and issues of common concern.

ASEAN Economic Community

9. Our ASEAN Economic Community by 2025 shall be highly integrated and cohesive; competitive, innovative and dynamic; with enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation; and a more resilient, inclusive, and people-oriented, people-centred community, integrated with the global economy.

10. We, therefore, undertake to achieve:

10.1. A highly integrated and cohesive regional economy that supports sustained high economic growth by increasing trade, investment, and job creation; improving regional capacity to respond to global challenges and mega trends; advancing a single market agenda through enhanced commitments in trade in goods, and through an effective resolution of non-tariff barriers; deeper integration in trade in services; and a more seamless movement of investment, skilled labour, business persons, and capital;

10.2. A competitive, innovative and dynamic community which fosters robust productivity growth including through the creation and practical application of knowledge, supportive policies towards innovation, science-based approach to green technology and development, and by embracing the evolving digital technology; promotion of good governance, transparency and responsive regulations; effective dispute resolution; and a view towards enhanced participation in global value chains;

10.3. Enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation with improvements in regional frameworks, including strategic sectoral policies vital to the effective operationalisation of the economic community;

10.4. A resilient, inclusive, people-oriented and people-centred community that engenders equitable development and inclusive growth; a community with enhanced micro, small and medium enterprise development policies and cooperation to narrow the development gaps; and a community with effective business and stakeholder engagement, subregional development cooperation and projects, and greater economic opportunities that support poverty eradication; and

10.5. A global ASEAN that fosters a more systematic and coherent approach towards its external economic relations;

a central and foremost facilitator and driver of regional economic integration in East Asia; and a united ASEAN with an enhanced role and voice in global economic fora in addressing international economic issues.

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

11. Our ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community by 2025 shall be one that engages and benefits the peoples, and is inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic.

12. We, therefore, undertake to realise:

12.1. A committed, participative and socially-responsible community through an accountable and inclusive mechanism for the benefit of our peoples, upheld by the principles of good governance;

12.2. An inclusive community that promotes high quality of life, equitable access to opportunities for all and promotes and protects human rights of women, children, youth, the elderly/older persons, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, and vulnerable and marginalised groups;

12.3. A sustainable community that promotes social development and environmental protection through effective mechanisms to meet the current and future needs of our peoples;

12.4. A resilient community with enhanced capacity and capability to adapt and respond to social and economic vulnerabilities, disasters, climate change as well as emerging threats and challenges; and

12.5. A dynamic and harmonious community that is aware and proud of its identity, culture, and heritage with the strengthened ability to innovate and proactively contribute to the global community.

Moving Forward

13. In order to achieve our ASEAN Community Vision 2025, we shall realise a community with enhanced institutional capacity through improved ASEAN work processes and coordination, increased effectiveness and efficiency in the work of ASEAN Organs and Bodies, including a strengthened ASEAN Secretariat. We shall also realise a community with increased ASEAN institutional presence at the national, regional and international levels.

14. We, therefore, task the ASEAN Community Councils to fully and effectively implement the commitment contained in the *ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together* and to submit their reports to the ASEAN Summit, in accordance with the established procedure.

15. We pledge to our peoples our resolve to realise a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN of "One Vision, One Identity, One Community". ■

**Excerpted from ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, November 2015)*

ASEAN 2025: Looking Beyond Functional Cooperation

BY TANG SIEW MUN



The ASEAN Leaders meeting in Kuala Lumpur for the 27th ASEAN Summit laid down yet another important marker for ten member states by adopting the *ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together* document as the referent point for the next phase of community-building. This document encapsulates the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, the Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025, Economic Community Blueprint 2025 and the Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025.

ASEAN 2025 strives to build on achievements made since 1967 when the five founding members pledged to establish “an association for regional cooperation among the countries of Southeast Asia.” ASEAN plodded along to find modalities to deepen cooperation but it was not until the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (also known as Bali Concord II) in 2003 that the idea of establishing a “community” was formally adopted. The declaration proclaimed that the community shall comprise of three pillars, namely political and security,

economic and socio-cultural cooperation, and established 2020 as the targeted deadline.

To underscore its commitment to promote deeper integration and cooperation, ASEAN adopted the Cebu Declaration in 2007 to accelerate the establishment of the community from 2020 to 2015. This was followed by the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on the Roadmap for ASEAN Community (2009-2015) adopted under Thailand’s ASEAN Chairmanship in 2009 which served as a blueprint to establish tangible goals toward the creation of a dynamic, cohesive, resilient and integrated community.

Contrary to the euphoria surrounding the proclamation of the establishment of the ASEAN Community, it remains a work-in-progress. Critics were right to highlight the shortcomings of the community. For example, the open skies initiative to create a single ASEAN aviation market ran into turbulence when Indonesia and the Philippines proved unable to fulfil their commitment by the deadline of 1 January 2016. While

officials lauded the lowering of tariffs, businesses bemoaned the rise of non-trade barriers, which effectively dampens the achievements of the economic community.

In a recent interview, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted the importance of strengthening the "sense of ASEAN one-ness and identity." He explained that the reason "ASEAN finds it difficult to make progress together is because there is not a very strong sense of ASEAN identity."

There are indeed a myriad of challenges ASEAN must face and overcome before it becomes a community in the full sense of the word. But, it would be a mistake to deride the community as hollow. To be sure, the community is far from perfect and will have to endure birthing pangs. The true test for the community surfaces when national interests clash with regional commitments.

This challenge will become more pronounced as ASEAN transitions into the next phase of community-building, which requires a higher degree of political will. Nevertheless, the Kuala Lumpur Declaration made plain the Leaders' continued commitment towards deeper regional integration. At the end of the day, it bears reminding that ASEAN is an inter-governmental organisation and advances at the pace of its lowest common denominator.

The ASEAN 2025 agenda primes the ten member states for enhanced regional cooperation and it needs to be complemented with a robust discussion on ASEAN's strategic direction and institutional development. Four issues come to mind.

First, ASEAN needs to reconcile the focus on creating a "people-oriented" and "people-centred" ASEAN. In ASEAN-speak, the former refers to a top-down approach to bring the benefits of the Community to the people, and the latter allows a wider berth for bottom-up initiatives. Both approaches can theoretically co-exist, but in practice they create tensions. Subscribing to a people-centred approach entails empowering the citizenry to drive the community-building process. This approach has reaped successes in forging regional economic cooperation with the business community leading the way, but it is less useful in other domains where the deliverables are state-driven and the issues are more local than regional.

Second, if ASEAN is to succeed in forging a regional sense of identity it needs literally to fly its flag beyond Jakarta. Spreading out newly created institutions and offices to other

“The ASEAN 2025 agenda primes the ten member states for enhanced regional cooperation and it needs to be complemented with a robust discussion on ASEAN’s strategic direction and institutional development.”

ASEAN capitals would help to instil a sense of ownership and encourage greater participation from within the host countries. At the same time, it could attract more ASEAN nationals to contribute and serve in these functional agencies.

Third, ASEAN has to address the issue of regional leadership. "Who leads ASEAN?" The most logical answer is the ASEAN Chair. Presently, the Chair is "first among equals" during its one-year tenure with the quality and experience of the chairmanship

contingent on the vagaries of ASEAN's alphabetical rotational system. Laos, for example, is unfairly compared to Malaysia even before it formally began its official duties. Nevertheless, ASEAN has a tendency to be over-reliant on the Chair. The sharing of leadership responsibilities on functional issues with designated "coordinators" could help lessen the burden of the Chair, besides providing continuous leadership on key issues.

Fourth, ASEAN would have to decide on Timor Leste's application to join the regional grouping. The informal consensus among ASEAN seems to gravitate toward the position of "when", not "if." Dili's position is further strengthened by the fact that Timor Leste stands to fulfil the admission criteria for new members found in Article 6 of the ASEAN Charter. However, Timor Leste's admission has wider strategic implications for regional cooperation as doing so will increase the number of veto-wielding states – due to ASEAN's consensus decision-making protocol – to 11. Should ASEAN re-visit the consensus decision-making model and consider a super-majority modality for ASEAN to move at a "slower" and not necessarily at the "slowest" pace? Timor Leste's application provides an opportunity to discuss and re-negotiate the regional organisation's decision-making modality.

The imperfect and "in-progress" ASEAN Community will continue apace in the years and decades to come. The fact that the 735-word ASEAN Declaration inked in 1967 evolved into a comprehensive document of 5258 words in the ASEAN Charter in 2007 bears testimony to the vision and aspirations of the ten member countries for building a united, progressive and prosperous community. ASEAN will commemorate its 50th anniversary in 2017, crossing yet another milestone. More importantly, it presents an opportunity to think through ASEAN's strategic goals and directions. ■

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More of the Same Political-Security Cooperation in ASEAN Over the Next Decade?

BY TERMSAK CHALERPALANUPAP

Shortly before the full text of the new ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025 was posted on the ASEAN Secretariat website, two of its drafters cautioned the audience in a seminar organized by the ASEAN Studies Centre (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute), not to expect many new and “fanciful” initiatives in the new APSC Blueprint for 2016-2025. A perusal of the document confirms the warning to be valid.

There are few new ideas in the 40-page Blueprint, which has 290 action lines. Reasons for the rather unexciting outcome include the following: the framework for the Post-2015 Vision and desirable elements for all the three new Blueprints for the three community pillars were already laid down by ASEAN Leaders as far back as at the 23rd ASEAN Summit in Bandar Seri Begawan which took place in October 2013. Not much new room was thus left for manoeuvres.

