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ASEAN Focus



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CELEBRATING FIVE DECADES
OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

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

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2017 has been a whirlwind year for ASEAN. As ASEAN celebrated its 50th anniversary, its member states have had to contend with and adapt to the shifting geopolitical and geo-economic landscape across the wider region. Weathering through the many events and developments that have unfolded in the year, ASEAN is now poised to begin the next chapter of its journey towards deeper regional cooperation and integration.

As the clock strikes midnight on 1 January 2018, the chairmanship of ASEAN formally passes on from the Philippines to Singapore. At the 31st ASEAN Summit in November this year, Singapore unveiled its chairmanship theme, choosing to focus particularly on supporting an ASEAN that is “Resilient and Innovative.” We are honoured to have Singapore Foreign Minister Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan expound in greater detail, in an exclusive piece for ASEANFocus, the country’s priorities as it prepares to chair the regional organisation for the fourth time.

With US President Donald Trump making his first sojourn to Asia for the APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting in Vietnam and the ASEAN Summit in the Philippines, we got a close-up view of his Administration’s policy leanings towards the region. In this issue, we have assembled two distinguished panels of experts and academics to each analyse the impact of President Trump’s visit to Southeast Asia, as well as the Indo-Pacific concept that is beginning to define his Administration’s Asia policy.

With the passing of Dr. Surin Pitsuwan and the impending handover of office from Mr. Le Luong Minh to Dato Paduka Lim Jock Hoi on January 2018, we are reminded of the important work of the Secretary-General of ASEAN in realising the shared vision for regional integration. Dr. Termsak Chalermphanupap introduces us to the ASEAN Secretary-General post for *Know Your ASEAN*. This is followed by a valedictory interview with outgoing Secretary-General Le Luong Minh for *Insider Views*, and a tribute to Dr. Surin Pitsuwan by Dr. Termsak and Ms. Moe Thuzar.

There is nothing that defines a person’s aspirations more than his or her desire for education. As Southeast Asian economies move up the value chain – from agriculture and manufacturing to knowledge-based industries and the services sector – the spotlight on higher education as well as technical and vocational education and training (TVET) across the region has never shone brighter than now. In our last instalment of the *Outlook at 50* series, we take an in-depth look into the opportunities and challenges for higher education and TVET throughout ASEAN. Dr. N Varaprasad gives us an overview of the higher education and skills development landscape in ASEAN, followed by Prof. Arnoud De Meyer’s vision for the university of the future, and Mr. Victor Mills’ thoughts on what businesses today want from graduates. We supplement these insights with pertinent data on higher education and TVET for ASEAN in *Figures*.

We end off by introducing you to Thai martial artist Tony Jaa and the Prambanan temple complex in Indonesia for *People and Places*, as well as a timeline of key regional events that took place in 2017.

From all of us here at the ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, we wish you the warmest greetings of this season, and a happy 2018 ahead! ■

ASEAN: Next 50

DR VIVIAN BALAKRISHNAN, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore, explains why ASEAN is at an important turning point in its history and outlines Singapore's vision for the region's future.



ASEAN 
SINGAPORE
2018 RESILIENT
AND INNOVATIVE

ASEAN is at an inflexion point today, and not just because it is our 50th anniversary. We live in uncertain times and as we look ahead, we must ask: Why was ASEAN formed 50 years ago? What role has it played? What does the future hold? And what do ASEAN unity and centrality truly mean?

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY

First, the geostrategic balance is shifting. China and India are emerging as global powers. Never before in history have hundreds of millions of people been raised from abject poverty into a rising middle class – all connected to the global economy at the same time. We are also witnessing profound demographic, cultural and political changes in America, Europe and Japan.

Second, the global consensus on free trade and globalisation is fraying. Populism has gained political traction across the world. Free trade has been unfairly blamed for legitimate middle class anxiety over jobs and wage stagnation, when the real phenomenon driving such anxiety is the ongoing digital revolution. Some of today's jobs are at risk of becoming obsolete, and families are worried about their children's future. But new technologies also offer great opportunities to improve the way we live, work and play. The key challenge is to re-skill our people so that no one is left behind.

Third, our global order is being reshaped by non-state actors and transboundary challenges, including terrorism, cybercrime and climate change. These phenomena are not confined to neat geographical boundaries, and do not operate within the usual concepts of the Westphalian nation-state. A

“If we continue to uphold ASEAN unity, and find the right balance between promoting the regional good and our national interests, we will stay strong and our prospects remain bright.”

case in point for Southeast Asia is the returning fighters from Iraq and Syria. We saw more returning fighters in Marawi in southern Philippines, and there are other potential hotbeds for terrorism in our region. Our concern with the situation in Rakhine State is related to our anxiety that this becomes another sanctuary for extremism and terrorism. Closer home, we saw a Singaporean in an ISIS recruitment video. No single country can solve these problems alone. We need effective multilateral processes based on mutual respect, interdependence and cooperation.

Fourth, ASEAN has to contend with our internal challenges. The ten Member States are highly diverse, in terms of our political, economic and social systems. ASEAN's consensus-based decision making is a design feature that assures every member an equal voice despite our great diversity. Consensus, however, has its challenges. It can be laborious, and our ability to find a common position on issues of regional concern is sometimes tested.

ASEAN has always had to deal with external challenges. ASEAN was formed in 1967 amidst immense geopolitical instability – it was the zenith of the Cold War, the conflict in Indochina was in full force and there were some conflicts within the original five members of ASEAN. Against this backdrop, the ASEAN Member States put our differences aside and pursued economic development for prosperity. Instead of breaking ranks or becoming proxy states, we chose to stand together. This gave us the critical two to three decades of peace amongst ourselves, and time to invest in our infrastructure and people, and to prove that an economic model of openness, of trade, and of liberalisation works. That there has been no outright war or battle between ASEAN Member States is another achievement worth celebrating.

If we continue to uphold ASEAN unity, and find the right balance between promoting the regional good and our national interests, we will stay strong and our prospects remain bright. We must not let external tsunamis overwhelm us, but collectively build a bigger and stronger ship to navigate the tough waters and expand opportunities for all.

That is why Singapore, as the 2018 ASEAN Chair, will focus on strengthening resilience and expanding our innovation capacity. We need ASEAN to be adaptable, and to be able to find innovative solutions to emerging challenges, and seize the opportunities of the digital revolution. “Resilience” and “Innovation” will underpin cooperation across all three

ASEAN Community pillars. Below are a few chairmanship initiatives.

First, we will find new ways to seamlessly connect our people and economies. Advancing e-commerce will deepen digital connectivity, transform supply chains and realise the freer movement of goods and services. We also hope to establish an ASEAN Smart Cities Network to catalyse opportunities for growth, capacity-building and development.

Second, we will enhance collective resilience against common threats such as terrorism, violent extremism, and transnational crimes. We will work towards completing a Model ASEAN Extradition Treaty to strengthen the rule of law. ASEAN also needs to step up collaboration on cybersecurity, and establish a robust cybersecurity regime to provide assurances for our citizens and businesses.

Third, we will continue to invest in our people, especially our youth. Around 60 per cent of ASEAN's population of over 630 million is below the age of 35, and this demographic dividend presents great opportunities. We must equip our people with relevant skills for the new economy; and ensure that our social, political and economic systems give everyone an opportunity to succeed.

Fourth, we will strengthen ASEAN's financial and macroeconomic resilience, whilst deepening our trade ties with external partners. We want to deepen interdependence for win-win outcomes, and expand everyone's stake in our region's prosperity. We will step up efforts to achieve a high-quality Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and bolster regional business opportunities – particularly for small and medium enterprises – by advancing the ASEAN Single Window and the ASEAN-wide Self Certification regime.

ASEAN has come a long way and we have much to be proud of. The challenges we have overcome are also salutary reminders that there will always be a premium on maintaining ASEAN unity, in order for us to remain relevant and give truth to the concept of ASEAN centrality.

Singapore as Chair will do our best as ASEAN makes its first steps towards the next 50 years. ■

Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan is Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore.