The High Level Task Force (HLTF) set up in February 2015 had less than 10 months to draft five documents that would form the ASEAN Community’s Post-2015 Vision, i.e. the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN Community Vision 2025; the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 (ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together); and the three new Blueprints.

Since most of the HLTF members are either retired ambassadors or senior Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, the HLTF concentrated on drafting the new APSC Blueprint, and relied on senior economic officials and other senior officials in functional line agencies to draft the new AEC and ASCC Blueprints.

Moreover, most of the HLTF members who are either serving or former senior officials were mindful of the responsibility – and bureaucratic limitations — of implementing action lines in the new APSC Blueprint. Hence, they went for what could be done and avoided what could be too difficult to do or innovative.

Perhaps the most important reason why the new Blueprint brings more of the same is because it is the outcome of a consultation and consensus decision-making process. As always, what is finally accepted is not always the most desirable, but the least objectionable.

Nevertheless, the new APSC Blueprint contains interesting additions and omissions. One change is the aspiration of becoming a “rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred community.” It will be interesting to decipher the meaning and implications of this rather awkward formulation. Suffice to say that being “rules-based” is to be serious about fulfilling and implementing all ASEAN commitments and agreements.

In the APSC, three signed agreements have been awaiting full ratification for several years: the 2006 ASEAN Framework Agreement on Visa Exemption; the 2009 Agreement on Privileges and Immunities of ASEAN; and the 2010 Protocol to the ASEAN Charter on Dispute Settlement Mechanisms. This glaring shortcoming does not inspire confidence in the member governments’ seriousness to make the ASEAN Community “rules-based”.

The new blueprint contains eight action lines to “instil the culture of integrity and anti-corruption” as part of the aspiration to “strengthen democracy, good governance ... as well as combat corruption”. In practice, however, no ASEAN body has ever come to the fore to take charge of promoting regional cooperation in combating corruption. In recent years, only three member states (Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia) have passed the scrutiny of the Transparency International in its annual Corruption Perception Index.

The promotion and protection of human rights garnered the highest number of action lines at 15. This is a surprising development as the recent review of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) did not result in any significant change to its five-year Terms of Reference (TOR). Operationally, AICHR will continue to concentrate on the promotion of regional human rights cooperation, leaving the protection of human rights to the future, and in the hands of the UN Human Rights Council (UN HRC). ASEAN member states have also not been able to reconcile its openness to regular Universal Periodic Reviews

by the UN HRC with its aversion toward AICHR to conduct a similar exercise. The new Blueprint only goes as far to “continue the work of AICHR in obtaining information from ASEAN Member States on the promotion and protection of human rights”.

One challenge that ASEAN has yet to overcome is the ambitious attempt to make ASEAN drug-free by 2015. At first, ASEAN Foreign Ministers at the 31st AMM in 1998 announced the goal of making ASEAN drug-free by 2020. Later on at the 33rd AMM in 2000, the deadline was advanced to 2015, although relevant officials on the ground believed the goal was not achievable. As a result, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drug Matters (AMMDM) was established as a fall back option to pursue “the aspiration of a Drug-Free ASEAN” with 14 action lines.

Unfortunately, one long-standing commitment to convene special meetings of government leaders or ministers in the event of a political crisis or transboundary emergency has now been practically downgraded to the senior official level. This is inexplicable. What can senior officials do in a political crisis or a transboundary emergency like in the recent haze crisis, the seasonal irregular movement of people in the Indian Ocean and SARS? Relegating this mechanism to sub-ministerial levels will render the meeting ineffective as senior officials often lack the political mandate to undertake urgent commitments.

The new Blueprint contains 14 action lines on the South China Sea. But most of the focus was pedestrian and focused on continuing ASEAN-China cooperation on implementing the existing 2002 DOC and on discussing a COC. There was one noticeable omission in that the Leaders’ commitment in 2011 to create an “ASEAN common platform” on global issues to enable ASEAN to speak with one voice was left out.

Finally, one refreshing new addition to the Blueprint are the four action lines to raise the presence and awareness of ASEAN, an issue that was included in the ASEAN Social-Cultural Community Blueprint in the past. Moving this important issue to the APSC under the aegis of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM) signifies its growing importance to ASEAN. The AMM, directly or indirectly, oversees some of the regional organisation’s core institutions such as the ASEAN National Secretariats, the ASEAN Secretariat and the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN and the ASEAN Foundation, which puts it in a prime position to advance this issue. ■

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A Primer to the ASEAN Economic Community 2025

BY SANCHITA BASU DAS

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) achieved a major milestone on 31 December 2015 as it strove to create a single market among the 10 ASEAN countries by standardising economic regulations including those on trade, financial capital flows and labour migration. Altogether, the countries in the region offer a significant market of US\$2.6 trillion and around 635 million people.

ASEAN member countries adopted the 'AEC Blueprint 2025' in November 2015. This Blueprint provides a broad direction through several strategic measures to be implemented over the next ten years. It should be noted that the overall vision stipulated in the earlier Blueprint of AEC 2015 still remains relevant, though there are some notable changes.

The AEC Blueprint 2025 consists of five inter-related characteristics, instead of four developed under AEC 2015 (refer to table). The three key differences that are observed in the new Blueprint compared to the last one are: the 'wording' used for broad description of the characteristics; the reorganisation of elements under each of the characteristics; and a distinct focus on people. These are worth mulling over, although the underlying meaning of both the Blueprints has stayed the same.

With regard to the 'wording', the 2025 Blueprint describes the characteristics distinctly and leaves little room for misunderstanding. For example, in the 2015 Blueprint, the first characteristic of 'single market and production base' was highly debatable, as theoretically, a single market is defined as an area where there are no barriers to the flows and it satisfies the *Law of One Price*, after adjusting for transport and other transaction costs. However, ASEAN never aimed for such a form of integration; all it wanted was a free trade area with some characteristics of a single market. With this in mind, the 2025 Blueprint, clearly states that with reduction of barriers in trade and investment, the ASEAN countries are aiming to deliver on 'a highly integrated and cohesive economy'. Even specifications like 'free flow' and 'freer flow' have been replaced by generic terms like 'trade', 'environment' or 'facilitating movement'. This helps to avoid confusion.

As for the elements under each of the characteristics, these are far more detailed than in the earlier Blueprint. One noticeable change is the removal of priority integration sectors as a separate element, though enhanced sectoral cooperation retains some of the factors (such as tourism, e-commerce, healthcare). There are two missing elements in the 2025 Blueprint – infrastructure development and Initiative for ASEAN Integration. These are supposed to be reviewed in 2016 and are to be incorporated in the new Blueprint later. Regarding new attributes, good governance and productivity are included due to their importance and role in many Southeast Asian economies. As the characteristics in the 2025 Blueprint are inter-related and mainly reinforce increasing ASEAN's competitiveness via greater intra-ASEAN trade and investment, 'development of value chains' or 'trade' is mentioned as an element in almost all of the broad headings. This is mainly to minimise the 'silo mentality' that existed in the 2015 Blueprint.

The 2025 AEC Blueprint specifically mentions 'people'. Though trade and regulatory measures of a country touch lives of people and businesses, AEC 2015 had omitted to create this direct link in its main policy document. This led many to criticise ASEAN as a 'top-down' approach with minimal or nil consultation with people on the ground. The AEC 2025 Blueprint attempts to change the perception, not only by involving two regional think tanks to undertake prior studies, but also by noticeably mentioning 'people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN'.

Besides the differences mentioned above, the 2025 Blueprint highlights the need to implement the incomplete measures articulated in the 2015 Blueprint. It puts the unfinished agenda as a top priority that needs to be carried out by end-2016 for ASEAN countries, in general, and by 2018 for the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam).

However, the new Blueprint is sketchy about several policy issues, as many of the policy actions are saddled with words like 'promote', 'strengthen', 'discuss', 'enhance engagement' etc. Many of the initiatives do not clearly specify the timeline. For example, there is no mention of a timeframe for establishing a common ASEAN consumer protection

“The 2025 Blueprint, clearly states that with reduction of barriers in trade and investment, the ASEAN countries are aiming to deliver on ‘a highly integrated and cohesive economy’.”

framework or for establishing an efficient and integrated regional land transport network within ASEAN. The new document is also not clear on the monitoring mechanism (vis-à-vis the AEC Scorecard mentioned in AEC 2015 Blueprint), though it refers to the ASEAN Secretariat as the main body to track the implementation.

On the whole, although the 2025 Blueprint does not convey any ground-breaking vision or any drastic measures, it does indicate ASEAN countries' willingness to continue with their agenda of economic cooperation over the next ten years.