Trump in Southeast Asia

US President Donald Trump’s tour of Asia in November 2017 left behind mixed feelings in the region. We invite six Southeast Asian academics to share their take-aways from the visit.

■ **Dr. DEWI Fortuna Anwar** is Research Professor at the Centre for Political Studies, the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI).

■ **Mr. Herman Joseph S. KRAFT** is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, the University of the Philippines, Diliman.

■ **Dr. Cheng-Chwee KUIK** is Associate Professor at the Strategic Studies and International Relations Programme, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

■ **Dr. Joseph LIOW** is Dean and Professor of Comparative and International Politics at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

■ **Dr. NGUYEN Vu Tung** is the President of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam.

■ **Dr. THITINAN Pongsudhirak** is Director of the Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) and Associate Professor of International Political Economy at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.

AF: What is your sense of the Trump Administration’s policy towards Asia after the visit?

LIOW: A lot depends on what one’s expectations were prior to the visit. For most, the expectations were not high, so in that sense even the very fact that Trump made the trip would be a plus. On the upside, it was important for him to come and see what is going on in the region (from within the region). Most of the regional leaders welcomed the visit which represented an important expression of the Trump Administration’s – and indeed, his personal – interest in East Asia. As for the downside, there was nothing truly substantive coming out of the visit. Much of the attention was unsurprisingly on North Korea, rather than on Southeast Asia. Trump has been criticised for ceding leadership to China, but this criticism assumes that he was interested in American global and regional leadership in the first place.

NGUYEN: It is clear that the Trump Administration’s Asia policy is informed by American long-term national interests. Yet, how the Administration prioritises the goals and selects the tools to achieve them will make the difference. One drawback observed thus far is the slow process of foreign policy formulation both in terms of overall themes and specific contents, and the delayed appointment of high-ranking officials.

DEWI: I believe that President Trump follows previous US Administrations in regarding Asia as important to American interests. This is borne by the number of countries Trump visited and the considerable length of stay he made during his first Asia tour. The issues which preoccupy Asian countries, such as the North Korean nuclear threat and the growing power of China, are also of critical interest to the Trump Administration.

KRAFT: The essentials of American geopolitical strategy remain unchanged, based largely on a vague notion of maintaining American primacy. But the specifics of the Asia policy are clearly defined in terms of undoing and moving away from the initiatives of the Obama Administration.

THITINAN: President Trump has been true to his creed of prioritising “America First.” On Asia, the Trump Administration is mainly focused on North Korea and US trade deficits with Asian countries. Trump treats Asia as a collection of bilateral relationships rather than as a region, unlike President Obama whose “pivot” and “rebalance” were conceptualised on a regional “Asia-Pacific” construct.

KUIK: The Trump Administration’s Asia policy is disjointed and at times disconnected from reality. It is incoherent in its DPRK approach, inconsistent towards China and on the South China Sea disputes, and largely inattentive to Southeast Asia and multilateralism. These lapses, alongside other liabilities of the Trump’s “America First” agenda, are undoing some of the diplomatic accomplishments of the Obama Administration, unnerving US allies and friends, and potentially accelerating the shift in the global power structure.

AF: Do you think the US’ image and credibility in the region have improved or worsened after President Trump’s visit to Asia?

THITINAN: Trump was “omnidirectional” in his November 2017 tour of Asia, befriending all and alienating none despite fundamental differences on trade, human rights and democracy. He benefits from low expectations due to his controversial

style and from high expectations Obama generated. However, Trump's commitment to Southeast Asia remains dubious.

DEWI: The Trump Administration seems to remain committed to engagement with Southeast Asia in both economic and security terms. Nevertheless, by emphasising bilateral and transactional relations, the Administration is seen to be ceding US leadership in the wider multilateral arena in the region. Moreover, many countries in the region are concerned by both the possibility of US benign neglect and Trump's adventurous and provocative policy towards China and North Korea which can spark an open conflict that would be damaging to all.

KRAFT: Trump's visit most probably affirmed prior concerns about uncertainty and unclear direction in his Administration's policy towards Southeast Asia in both economic and security terms. During Obama's time, there were of course some disappointments but the sense of direction and confidence was clear. With the Trump Administration, the feeling in the region is less about looking forward to changes for the better and more about hedging against future uncertainties in US engagement and commitment. Trump's visit probably did not do much to change those perceptions.

LIOW: To be fair, there was a measure of assurance on the security front and American security presence has been even more visible compared to the first year of the Obama Administration. But there remains a lot of uncertainty. For example, is the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" a viable geopolitical concept for an American strategy in East Asia? What agenda would the revived Quad take and how effective would it be? ASEAN might be nervous if the Quad is designed to deal with regional security issues where hitherto ASEAN – via its centrality and the ASEAN Way – has been deemed a key player. The picture is starker when it comes to trade. The US stood at the sidelines of the CPTPP discussions. Washington will not be part of the regional economic integration process which could be a major boost for regional growth. The US wants to pursue bilateral FTAs but it is likely to be met with lukewarm responses.

NGUYEN: US presence in and commitment to Southeast Asia are more reassured after Trump's visit to Asia. The fact that he agreed to engage at the high-level diplomatic events in the region, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in the first year in his term, suggests a good level of stability in the US' policy towards Asia. And that serves to improve US' image in the region.

KUIK: I became even less reassured of US commitment to engaging Southeast Asia, especially after Trump's earlier signal of disinterest about EAS and his eventual last-minute decision to skip it. The impact of his absence should not be over-emphasised, but skipping the 18-member summit clearly reinforced regional skepticism about Washington's long-held pledge as a "resident Pacific power" and undercut the credibility of his Administration's "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

AF: What are the prospects of ASEAN-US relations after President Trump's attendance at the November ASEAN Summit in Manila?

KRAFT: ASEAN-US relations of course go beyond any

particular US Administration. The relationship will survive the ebb and flow of American foreign policy. However, given the mood of uncertainty about the commitment and interest of the Trump Administration in Southeast Asia, it is difficult to imagine that ASEAN states will look at the US with confidence, particularly on the question of whether Washington will be an important partner on geo-strategic matters.

DEWI: Trump's attendance at the November ASEAN Summit in Manila has reassured ASEAN countries of the US' continuing commitment to engage with ASEAN. It would have been better if Trump had stayed a bit longer to attend the East Asia Summit. ASEAN countries are keen to keep the US engaged in Southeast Asia in ways that are beneficial to both parties.

AF: What is your assessment of the current trajectory of US-China relationship and how would this affect Southeast Asia?

LIOW: It looks like a turbulent road ahead, especially in terms of trade with US trade deficit being a sore point. If the Trump Administration initiates a trade war with China, Southeast Asia will be vulnerable and affected since around 50% of Chinese exports to the US include value-added components from Southeast Asia. Moreover, while the security relationship may be insulated from the trade rancour for the moment, there is no guarantee that this division of the two realms – security and economics – will hold. US-China relations could well spiral downwards in the event of signs of a brewing trade war, affecting other aspects of the bilateral relationship and placing Southeast Asia in a difficult position.

THITINAN: Southeast Asian states prefer limited and varying tension, short of outright conflict, between the US and China. Such tension provides space for manoeuvre. US-China relations are on a cordial course because Trump wants China's assistance in addressing North Korea's nuclear threat. If China helps on North Korea and makes enough concessions on trade to placate Trump, US-China ties will be workable. On the other hand, the cozy Trump-Xi ties may effectively hand over the South China Sea to Beijing. Middle powers, namely Japan, Australia and India, seem the only counterweights left for ASEAN.

DEWI: Trump's effusive words after receiving a special red carpet treatment in Beijing show that he is willing to work together with China. Furthermore Trump and Xi Jinping seem to have good personal rapport. Less contentious, if not warmer, relations between Washington and Beijing will be beneficial for peace and stability in the wider region, as long as U.S. transactional dealings with China will not sideline the concerns of Southeast Asian countries.

AF: President Trump has offered to "mediate" in the South China Sea disputes. How do you read this overture in the context of the US' Asia policy?

KRAFT: It shows Trump's continued lack of knowledge about the nuances of the situation in the South China Sea. Whether he was serious about it or not, it is likely going to be ignored by China, and is clearly something that does not create a mood of confidence about US intentions.