The crucial thing to observe is that the member countries have learnt from their past experience of executing the AEC 2015 Blueprint. They are now wiser and know what can or cannot be delivered in the economic sphere. This is reflected in the new 2025 AEC Blueprint, where the language is either kept simple and broad or actions have been promised that are practical and can be delivered in the years to come. In the end, what matters to ASEAN is its credibility as an organisation and its capacity to bring together ten countries from different levels of economic development and work for incremental change in regional integration. ■

Characteristics and Elements of AEC 2025 and 2015 Blueprints

AEC 2025	AEC 2015
<p>A Highly Integrated and Cohesive Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade in Goods • Trade in Services • Investment Environment • Financial Integration, Financial Inclusion, and Financial Stability • Facilitating Movement of Skilled Labour and Business Visitors • Enhancing Participation in Global Value Chains 	<p>Single Market and Production Base</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free flow of Goods • Free flow of Services • Free flow of Investment • Freer flow of Capital • Free flow of skilled labour • Priority Integration Sectors • Food, Agriculture and Forestry <p><i>(Financial sector integration was dealt with separately)</i></p>
<p>A Competitive, Innovative, and Dynamic ASEAN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective Competition Policy • Consumer Protection • Strengthening Intellectual Property Rights Cooperation • Productivity-Driven Growth, Innovation, Research and Development, and Technology Commercialisation • Taxation Cooperation • Good Governance • Effective, Efficient, Coherent and Responsive Regulations, and Good Regulatory Practice • Sustainable Economic Development • Global Megatrends and Emerging Trade-Related Issues 	<p>Competitive Economic Region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition Policy • Consumer Protection • Intellectual Property Rights • Infrastructure Development • Taxation • E-Commerce
<p>Enhanced Connectivity and Sectoral Cooperation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport • Information and Communications Technology • E-Commerce • Energy • Food, Agriculture and Forestry • Tourism • Healthcare • Minerals • Science and Technology 	<p>Equitable Economic Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SME Development • Initiative for ASEAN Integration
<p>A Resilient, Inclusive, People-Oriented, and People-Centred ASEAN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the Role of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises • Strengthening the Role of the Private Sector • Public-Private Partnership • Narrowing the Development Gap • Contribution of Stakeholders on Regional Integration Efforts 	<p>Integration into the Global Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coherent approach towards external economic relations • Enhanced participation in global supply networks
<p>A Global ASEAN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talks about ASEAN's efforts in integrating itself with the global community. • Develop a strategic and coherent approach when dealing with external parties. 	<p>---</p>

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ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Post-2015: Towards a People-Centred ASEAN?

BY MOE THUZAR

With the adoption of future directions for ASEAN integration at the 27th ASEAN Summit in November 2015, it is worth assessing these broad priorities and identifying where more effort is required to ensure that ASEAN's social pillar actually gains more traction among the intended beneficiaries of regional integration: the people.

The new Blueprint for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) contained in the vision for ASEAN 2025 highlights five main characteristics. The ASCC's path towards 2025 would be one that engages and benefits the people, and is inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic. These provide clear links to ASEAN's work on political-security and economic integration. Thus, human rights promotion and protection, and boosting entrepreneurship are priorities together with disaster and pandemic resilience, social protection, and equitable and sustainable development. Deepening and broadening ASEAN awareness and identity is linked to empowerment of people and strengthened institutions regionally and locally.

Preparing for a Post-2015 ASCC

The ASCC's continued journey towards 2025 does not start from a completely low base. There have been several accomplishments over the 2009-15 Roadmap period. These range from a commission on promoting and protecting the rights of women and children; credit transfer and quality assurance networks under the ASEAN University Network (AUN) to facilitate more student and faculty exchanges; an ASEAN curriculum sourcebook; ASEAN Resource Centres for capacity-building and development in ASEAN civil service cooperation; a regional agreement on disaster management and emergency response, and a regional centre on humanitarian assistance coordination; and the ASEAN Peatland Management Initiative as a means of tackling transboundary haze pollution. An instrument addressing

the rights of migrant workers is in the works. Yet, the diversity of systems and societies in the ASEAN member states and the broad priorities of the ASCC have lent to weak coordination in implementation, especially for situations (such as disasters, migration, and haze) that require multi-sector, multi-stakeholder participation.

Moving into the post-2015 scenario will involve more work by all concerned, especially the ASEAN Secretariat, in highlighting the human dimension of ASEAN cooperation and in bringing ASEAN processes closer to the people. A Mid-Term Review of the ASCC has assessed several challenges in implementation, including coordination, resource-mobilisation and capacity needs for monitoring and implementing regional programmes. The ASCC's value lies in the facilitating role for a certain measure of policy coherence through the closer partnerships/relationships built through regional activities. The advent of an ASCC Scorecard establishing region-wide benchmarks provides a practical element for the future projects and activities by the ASCC sectoral bodies that are implementers of regional cooperation and for the ASEAN Secretariat as coordinator of these regional activities. The ASCC 2025 priorities also find a convergence with the United Nations (UN) post-2015 sustainable development goals. There is thus a strong motivation for ASEAN governments to follow up through national plans as well as at the regional level.

“The ASCC’s path towards 2025 would be one that engages and benefits the people, and is inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic. These provide clear links to ASEAN’s work on political-security and economic integration.”

Since its establishment in 1967, ASEAN's social and cultural priorities have progressed from a general mention in the early ASEAN documents to more specific highlighting of the social development agenda. In the aggregate, ASEAN has fared better than other developing regions. But income inequality remains high. A large number of ASEAN workers are in the informal economy, in vulnerable employment situations, and women are more affected than men. The

labour market situation is particularly difficult for youth, as more educated youth in ASEAN countries are unemployed due to job-skills mismatch. To address this, and to prevent a further increase in the number of “working poor”, ASCC priorities for boosting competitiveness in the region’s workforce and encouraging entrepreneurship will need to consider more investment in education and training, particularly vocational training; employment services for better job-skills matching; support for SMEs to join the formal economy; and more bilateral/regional cooperation on migrant workers, who are a rapidly growing group in ASEAN.

Is A People-Centred ASEAN Possible?

The Eminent Persons Group (EPG) on the ASEAN Charter had first proposed the term “people-centred ASEAN”, for inclusion in the ASEAN Charter. The ASEAN Charter drafting process agreed on the term “people-oriented”. Currently, interpretations of a people-centred ASEAN are finding multiple directions. Whether ASEAN uses the term “people-centred” or “people-oriented”, it is incumbent on the part of the ASEAN regional cooperation processes to fulfil the commitments made by the ASEAN Leaders. At the same time, ASEAN governments have to manage the expectations and aspirations articulated by stakeholder groups in ASEAN, including the civil society organisations (CSOs) and the business community. Their “bottom-up” inputs are valuable for the formulation of future programmes and projects in the post-2015 ASEAN. The interest for human rights to be mainstreamed in all three community pillars of ASEAN cooperation is a recognition that is necessary for all sectors of ASEAN cooperation as ASEAN “forges ahead together” towards 2025.

ASEAN Awareness and Identity

There continue to be challenges of communicating ASEAN’s goals and aspirations effectively. While the regional-level ASEAN Communication Master Plan can serve as an overall framework for national implementation, both education and media can and do play an important role in informing people – especially the youth – about ASEAN and its priorities. This may at times be framed by the changes and

challenges of national needs and priorities in the ASEAN countries. ASEAN awareness in the region currently seems to be more about the breadth rather than depth of knowledge. Newspapers, books and the internet are the three main sources of information on ASEAN. Print media in the ASEAN countries usually cover ASEAN issues by topic of “interest”, focusing heavily on political headlines and territorial disputes, followed by reports on economics, trade and investment. There is also some difficulty in defining the “ASEAN-ness” of an issue. For example, would bilateral issues between two ASEAN countries be counted as ASEAN news? In addition to the research community’s deeper analysis of ASEAN issues, there is a dedicated online portal, ASEANnews.net, which offers readers a mix of voices and views on issues related to ASEAN. As for promoting ASEAN awareness and understanding through education, the ASEAN Curriculum Sourcebook has been developed as a reference source for ASEAN member states, and is freely available on the ASEAN Secretariat’s website at www.asean.org. However, not all ASEAN members have implemented dedicated courses/classes on ASEAN Studies at the secondary or tertiary levels.

ASEAN’s community-building efforts towards 2025 are finding a renewed focus on forging more people-to-people connections, in order to bring ASEAN outside of the intergovernmental circles and closer to the people. Greater people-to-people links would certainly contribute towards achieving the priorities of the ASCC, ranging from networking and exchanges to deepen academic knowledge and qualifications towards greater competitiveness of the region’s workforce, and helping create a sense of regional identity, and sharing information and experiences to boost national and regional responses to cross-cutting transboundary issues. The ASCC Scorecard will also help monitor progress of the extent to which ASEAN’s priorities for the people find traction with and participation from the people. ■

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Did You Know?

The Global Gender Gap Report (2015) by the World Economic Forum ranked the Philippines 7th in the Gender Gap Index. Among the ASEAN member states, it has the highest female-to-male ratio of women in parliament at 0.37. 1 in 4 ministerial positions are held by women.



Views

from the Secretaries-General

The process of community-building in ASEAN is one that was already in place way before the concept of an ASEAN Community was mooted. Central to this endeavour was the ASEAN Secretariat, the administrative arm of the organisation led by the Secretary-General. ASEANFocus is honoured to have four former ASEAN Secretaries-General, all distinguished statesmen in their own right, to share with us their thoughts on ASEAN's past, present, and future.

Tan Sri Ajit Singh	13
Mr. Rodolfo C. Severino	14
Ambassador Ong Keng Yong	15
Dr. Surin Pitsuwan	16

Tan Sri Ajit Singh is from Malaysia and served as the first Secretary-General of ASEAN from 1993-1997 after the restructuring of the ASEAN Secretariat, in which the professional staff was for the first time openly recruited, instead of being seconded officials from member states.

AF: ASEAN has overcome numerous obstacles since its formation in 1967, and the proclamation of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration signifies yet another historic milestone. What is the secret of ASEAN's longevity and success?