KUIK: Trump’s offer appeared to be more about boasting his self-proclaimed ability as “a good mediator” rather than reflecting an emerging national strategy. Even if there are efforts to translate this into a policy, its feasibility and desirability will be in question. China will reject US mediator role, whereas some regional states might question if the role actually means a downgraded alternative or an additional supplement to the freedom of navigation operations in the Administration’s post-pivot strategy.

NGUYEN: There has not been much of follow-up from the offer. In general, US policy with regards to the South China Sea disputes will not change substantially, especially when the South China Sea is important to the US’ interests in maintaining the international order and the rule of law with a focus on freedom of navigation and over-flight in the area.

AF: How will President Trump’s push for American arms sales affect the security environment in the region?

NGUYEN: Arms sales reflect the need for capacity building and weapon systems diversification in Southeast Asian defense forces. They may also reflect the improved military-to-military relations between the US and some countries in the region. But arms sales are also subjected to the law of supply and demand while countries should adhere to the principle of settling disputes through peaceful means.

LIOW: We should keep in mind that the US has already been a major arms exporter to the region for a long time. American weaponry has always been of a higher quality and calibre and it is no surprise that regional states would want access especially to the technology. Whether and how these weapons are integrated into regional countries’ defence systems and doctrines is a different matter.

KUIK: The arms sales push is an extension of Trump’s “America First” agenda and his transactional approach to external affairs. It aims to benefit America from Asia’s security situations by boosting US defense sector, creating more jobs, and reducing trade deficits with several major Asian nations. Although Asian security situations are rooted in the region’s own historical and political problems, the weapon deals do not bode well for regional peace and stability.

AF: President Trump’s multilateralism credentials may be shaky but under the Trump Administration, bilateral ties between the US and key Southeast Asian countries are on an upward trajectory. What is your take on this assessment?

THITINAN: That Trump has bilateral preferences is par for the Trump course. He is a dealmaker on a one-on-one transactional basis. Interestingly, this bilateral approach matches China’s way of dealing with Southeast Asia. It will be crucial for Southeast Asian governments to leverage bilateral deals with Trump for regional effectiveness in maintaining centrality and preventing any single major power from dominating the neighbourhood.

KRAFT: Given its pronouncements thus far, the Trump Administration has always preferred a bilateral approach to

foreign policy. On the other hand, the US remains committed to the multilateral architecture of Asia-Pacific international relations unless the objectives of that architecture are inconsistent with American interests as defined by the Administration. In that case, incoherence and inconsistency in US foreign policy towards the wider region will arise, and this has dangerous implications for ASEAN and its role in the regional architecture.

LIOW: I would not really say that US bilateral relations with regional countries are on an upward trajectory. After all, no major bilateral agreements have been reached over the past year. Southeast Asian leaders are reacting to the uncertainty of the situation born out of the unpredictability of the Trump White House. Almost all have attempted to proactively engage President Trump, if only to develop some measure of rapport and grasp a sense of his thinking on regional affairs, and to try to shape or at least have input into his thinking as it develops.

AF: With the Trump Administration approaching its one year milestone, do you think Trump’s transactional approach is working in Southeast Asia?

KUIK: Trump’s transactional approach might result in some short-term gains, as several Southeast Asian governments signed multi-billion deals to buy American products and offered investments in the US. However, such an approach and its resultant inattention to poorer and weaker regional countries risks pushing them away from Washington and closer to Beijing, as their ruling elites increasingly look upon the latter to bolster their own political survival. Hence, Trump’s transactional approach might ironically drive more regional countries into more transactions (in infrastructure and other deals) with China over the long run.

KRAFT: If “working” means “increased US impact” on the region, then that is probably not the case. US influence is always amplified when it works with and within regional multilateral initiatives, keeping a balance between its military primacy and its willingness to engage in multilateral diplomatic and economic networks. Emphasis on a bilateral approach puts Washington in direct competition with China’s own attempts to strengthen its influence over the region through a bilateral approach – a competition in which China has an upper hand because of its economic dominance.