Tan Sri Ajit Singh (AS): Many Cassandras and naysayers have come and gone. Their favorite refrain was that ASEAN would not survive the next Summit. Yet, time and again they have been proven wrong. ASEAN continues to grow. Progress may be glacial but therein probably lies the clue to its resilience and durability.

At the heart of the matter, in my view, has been this collective and collegiate leadership that has helmed ASEAN since its founding. The Leaders themselves may have changed but the leadership as such has been rooted in good old-fashioned community values steeped in tradition and practice common to nearly all the ASEAN countries. It is based on the concept of *musyawarah* and *muafakat*, the Malay equivalent of consultation and consensus.

The terms may sound like clichés but their essence is deeply embedded in the ASEAN psyche. The process shuns grandstanding, bullying of the weak by the strong, and its acceptance of who you are rather than trying to make the other of your own image. It calls for patience and for the respect and understanding of the other's point of view. The need for maintaining friendly and harmonious relations is well understood by all as is the necessity for a peaceful and a stable region to promote growth and prosperity which all can share.

This is basic to the understanding of what makes ASEAN tick. There have been aberrations as are bound to occur even in one's own family. But by and large, the system has held well. This does not mean that national interests and priorities take a back stage. On the contrary, they are always uppermost in the minds of all Leaders in all ASEAN countries and are vigorously pursued. However, they are tempered by the need for interdependence, shared growth and shared responsibilities in ASEAN.

Also, ASEAN's geo-strategic location, astraddle one of the world's busiest sea and air commercial routes, makes it the centre of focus of most major powers which have their interests to pursue. ASEAN has used its own deftness in managing relations with these countries through a unique Dialogue Partnership System for the benefit of its members and the region.

Hence, imbued with its own innate wisdom and foresight, ASEAN can confidently look forward to playing an increasingly important role well into the future.

AF: ASEAN has reaped the success of the "low-hanging fruits" in the first phase of its community-building. The next phase as envisioned in the Declaration would be more challenging. What are the major obstacles that lie ahead for ASEAN?

AS: Looking at the Declaration and the accompanying documents, it does appear to be a formidable and ambitious agenda. The Leaders have clearly mapped out the route ASEAN should take for it to reach the next level of integration in order for it to cope with the ever-changing politico-socio-economic landscape. It is not just a question of a more closely integrated ASEAN but also an ASEAN which will play a lead role in a wider regional architecture.

The question this raises is whether ASEAN's present *modus operandi*, its structures, mechanisms and institutions will be able to handle such a heavy and complicated agenda.

Clearly, the document shows that the Leaders are not being starry-eyed about the Declaration agenda as ASEAN's shortcomings have been alluded to, if not specified. However, in the nature of things, the Leaders are more preoccupied with the bigger picture and have left the details on the implementation to the Ministers and officials.

To take just a small example relating to the ASEAN Secretariat, the call is being made for it be beefed up with more financial resources and competent staff. The question this raises is where are the necessary funds going to come from? Let's say, for the sake of argument that the Secretary-General of ASEAN comes out with the Secretariat's need for an additional US\$150 million over the next ten years to enable it to meet the Declaration goals assigned to it. Are the additional funds going to come in the form of larger yearly contributions from Member States? Can the additional funds be raised from the private sector? From members of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council, for example? Will they be ready to do some "ASEAN Service", (as opposed to "national service")? Will the Governments be ready to grant tax-exemption for their contributions?

The Declaration agenda has indeed loaded a heavy pile on ASEAN's shoulders. There will be difficulties but I think these will also be both challenging and exciting times to be involved in erecting and in fortifying the sinews of the ASEAN integration process. ■

Rodolfo C. Severino
is from the Philippines and was the Secretary-General of ASEAN from 1998-2002. He was the Founding Head of the ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

“The primary obstacle for ASEAN moving forward is the clash of national interests.”

AF: ASEAN has overcome numerous obstacles since its formation in 1967. The proclamation of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration signifies yet another milestone. What – in your view – is the secret of ASEAN’s longevity and success?

Rodolfo Severino (RS): What is considered a success for ASEAN is different for each member state and is dependent on its individual interests. What the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam defines as successes will be very different, as each will have different priorities the country hopes to gain from participating in ASEAN.

That being said, I believe that the quality that is at the core of ASEAN’s success thus far is the shared recognition among the ten Leaders that they have common regional interests and that they can better pursue these interests together rather than apart. This understanding has been reinforced by ASEAN’s many meetings, which institutionalise interactions among all levels of government, and now increasingly among members of civil society.

AF: ASEAN has reaped the success of “low hanging fruits” in its first phase of community-building. The next phase towards 2025 will be more challenging. What are some major obstacles that lie ahead for ASEAN?

RS: The primary obstacle for ASEAN moving forward is the clash of national interests, best illustrated in 2015 by member states’ different responses to transboundary issues such as the haze crisis and the refugee crisis. If ASEAN cannot solve these transboundary issues, it cannot accomplish anything.

AF: How can ASEAN’s institution-building be further strengthened to achieve the ASEAN 2025 goals?

RS: The ASEAN Charter has helped to codify and streamline the work of building the ASEAN Community, and identify the institutions that will move regional integration processes. But, there is limited scope to ensure compliance with ASEAN agreements or for settling disputes arising from these agreements. So, while regional institutions are certainly important for community-building, without national-level support, there is little that institutions by themselves can do.

AF: Now that ASEAN is going into the third IAI Work Plan, what are your thoughts on narrowing the development gap across ASEAN member states in the 2016–2025 Roadmap?

RS: Regardless of the contents of the IAI Work Plan, it will need political will at the national level for implementation to be a success. The ASEAN-6 need to recognise that they too will benefit from the more rapid, more inclusive development of the CLMV countries. ASEAN Leaders need to remember the basis of success of ASEAN so far, which is the common understanding that shared interests should be pursued together. ■

Amb. Ong Keng Yong served as ASEAN Secretary-General from 2003 to 2007. A career Singaporean diplomat since 1979, his most recent posting was as Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia from 2011 to 2014. He currently serves as Ambassador-at-Large for the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Executive Deputy Chairman of the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.

“Non-governmental organisations and civil society groups are important for the well-being of the ASEAN Community.”

AF: ASEAN has overcome numerous obstacles since its formation in 1967, and the proclamation of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration signifies yet another historic milestone. What is the secret of ASEAN's longevity and success?

Ong Keng Yong (OKY): In essence, each ASEAN Member State realises it cannot achieve the ASEAN agenda and the underlying strategic objectives without hanging together with other fellow ASEAN Member States. The rise of China and the implications for power relations require each ASEAN Member State to operate on two levels with the Chinese: firstly at the bilateral level and then at the multilateral level. Individually, there is little space for manoeuvres between China and the US. It is better to stick together as a regional organisation to transact business affecting each country's strategic and security concerns. Operating as ASEAN gives member states flexibility and space for managing ties with major powers. At the strategic level, ASEAN is the only platform where major powers and Southeast Asian nations can cooperate and collaborate on broader regional issues.

AF: ASEAN has reaped the success of the “low hanging fruits” in the first phase of its community-building. The next phase as envisioned in the ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together declaration would be more challenging. What are the major obstacles that lie ahead for ASEAN?

OKY: Domestic reforms, especially in economic restructuring, are the most urgent tasks. The ASEAN Community is based on economic integration which spurs growth and prosperity, and also ASEAN acting in a coherent and cohesive manner in managing relations with the major powers. Therefore, relevant policies inside the individual ASEAN Member States must be developed and put in place to strengthen the ASEAN agenda and the ASEAN Community. Furthermore, the people in ASEAN nations must be more aware of the benefits of being part of the ASEAN Community. There is a need for more institutional presence of ASEAN in domestic policy making and in all the ASEAN Member States.

AF: Are the circumstances right at the moment to consider a review of the ASEAN Charter to further strengthen the legal and institutional foundation of the ASEAN Community?

OKY: Yes, it is necessary to update the ASEAN Charter and to promote greater clarity in some areas. For example, the ASEAN Community and the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) are already a reality. We also need to be more inclusive with regard to those bodies and organisations in ASEAN which contribute to the development of the ASEAN Community. In other words, we need to revise Annex 2 (“Entities Associated with ASEAN”) of the ASEAN Charter.

AF: How can non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society groups play a more active role in the post-2015 ASEAN community building process?

OKY: Non-governmental organisations and civil society groups are important for the well-being of the ASEAN Community. No government can do everything. In this technological age where social media is increasingly dominant, it is useful to engage all these bodies to help in the role of governance. At the same time, these bodies must also be more responsible and accept that their expanded role also carries various obligations. It is easy to criticise and make suggestions, but that is not enough as policy-making in any country requires a balance of all interested parties and their causes. Taking ASEAN as a whole, we are dealing with a pluralistic society. It is essential for all quarters to cooperate in preserving peace and harmony to achieve the respective national progress. ■

Dr. Surin Pitsuwan was ASEAN Secretary-General from 2008 to 2012. A former Foreign Minister of Thailand, he now heads the Future Innovative Thailand Institute.

“If ASEAN wants to build its own Community, it must be willing to pay for its construction. There is only so much that outsiders can do for us.”

AF: ASEAN Leaders have broadcasted ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together in their Kuala Lumpur Declaration. What are your thoughts on this historic milestone?