LIOW: I would say that because most Southeast Asian states believe the US has a crucial role to play in regional affairs, they would attempt to enhance their engagement regardless of the kind of approach the particular government in Washington takes. You see this pattern across history and presidents – Southeast Asia always tries to reach out to whichever party has come to power and responds to whatever approach of the new administration.

THITINAN: Trump’s bilateral approach works because most Southeast Asian governments want to re-engage with the US after the difficult Obama years where American values of rights and freedoms alienated certain regional regimes. Concurrently, Southeast Asia has been divided and ASEAN

US President Donald Trump joins his fellow East Asia Summit leaders at a dinner reception.



Presidential Communications Group, the Philippines

has not been sufficiently unified and coherent as a regional organisation to deal effectively with either Washington or Beijing.

AF: Are you hopeful about Indonesia-US relations in the Trump era, and why?

DEWI: Indonesia's relations with the US are not only driven by bilateral or regional interests but are also affected by the US global agenda and policy, particularly those relating to the wider Islamic interests. President Trump's image as being hostile to Islam and his latest policy of recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel have severely damaged US credibility and standing in the eyes of Indonesians. While the Indonesian government may wish to strengthen various strategic and transactional relations with the US, strong and widespread anti-Trump sentiments among the Indonesian people will make Jakarta wary of being seen too close to Washington.

AF: Are you confident in the prospects of US-Malaysia relations despite the 1MDB fracas?

KUIK: Prime Minister Najib's Washington visit in September 2017 indicates that US-Malaysia relations are not much affected by the 1MDB scandal. Prospects of bilateral relations are good due to the long-standing foundation of economic and security partnerships between the two countries. However, Trump Administration's recent move in recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital has cast a shadow over US-Malaysia relations, prompting the Najib government to distance itself from America, especially as the General Election looms.

AF: The US-Philippines and US-Thailand alliances appear to be back on track. Were the earlier concerns about the breaking-away of the Thailand and Philippines spokes too premature?

KRAFT: The fundamentals of the alliance between the Philippines and the US, less so between Thailand and the US, have always been strong regardless of the relations between the Chief Executives. Military-to-military relations have

always been consistent even as some policy initiatives were discontinued because of political decisions. Despite President Duterte's strong rebuke to the Obama Administration's criticisms about his war on drugs, the alliance relationship and US military involvement with the Philippines continued albeit in a very low-key way.

THITINAN: The US' treaty alliance with Thailand was deeply strained during the Obama years. So was the case with the US-Philippines alliance by the time Obama left office while Duterte rose to power. Trump's break-away from Obama's geo-strategic preferences has regained traction for these two US allies. Had Hillary Clinton won or if somehow another Obama-like White House occupant came to the fore at this juncture, these two alliance relationships may be squeezed yet again.

AF: Prior to his visit to Washington in October 2017, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong remarked that Singapore-US relationship is based on a "basic strategic congruence of views about the world, about the region." What is that strategic congruence in your view, and is it going to hold in the next 10 years?

LIOW: Both agree on the importance of a rules-based order to govern regional and international affairs, both see the US' presence as a constructive element of the regional architecture, and both see regional stability as absolutely crucial for regional prosperity.

AF: A Pew Research Center poll showed a high confidence (58%) among Vietnamese in Trump to "do the right thing." How do you explain Trump's popularity in Vietnam?

NGUYEN: Trump is continuing the bi-partisan support to the improved ties between the US and Vietnam since the normalisation of bilateral relations in 1995. He has also demonstrated US support to Vietnam as the host of APEC 2017. And above all, his Asia trip shows the US' commitment and contribution to peace, stability and prosperity in Asia as well as its recognition of the ASEAN centrality. ■

Diving into the Indo-Pacific

As US President Donald Trump seeks to redefine American engagement with the region through his “Indo-Pacific” strategic concept, we invite five eminent scholars to analyse what this means for Southeast Asia and beyond.

■ **Dr. CHONG Ja Ian** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the National University of Singapore.

■ **Mr. Dhruva JAISHANKAR** is Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings India in New Delhi and the Brookings Institution in Washington DC.