Surin Pitsuwan (SP): ASEAN has always been visionary and ambitious. And through the years since its inception back in 1967, lofty words have inspired leaders and officials. Now it is time to deliver on the vision and the promise. We must engage the larger population. And they need more than just inspiring words. They need actual delivery. Each ASEAN Member State must go back and do its stock-checking on the many commitments made to the “Community” and how much and how many have actually been implemented. What is contained in the *ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together* will only be another set of recycled goals already articulated in the past, with very little hope of being realised. We have to be careful not to give only words of hope to our people for too long.

AF: How does one excite people over community building post-2015?

SP: ASEAN Leaders must learn to communicate with their people. ASEAN will have to be more participatory than before. Those Member States who think the Community will protect them from demands and pressure for change and transformation are wrong. The people will want change and transformation in the structure of governance so that they and their future generations will have a better life. Again, we want to make ASEAN a people-centred community, but we do not open up the space for the people. People-centred must mean that the process is created by the people, owned by the people, participated in by the people, and driven by the people.

AF: How does one convince people that an ASEAN identity is beneficial to them?

SP: ASEAN unity is the basis for ASEAN identity. Our people must benefit from ASEAN before they think ASEAN and feel ASEAN. We want each of our citizen to have that second identity. On top of being a Singaporean, one also feels ASEAN. In addition to being a Thai, one also feels the larger identity of being an ASEAN citizen. Much like a German feels European, and a Swede feels proud of being represented by the EU Delegation in our capitals.

A strong sense of belonging and a sense of ownership come with pride and confidence in what the EU stands for. Our people must also take pride and ownership in what ASEAN stands for. But what does ASEAN stand for?

AF: ASEAN remains a very “poor” organization which depends heavily on external funding support for its development cooperation projects. Could you share some practical ideas for resource mobilization in ASEAN to fund its projects?

SP: If ASEAN wants to build its own Community, it must be willing to pay for its construction. There is only so much that outsiders can do for us. We must do more for ourselves.

There must be ways to mobilize our own resources from the savings and the accumulated wealth and the foreign exchange reserves that we possess. Together we possess over US\$700 billion in reserves. I am glad there is a discussion going on about how we can make use of these resources more creatively for our own development. ASEAN needs close to US\$100 billion a year for infrastructure alone. We could only fund US\$30 billion a year.

I understand the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is now developing a scheme so that each ASEAN Member State can participate in a common fund from its own reserves. That would be a good beginning. We can also think about ASEAN taxes on some of the consumption and transactions that occur [in the region]. There are many creative ideas that can be developed to help finance the construction of our Community. If there is a will, there is a way. A collective will, I mean. ■



Views

from Outside ASEAN

Over the past 48 years, ASEAN has worked with many external partners to advance common interests in sectors as varied as development, security, and skills transfer. ASEANFocus invited six voices from some of these valued external partners on the future of relations with ASEAN.

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Southeast Asia, Meet Mr. Trudeau

BY PAUL EVANS

The surprise Liberal victory on October 19 ended a decade of Conservative rule. Though little was said about Asia during the election campaign, expectations are high that the new government will take a fresh and more ambitious approach.

Its style and orientation differ starkly from its predecessor. The inclinations and instincts are liberal internationalist, the Cabinet younger, half women, and with considerable international exposure. It has a “sunny ways” optimism and promises transformational rather than incremental change.

Justin Trudeau is cosmopolitan, telegenic and charismatic, drawing rock-star attention while thrown into the deep end of four international summits in his first six weeks in office. In Manila at APEC he was mobbed by adoring fans. “Hot and intelligent” concluded one Filipina journalist.

The first Prime Minister with a Southeast Asian blood line, he is a descendant on his mother’s side from William Farquhar (the first British Resident and Commandant of Singapore), and his Eurasian/Malay wife.

Trudeau has described Canada as “the first postnational state” and identified climate change as the most pressing international issue. A symbolic first step was renaming the foreign ministry “Global Affairs Canada.”

His government is just settling in, finalising appointments, and responding to immediate domestic issues and the Syrian refugee crisis. What can be expected in its policies and priorities as it turns to Southeast Asia?

No one in Cabinet has strong Eastern Asian connections, but there is widespread understanding of the importance of diversification of markets and partnerships across the Pacific. The TPP is likely to be endorsed after it is clear that Washington will as well. Deeper relations with China, including a move towards a bilateral FTA, are strong possibilities even as the government begins to position itself more publicly on how to respond to Beijing’s more assertive regional role.

It will almost certainly build on existing efforts to expand trade and consolidate the diplomatic scaffolding through representation in all 10 ASEAN countries and the appointment of a dedicated Ambassador to ASEAN.

Infrastructure investment is high on the domestic agenda and may connect to projects on the Western side of the Pacific.

On security matters in Southeast Asia, the focus may shift from the Conservatives’ emphasis on counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, and transnational crime to areas including the energy-environment nexus, and marine aquaculture.

Instinctive and avowed multilateralists, the team will probably push even harder to see Canada admitted to the East Asia Summit and the ADMM Plus processes.

En route, the bigger question is whether Ottawa will provide leadership and resources (the fiscal situation is not positive) for something bolder along the lines of the initiatives in the 1990s that included the Canada-ASEAN Centre, the workshops on the South China Sea, and the regional security dialogues that prepared the ground for the creation of the ARF.

Ambition, optimism, and respectful consultation are distinctive parts of the new government’s style. With liberalism under siege around the world and widening scepticism about the prospects of regional and global institutions, some “sunny ways” might just be welcome. ■

Dr. Paul Evans is Professor of International Relations at the University of British Columbia, Canada, and a senior member of the Institute of Asian Research and the Liu Institute for Global Issues

“... the focus may shift from counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, and transnational crime to areas including the energy-environment nexus, and marine aquaculture.”

ASEAN Community, China's Opportunity

BY WEI LING



The 27th ASEAN Summit declared the formal establishment of the ASEAN Community on 31 December 2015, the first of its kind in East Asia and a landmark in regional integration. Given its centrality in regional institution and architecture-building, the ASEAN Community will have profound impact on the evolution of regional order. What does the ASEAN Community mean to China? It is often said that the rise of China is an opportunity for its neighbours and partners. Likewise, the establishment of the ASEAN Community is a great opportunity for China.

A stable, peaceful and prosperous ASEAN contributes to a good periphery environment of China. China is the only major power that shares borders with ASEAN both on land and at sea. The stability and prosperity of ASEAN has a direct and immediate bearing on the strategic environment of China. The ASEAN Community is not an entity, but a process towards a rules-based, people-oriented and people-centred Community. *ASEAN 2025* envisions a community of peace, stability and resilience, composed of vibrant, sustainable and highly integrated economies. And such a vision and process has been institutionalised. Since the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, there has been no serious conflict among its members. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that an increasingly integrated and institutionalised ASEAN can do even better in maintaining peace and promoting growth in the region, and hence help create a favourable periphery environment for China's development.

ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together opens new space and provides new impetus for the win-win cooperation between ASEAN and China. With identical goals and common interest in uplifting people's living standards and narrowing development gap, the two sides can integrate their development

strategies. For instance, ASEAN is a key partner for China in the Belt and Road Initiative. The five major goals of the Initiative, namely, policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds, are compatible with ASEAN Connectivity goals. No matter on land, at sea or in the sky, China-ASEAN cooperation is indispensable in safeguarding key passageways, linking up road sections, and building transportation network.

The ASEAN Community will enhance the "one identity" of ASEAN and consolidate ASEAN centrality in the regional process. And a more cohesive ASEAN with greater institutional capacity is in China's interest. Since the East Asian integration started in 1997, ASEAN has been the norm-maker, agenda-setter and institution-builder. The ASEAN Way, ASEAN consensus first, and ASEAN institutional centrality have been the fundamental norms in the region. ASEAN leadership and centrality have been proven to be the only feasible way for regional cooperation. No major powers can lead. China or Japan cannot. Neither can the US. Regional architecture has been built in the "ASEAN Plus" format and ASEAN's partners have been socialised to the ASEAN Way. ASEAN capacity to remain central in norm and institution is critical in keeping regional integration on track.

ASEAN centrality is not a liability or constraint, but an asset and opportunity. It has provided and will continue to provide institutional context for China to embrace multilateralism, shoulder responsibilities for governance, and build rule-making capacity in its rise to great power status. ■

Dr. Wei Ling is Professor of International Studies and Director of the East Asian Studies Centre at the China Foreign Affairs University, China

ASEAN and the EU: 'Partners in Integration'

BY STEVEN EVERTS



The European Union has a strong stake in ASEAN's success. While the historical origins and subsequent development of the EU and ASEAN are very different, there are also important similarities, including a shared commitment to rules-based integration. Perhaps more than any other Dialogue Partner, the EU knows not only about the strategic imperative of regional integration but also how to translate ambitious goals into practical progress that benefits citizens. The EU is of course no simple 'model' for ASEAN, but we are always ready to share lessons learned, on how to plan on a continental scale and how to strengthen solidarity among countries and peoples.

It is for this reason that the EU salutes the outcomes of the recent ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, including the historic milestone of establishing the ASEAN Community. We know full well that integration is a process and not an event. It is therefore equally important that ASEAN Leaders agreed on a post-2015 vision ('ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together'); underlining the need for a full implementation of political decisions and to strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat. Apart from the need for strong political leadership and drive from national capitals, we also see an important role for the central ASEAN structures if the ambitions that ASEAN has set for itself are to be achieved. It is no accident that the EU has long been the biggest donor to the ASEAN Secretariat (which forms part of the more than doubling of EU assistance to ASEAN to €170 million for the period 2014-2020).

The EU is fully committed to upgrading the partnership with ASEAN and lifting it to a higher level, in line with the decisions taken by Ministers at the 20th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting in Brussels and the informal ASEAN-EU Leaders' Meeting held in Milan in October 2014. The EU has taken this task very seriously. In May 2015, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission adopted a strategy paper putting forward a very detailed set of proposals and commitments. The clue was in the title: 'The EU and ASEAN: a partnership with a strategic purpose'. These proposals were subsequently discussed and endorsed by all EU Foreign

Ministers in June. Taken together they represent a highly relevant political message and a concrete set of practical proposals, from connectivity to maritime security, from climate change to border management and human rights. In each of these areas we are stepping up our policy dialogue and we are expanding capacity building and the training of officials.

In 2016, as ASEAN works on implementing the next phase in its integration process, it will be important to sustain the positive momentum in the EU-ASEAN cooperation and better communicate the outcomes of this cooperation. This will require commitments and creativity on both sides. The EU is ready to deepen its engagement in and with ASEAN including by contributing to all ASEAN-led fora. We look forward to also enhance cooperation with ASEAN on pressing regional global issues so that we give substance to the stated goal of turning the relationship into a strategic one. There is much that the EU and ASEAN has achieved in recent years – but even more work needs to be done. ■

Dr. Steven Everts is Senior Advisor on EU-ASEAN Relations at the European External Action Service, the European Union's foreign ministry and diplomatic corps

“Taken together [these proposals] represent a highly relevant political message and a concrete set of practical proposals, from connectivity to maritime security, from climate change to border management and human rights.”

The ASEAN Community from a Korean Perspective

BY LEE JAE-HYON

In November 2015, ASEAN Leaders finally announced the establishment of the long-awaited 'ASEAN Community'. It was indeed a milestone event in the five decades that ASEAN has been in existence. Anticipating smooth progress towards the announcement, there have been lots of forums and conferences in Korea to discuss ASEAN. These events in Korea surveyed the past achievements of ASEAN as a regional organisation and the ASEAN Community's implications for Korea and Korea-ASEAN relations in the coming years. Of course all the events in Korea on the ASEAN Community have contributed to raising awareness among the Korean general public about the advent of the ASEAN Community.

Why is the historic transformation of ASEAN into a community so important for Korea? Indeed, Korea and ASEAN in the past 26 years since the establishing of a dialogue partnership have developed a solid bilateral partnership in many areas. In the political and security realm, there have been numerous strategic and security dialogues between the two sides. In 2013, the two launched a bilateral security dialogue which was the first case of ASEAN holding a security dialogue with a non-ASEAN country. They are also partners in many regional cooperation frameworks such as the ARF, the ASEAN+3, the EAS and the ADMM Plus.

Economically, the partnership between Korea and ASEAN is also extensive. ASEAN is Korea's second largest trading partner after China. Korean SMEs as well as major conglomerates invest heavily in Southeast Asian countries. They are also partners in regional financial cooperation schemes such as the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation (CMIM). In the socio-cultural arena, people-to-people exchanges through tourism, labour migration, marriage migration and student exchanges easily exceed one million people each year. Also, the two are close partners in dealing with many non-traditional and human security issues in the region.

The building of the ASEAN Community should be a springboard for the future development of a Korea-ASEAN bilateral cooperative partnership in many areas. To this end, both Korea and ASEAN have to make the following efforts. First, Korea's perception of ASEAN should be improved. So far, the most important aspect of Korea-ASEAN relations has been

the economic one. Many Koreans are aware of the importance of ASEAN, but the recognition of ASEAN is only confined to Korea's economic interests. To put it more bluntly, ASEAN is crucial to Korea since Korea has a chronic trade surplus in its trade with ASEAN and since Korean companies invest a lot in ASEAN countries. That is why the Korean media have focused primarily on the meaning and implications of the economic component of the ASEAN Community. Not much mention has been made in Korea regarding the other two pillars of the ASEAN Community.

ASEAN has to improve its role in regional security issues. While ASEAN has been promoting the concept of ASEAN centrality for many years, the influence of ASEAN in regional security matters is under-appreciated. In this regard, ASEAN, taking the opportunity of announcing the ASEAN Community, and especially the ASEAN Political-Security Community, has to increase its presence in regional security matters. ASEAN needs to be more pro-active. It has to speak up on regional security-strategic issues and engage more with other major regional countries in security cooperation and even defense cooperation. Also, ASEAN has to broaden its scope of security concerns beyond the immediate Southeast Asian region, reaching out to the security issues in Northeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, too.

The announcement of the establishment of the ASEAN Community does not mean a completion of the ASEAN Community building project. It rather heralds the genuine start of community building in Southeast Asia. ASEAN has a lot of challenges on the road to the completion of the ASEAN Community, even if it does not dream of a European Union-type community of nation-states. Of course, it must have been daunting to make such an announcement. The real test, however, has only begun. It is time for both ASEAN and Korea to think about how to cooperate in the successful building of the ASEAN Community for the peace, progress and prosperity of the region. ■

Dr. Lee Jae-hyon is Research Fellow and Director of the Centre for ASEAN and Oceania Studies at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, Republic of Korea



Did You Know?

The full official Thai name of Bangkok holds the world record for the longest name of a capital city. It reads as, "Krungthep Mahanakhon Amonrattanakosin Mahintharayuthaya Mahadilokphop Nopparatratthathaniburirom Udomratchaniwetmahasathan Amonphimanawatansathit Sakkathattiyawitsanukamprasit," which translates to "Great city of angels, the supreme repository for divine jewel, the great land unconquerable, the grand and prominent realm, the royal and delightful capital city full of nine noble gems, the highest royal dwelling and grand palace, the divine shelter and living place of the reincarnated spirit."

ASEAN and New Zealand after the first 40 years: Supporting Centrality and Integration

BY Ambassador STEPHANIE LEE

There were several important milestones marked on 22 November 2015 in Kuala Lumpur. New Zealand and ASEAN Leaders met for only the third time ever, in a Commemorative Summit to mark 40 years of dialogue relations. The Leaders agreed to elevate the relationship to a Strategic Partnership and endorsed a programme of cooperative activities for the next five years. New Zealand Prime Minister John Key announced new programmes totalling over NZ\$200 million (about US\$136 million) over the next three years, focused on strengthening ASEAN's prosperity through trade and agriculture development, and its human capability through scholarships and training.

Immediately following the Commemorative Summit, New Zealand was privileged to witness the launch of the ASEAN Community, an historic moment as the ten ASEAN Leaders signed their commitment to a new level of regional integration, building on ASEAN's success to date as the foundation for a bold yet achievable vision to 2025.

Then, ASEAN and its eight partners celebrated the 10th anniversary of the East Asia Summit by agreeing to strengthen the forum, now firmly established as the region's premier, leader-led strategic body.

And by coincidence, 22 November was also the day 50 years ago that Singapore and New Zealand cemented their diplomatic relations.

Forty years ago when New Zealand became an ASEAN dialogue partner, we didn't imagine how successful ASEAN would prove to be, and how broad a scope regional cooperation would come to have. We are pleased that our decision to partner with ASEAN has been proved wise, and proud to have been able to contribute to the region's growth and stability. Today, the ASEAN-New Zealand relationship is one of mutual benefit with rich people-to-people and economic linkages, and a collective commitment to regional security.

New Zealand has always firmly supported ASEAN's centrality in the regional architecture, and is equally committed to supporting its regional integration and community building.

As a country in a comprehensive economic partnership since 1983 – the Australia-New Zealand Closer Economic Relations – we are firmly convinced of the role of regional integration in lifting an entire region. So it was a natural step in designing our cooperation for the next period to align it with ASEAN's own 2025 vision and integration frameworks.

As one practical example, New Zealand's support to implementing the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement is building the capacity of ASEAN officials to implement the ASEAN Economic Community and preparing the way for an ambitious outcome in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership negotiations.

New Zealand has very much embraced ASEAN's desire to be people-oriented and people-centred, and so New Zealand is increasing scholarships and programmes to strengthen linkages within ASEAN and with New Zealand, especially through young business and government leaders. We will continue to work with ASEAN on important areas such as disaster risk management and will have a special focus on narrowing the development gap between and within ASEAN countries.

The launch of the ASEAN Community marks a moment of clarity about the future. We know where ASEAN is going, what it must do to get there and how partners can walk alongside. As we begin the next 40 years of dialogue relations, New Zealand's enduring commitment to ASEAN has stepped up commensurate with ASEAN's ambitious vision. ■

H.E. Stephanie Lee is presently New Zealand's first dedicated Ambassador to ASEAN, based in Jakarta

“New Zealand has always firmly supported ASEAN's centrality ... and is committed to supporting its regional integration and community building.”

The Future of ASEAN-UN Cooperation

BY JEFFREY D. FELTMAN



Vietnamese Mission to the UN

The year 2015 has been an historic one for ASEAN and the United Nations. ASEAN formally established the ASEAN Community and the world adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. After witnessing the signing of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, congratulated the Leaders of ASEAN on becoming one community. He called for Vision 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goals to be complementary in order “to transform the lives of millions of people living in poverty”.

The year was also significant for the Comprehensive Partnership between ASEAN and the United Nations, which was first endorsed in November 2011. A major outcome of the 7th ASEAN-UN Summit that took place on 22 November 2015 in Kuala Lumpur was the decision to develop the first five-year Plan of Action (2016-2020) between the two Organisations. The Plan of Action will take into account key elements of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and focus on the future priorities of cooperation of both Organisations across the comprehensive areas under the partnership.

For example, the priorities of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025 provide opportunities to modify or expand ongoing engagement in areas of peace and

security cooperation; combat transnational crime, including trafficking in persons and ‘mixed migration’; strengthen counter-terrorism measures; and enhance the protection of human rights. ASEAN’s significant contribution of more than 5,500 uniformed personnel to global peace operations carried out by the United Nations provides a valuable basis on which to further strengthen ASEAN-United Nations peace and security cooperation.

Another focus of the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025 is preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. The United Nations Department of Political Affairs (DPA) has in the past several years carried out a series of joint ASEAN-United Nations workshops and regional dialogues. The DPA hopes to continue these events, together with ASEAN, so that they can grow and expand in depth and scope. The DPA also hopes to expand its cooperation with the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) to identify areas of future collaboration and capacity-building in preventive diplomacy, mediation, peace-building, ‘women, peace and security’ issues and disaster management.

The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 recognises ASEAN’s rising global role, through strengthened external cooperation and an ASEAN common platform on regional and global issues. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has encouraged ASEAN Member States to share development experiences and best practices, particularly in the areas of sustainable development and climate change. In the coming year, more international cooperation and partnerships to address a range of challenges are expected. ASEAN’s high-level engagement on issues such as migration and in the forthcoming Global Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism as well as at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 are very much welcomed and appreciated.

The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 has the potential to provide a solid foundation to further strengthen ASEAN-United Nations cooperation on a wide range of regional and international issues. It carries with it the hope that the formulation of the ASEAN-UN Plan of Action (2016-2020) can provide a strategic platform for this enhanced cooperation. ■

Mr. Jeffrey D. Feltman is the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs



Views

from the Ground

As ASEAN strives to become more people-oriented and people-centred, the onus is now on ordinary ASEAN citizens to own this community-building effort by fostering cooperation beyond the realm of inter-governmental relations. ASEANFocus is pleased to have five prominent Southeast Asian personalities opine on what ASEAN holds for the future of their respective sectors.

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ASEAN Community 2025: Into The Next Phase

BY DR. ROBERT YAP

As 2015 draws to a close, it is clear that the 10-member nations of ASEAN did not fully realise the objectives of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Despite making notable progress, the aim of integrating the diverse economies in Southeast Asia into a single market and production base, with freer movement of trade, investment, capital and skilled labour by the end of 2015 was constantly marred and delayed by political resistance and poor institutional infrastructure.

Yet, recognising the immense benefits of an unified market of 622 million people and a combined gross domestic product of US\$2.6 trillion, the ten member states of ASEAN adopted the AEC Blueprint 2025, which provides the general roadmap for the AEC from 2016 to 2025. The AEC Blueprint 2025 envisions sustaining the momentum of regional integration to realise a politically cohesive and economically integrated ASEAN.

While many look to the government to bring about the realisation of the AEC, the private sector can play a significant role in closing gaps, while leveraging on opportunities at the same time. The near-term impact of this community's creation would spur more local firms to expand abroad and move its production to cheaper bases and will also result in more cross-border movement of supply chain solutions to manage the logistics and value-adding activities.

In a bid to improve connectivity and openness to gain access to other markets, the ASEAN Business Advisory Council has introduced a concrete proposal to bring about a standardisation of customs procedures that will ease the shipment of goods. Another initiative is to pilot a regional interchange hub with YCH Group, a supply chain management company, to showcase a platform that harmonises cross-border transportation and facilitates trade in ASEAN. The interchange hub, LaosConnect™, would bring about supply chain connectivity and economic efficiency through a paperless flow of goods to connect various stakeholders throughout the entire supply chain. It would ensure a smoother cross-border flow of goods, enhancing the speed-to-market factor for businesses to expand regionally.

As businesses in ASEAN continue to grow, many neglect the importance of talent development. The lack of talents to support rapid expansion would eventually become the bottleneck for growth and is the Achilles' heel of many companies. With that understanding, it is imperative for ASEAN to develop supply chain and logistics talents in the region to build up a talent pipeline that caters to the ever-changing climate; such as the exponential growth of consumer demand and increased need for logistics services.

With the new ASEAN Community 2025, coupled with the existing frameworks and infrastructures, the ten member states continue to integrate economically, growing in tandem with China and India. While the AEC still faces many challenges ahead, buried in every challenge lies possibilities. Businesses in ASEAN are well-positioned to leverage on these opportunities through solving some of the biggest challenges in the Southeast Asian market today. ■

Dr. Robert Yap is Chairman of YCH Group, Singapore's leading supply chain company, President of the Singapore National Employers Federation, and a former Chairman of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council

“As businesses in ASEAN continue to grow, many neglect the importance of talent development. The lack of talents to support rapid expansion would eventually become the bottleneck for growth and is the Achilles' heel of many companies.”

ASEAN: A Regional Platform for Catalysing Domestic Change

BY TUNKU ZAIN AL-'ABIDIN MUHRIZ

The Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) started life as a Malaysian domestic think-tank in 2006 (under a different name) promoting the principles of rule of law, individual liberty, free markets and limited government. But since our relaunch in 2010, ASEAN has become increasingly prominent in our discourse and research. My own speaking engagements have come to feature perspectives on the region, as audiences of students, professionals and activists all wonder how ASEAN will change their lives. In 2015, the chatter was particularly loud, especially in Malaysia which held the ASEAN Chairmanship and the thumping (literally) declaration of the ASEAN Community, which as diplomats have already observed, was more aspirational than celebratory.

In 2014 IDEAS has established a regional arm called the Southeast Asia Network for Development (SEANET) which seeks to promote market ideas throughout the ten ASEAN countries. We are encouraged by the existence of civil society organisations – in some countries already vibrant, in others just beginning to sprout – with whom we can find common cause. These partnerships – alongside links between governments, universities and businesses – are essential in giving the community meaning.

Communities cannot be forced to grow top-down. Although ASEAN began life as a politically elite driven project – and achieved many significant things in that format – declamations of a community will be hollow unless paternalism eventually gives way to democratic principles, so that the community will be able to evolve organically according to the demands of its constituent citizens.

I completed my tour of all ten ASEAN member states in 2015 and realised that in most countries, and especially for young people, ASEAN is often seen as a platform for catalysing domestic change. For politicians, it can also be handy to argue that certain policies must “regrettably” be reformed in order to access certain benefits from the grouping (a similar phenomenon is also seen with trade deals such as the Trans Pacific Partnership). In CLMV, where war and strife destroyed institutions in the last few decades, I find that enthusiasm with ASEAN derives from the desire to rebuild national institutions and reconnect with neighbours towards a common purpose.

Ironically, that sense of shared destiny is perhaps not as strong in the founding members of ASEAN, and even when Malaysia was the ASEAN Chairman, far too few Malaysians understood the form and functions of ASEAN’s institutions, the Pillars of the Community, or indeed the ASEAN Charter. This is a shame and indicates how much more groundwork the community needs.

As we continue with this grand project, I believe we can be inspired by our past – not only from the cosmopolitan maritime and riverine trading ports that defined our region centuries ago – but by the proponents of freedom in the twentieth century, such as Malaysia’s Tunku Abdul Rahman.

I do not expect the ASEAN Way to surrender anytime soon, but I hope that the contributions of civil society will begin to imbue the region with greater democratisation and dynamism in the coming years. ■

HRH Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin Muhriz is Founding President of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS), Malaysia

“... enthusiasm with ASEAN derives from the desire to rebuild national institutions and reconnect with neighbours towards a common purpose.”

Strategising ASEAN's Outreach to the People

BY ABDUL QOWI BASTIAN & HARYO WISANGGENI

The end of 2015 marks a new beginning for Southeast Asian countries as they begin the economic integration process to establish the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). A lot has been said on the opportunities and challenges that will rise from this process. The AEC will allow for more efficient movement of resources and create opportunities to boost economic growth. However, the gap between countries—in GDP, bureaucracy efficiency and stakeholders' level of awareness of the AEC—remain visibly as a challenge.

As a media practitioner, I will address the last challenge – level of awareness – using Indonesia as a reference.

How many are aware of the AEC and the implications it holds for them? Based on a survey by the Indonesia Institute of Sciences (LIPI), released in December 2015, the number is disappointing low at 25.9%. The level of awareness among business community and traders was at 27.8%. With such low level of awareness, how could we expect these stakeholders to leverage on the AEC's attendant benefits while overcoming its challenges when most of them remain unaware of the AEC?

In all fairness, the current and previous administrations have tried to tackle this issue since the AEC agreement adopted by ASEAN member states in 2007. There were many media conferences, meetings, and workshops. But with the complexities of Indonesian society in terms of their media consumption behavior, these alone are insufficient.

How complex is the Indonesian media profile?

Examining this from the socioeconomic perspective, we will have the growing Internet savvy-critical-middle class near the top of the pyramid. They still consume content from major mainstream media. But at the same time, this market segment demand more “tailored” content that fits into their lifestyles. This fuels the rise of the “new media” which in general focuses on niche markets but pursue higher engagement with their audience. “Niche” does not necessarily mean small. *Hipwee*, a BuzzFeed-like site with viral contents, that is specifically crafted for the Indonesian urban youth is a case in point. With demographic bonus still in place, this is a huge market. On the other hand, at the bottom of the pyramid, we have those people who literally have no Internet access to consume any online content.

There is no “one size fits all” communication method for this kind of society. If the Indonesian government wishes to elevate the level of awareness, it needs to rethink the approach in striving to socialise the AEC with three steps.

Firstly, a lot has changed in the media industry but one thing remains constant: content is king. Reliable, data-driven AEC-related content will be a good start. Based on discussions with Indonesian analysts and government officials, these content do exist. The problem is that they are scattered across institutions. So the first step is to integrate these content in one place. Then, deliver the content source through an open platform where the government can crowd source more content while people respond with questions, views or objections. There are some excellent benchmarks like the Future Melbourne and Jakarta Smart City initiatives.

Secondly, good content is not only determined by its relevance and validity. When the content is relevant, it can impact the audience the way the content producer wants it to. The audience can be influenced if they understand the content. To achieve this goal, the AEC content hub will need to be reconstructed to make it easier to consume and comprehend.

Up until this point, all of the above can be done online. This poses a unique challenge as a significant number of people do not have Internet access. A possible solution to this conundrum requires two remedies: first, the central government has to ensure that all of their local counterparts will have reliable access to the online hub. Even for Indonesia, this is feasible.

Next, it will be local governments' responsibility to collaborate with their local stakeholders and deliver the information to the society through the right channel, at the right time. What is the right channel? It can be a very simple fact sheet distributed in traditional markets or banners in the vicinity of a *dangdut* concert venue. Local wisdom will play a critical role in finding an optimal strategy.

Last but not least, all of this will require a huge investment. The government will not be able to do it alone. Sourcing for assistance such as crowdsourcing site is a practical option. Finally, governments should be prepared to share data with NGOs to reach the targeted society. Private businesses funding these programmes should be compensated with some leeway to market their products and service. Ethical concerns can be mitigated if the agreements are transacted in a transparent manner. ■

Abdul Qowi Bastian is Indonesia Desk Editor at Rappler.com, and Haryo Wisanggeni is Multimedia & Business Reporter at Rappler Indonesia

ASEAN in a New Environment

BY M.C. ABAD, JR.

At least five new elements define the environment that ASEAN functions in today, half a century after it was created. These are new strategic alliances, greater economic interdependence, new transboundary issues, more confident members, and the rise of civil society.

In addition to post-WWII alliances, various levels of strategic partnerships between ASEAN members and between some ASEAN members and countries outside Southeast Asia have evolved over the years. These include Indonesia-Australia, Singapore-Australia, Singapore-US, Philippines-Japan, Philippines-Vietnam, among others.

ASEAN has indeed undergone substantial economic integration. In 2014, intra-ASEAN trade reached US\$608 billion or 24 percent of the total trade of the region, making the region its own largest market by partner. At US\$24 billion, intra-ASEAN investment amounted to almost 18 percent of the total FDI inflows into the region, the second largest by source. These are accompanied by increasing movement of people through tourism, education, and labour migration. The ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity will further enhance freer movement of people, goods and services and make the region more interconnected and interdependent.

Ominous if not new transboundary issues affecting the region take the form of labour migration, money laundering, human trafficking, illegal drug trade, maritime piracy, trafficking in firearms, environmental pollution including transboundary haze, viral and communicable diseases, and international terrorism.

All ten members of ASEAN have transformed into more confident nations. None is desperately dependent on any other country for its survival and development. None are at war, and most of them hold regular popular elections, the most recent of which is Myanmar with the National League for Democracy taking national leadership. Many are led by popularly elected leaders, supported by a professional civil service. The combined GDP of the region reached US\$2.57 trillion in 2014 with an average GDP per capita of US\$4,135 or about halfway to reaching the global average.

The region has also seen the rise of transnational civil society, business linkages, and think-tanks. ASEAN is no longer monopolised by diplomats and bureaucrats. Among them, the ASEAN Business Advisory Council advances economic integration, the ASEAN People's Forum advocates the democratisation of regionalism, and the ASEAN-Institutes for

Strategic and International Studies promotes regional peace and security. The widening of the ASEAN constituency is helped by the explosion of Internet-based social networks and new forms of media. Since the beginning of 2015, Southeast Asia has registered a social network penetration rate of 34 percent, above the global average of 29 percent.

What are the implications of these elements for ASEAN? The continuously changing strategic environment requires ASEAN to play an ever more stabilising and moderating role. As a group of relatively small states, multilateral security dialogue and conflict management can be as important as bilateral relations for ASEAN countries, and greater effort may need to be exerted in promoting security dialogue beyond ASEAN.

Greater economic interdependence requires a fair, stable, equitable, and consistent legal and investment climate. Legitimate traders and investors expect no less. ASEAN should bridge the gap between regional commitments and domestic implementation through effective incentives and sanction systems. We should reduce to the minimum the differences in our legal systems.

More serious and newer forms of transboundary challenges bring home the point that regional issues require regional solutions. This is a function of ASEAN's geographic contiguity, greater mobility across borders, large-scale environmental destruction contributing to climate change, and transnational crime. ASEAN governments should match this with even closer collaboration, prevention, control, and prosecution. ASEAN-wide hotline systems or point-to-point communications link among decision-makers and law enforcers should be strengthened.

An ASEAN composed of more confident members could mean a stronger and more independent group of states. This would advance greater collegiality and respect among members. But this could also be a double-edge sword. It could mean greater difficulty for the rotating chairmanship to set common directions. ASEAN should therefore be more discerning of divisive forces and behaviour both from within and from outside.

Finally, the broadening of the ASEAN constituency and the rise of civil society engaged in regional issues is a positive development which brings greater participation and a sense of ownership for Southeast Asians. ■

Mr. M. C. Abad, Jr. is the Chairman of the Institute for Strategic and Development Studies (ISDS), Philippines

Reflections on ASEAN Community 2015 and Beyond

BY **POU SOTHIRAK**

ASEAN aspires to become a community by the end of 2015. But this milestone aspiration will not be successfully completed and meaningfully welcomed unless ASEAN is able to deliver tangible results which their respective governments have promised the 635 million people of ASEAN.

ASEAN community-building is a step-by-step process that transforms gradually even after the announcement of the establishment of the ASEAN Community on 31 December 2015. Afterward, if ASEAN wishes to become a resilient community, it must overcome current shortfalls and address ongoing challenges by responding appropriately to the aspiration of the people, the member countries, and the region as a whole.

ASEAN must convince all its citizens that it can deliver concrete results as promised. These promises include reducing poverty and narrowing the development divide; providing the welfare and protection to citizens, allowing easy access to quality education, adequate healthcare and other public goods; empowering each man and woman so that they can live a life without fear and with dignity; protecting individuals from ill treatments and countering social injustice deriving from the concentration of wealth, knowledge and power. In this sense, the post—2015 paradigm for the people-centred ASEAN must be to ensure good governance and well-targeted interventions that allow the spillover from richer, more technologically advanced members of ASEAN to the less developed countries, increase significantly social investment, social protection, and promote people empowerment.

Each ASEAN country must take bolder action to further promote equitable and inclusive development by placing people's well-being at the centre of development and guarantee the trickle-down effect to the base. Besides grand-scale connectivity projects, more rural roads and affordable electricity must be provided to spur growth, increase employment, attract FDI, and advance social development. Long-term human resource programmes must be developed to meet the demand of the wide-ranging disciplines to cultivate a pool of capable youths with appropriate skills and knowledge to take on the necessary task of nation-building. Non-traditional security such as natural disasters, ecological degradation, haze, and pandemic disease outbreak must be tackled with fortitude. The impact of climate change must be addressed with effective adaptation and mitigation policies to prevent further damage to the environment. Deeper reforms must happen domestically to keep society as cohesive as

possible by embracing firmly the principles of the rule of law and democracy, suppressing corruption, expanding freedom of expression and the respect for human rights, and fully embracing the notion of open and just society.

All countries in ASEAN must work together to strengthen rule-based institutions, and bolster their relevance amidst power-shifting dynamics in the region. Broader regional significance must not be surrendered to narrow national interest. Although ASEAN principles articulate strong sense of mutual trust, shared responsibility, and common interest, the organization nevertheless repeatedly succumbs to individual national activities that often contradict common regional interest – for example the South China Sea issue and the irregular migration of Rohingyas from Myanmar. ASEAN must strengthen all its relevant institutions and mechanisms so as to remain in the “driving seat” of key ASEAN processes, such as the ARF, the APT, the EAS, and regional trade frameworks. ASEAN needs to gradually move away from the consensual style of cooperation towards an increased formalisation and legalisation of regional institutions. ASEAN must ensure that the scope of its regionalism and community-building are moving steadfastly towards becoming more rules-based and fulfilling the obligations of a global and modern system. ASEAN must act collectively to pull the community-building process to a higher level by strengthening its Secretariat and assure that all the targets and deadlines are met deadlines. There must be an effective monitoring mechanism to deal with non-compliance and non-cooperation on any of the ASEAN principles.

Amidst the power-shifting dynamics in the region, ASEAN must stand ready to tackle sensitive and common security interest more convincingly and project its collective leadership on issues of regional and international concerns. ASEAN must overcome the challenges confronting the “ASEAN Way”, be it the divergences in political or economic interests, the competing interest in the South China Sea, or different understanding of the concept of human rights and democracy. More importantly, ASEAN needs to formulate a common voice and act in unity on political-security, economic and social issues. The ASEAN Leaders must find more effective ways to respect community commitments rather than rely on peer pressure for upholding their commitment towards community building beyond 2015. ■

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