■ **Mr. Walter LOHMAN** is Director of the Asian Studies Centre at the Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy, Heritage Foundation, USA.

■ **Dr. SHAFIAH Muhibat** is Deputy Head of the Department of Politics and International Relations at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Indonesia.

■ **Dr. Yoshihide SOEYA** is Professor of International Relations at the Faculty of Law, Keio University, Japan.

AF: What is your understanding of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept as repackaged by the Trump Administration?

JAISHANKAR: The exact contours of this policy – including the military dimensions – are still taking shape, and will do so over the coming months. However, in terms of rhetoric, it draws upon Japan’s own, parallel approach for a “free and open Indo-Pacific.” While the exact policies and scope are still to be fleshed out, there is a shared understanding of: (1) the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a single strategic space in which all these countries have a stake, (2) an appreciation of the importance of the maritime domain for both security and trade, (3) an emphasis on the rule of law in governing this wide region, and (4) an understanding that India plays a vital role in the regional balance of power.

SOEYA: There are differences between President Trump and other policy makers/bureaucrats regarding the concept and its goals. Trump may be primarily interested in economic benefits with the “America First” principle, while others would see strategic interests as a counter balance against China. President Trump’s concept is well expressed in his words in Vietnam when he said, “I will make bilateral trade agreements with any Indo-Pacific nation that wants to be our partner and that will abide by the principles of fair and reciprocal trade.”

LOHMAN: This concept is this Administration’s expression of America’s traditional commitment to the region. Obama’s was the “pivot.” Most of the essentials remain the same: the importance of alliances, rules-based order, cultivation of new security partners, the forward deployment of U.S. military, diplomatic engagement, ASEAN-centrality. The biggest difference is on trade.

SHAFIAH: The concept frames America’s broader commitment to Asia, which seems to promote increased cooperation between the US, Japan, Australia and India. Amidst confusion about where Asia lies within Trump Administration’s broader foreign policy, it is not yet clear where the administration is heading now. At first glance, it looks to be a strategy of China containment.

AF: Do you think there is an inherent disconnect between the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept and President Trump’s “America First” approach on trade?

LOHMAN: “Free and Open” refers to concerns about Chinese strategic intentions, not trade. So there is no contradiction. The Indo-Pacific framework, however, does lack a compelling vision on trade. Trade remedies and a focus on deficits are not enough. While FTAs with Japan and Vietnam, or others in the region, are good ideas, the terms the Administration is offering and the tenor of the trade debate in Washington make them unattractive.

SOEYA: As an economic concept to enhance America’s interests, there is not much disconnect, at least in Trump’s mind. However, as a concept of an emerging regional order, there is an obvious disconnect. When Trump mentioned “bilateral trade agreements with any Indo-Pacific nation,” clearly China should be one of the Indo-Pacific nations, which implies the lack of any element relevant for a regional order at the time of the rise of China.

JAISHANKAR: The Trump Administration's approach to trade and international economics is somewhat discordant in two ways. One is the obsessive focus on reducing trade deficits. The second discordant element is the unilateral withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which cedes space in setting the next generation of multilateral trade standards for the region.

AF: The Free and Open Indo-Pacific is meant to provide strong alternatives to China's infrastructure financing in the region. What are the tools and resources available for the US and its partners to deliver on this?

LOHMAN: In the US, decisions governing investments are made in corporate boardrooms, not in Washington. The government, however, is considering ways it can use limited government funding for agencies like OPIC and Eximbank to leverage these decisions to the country's geopolitical benefit. The US will also continue to consult with Japan on its infrastructure plans and look for synergies between their agencies and private sectors. Still, it is very difficult to see the Indo-Pacific concept, as currently conceived, providing a comprehensive alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative.

SOEYA: It is imperative for the US and its partners to join and be involved in infrastructure projects under the banner of the Belt and Road Initiative, and interject rules and conditions of global standard as well as financial and technical resources.

JAISHANKAR: The US has only a limited ability to play a competitive role in infrastructure financing in Asia. However, its partners bring other strengths to the table. Japan is the only country that can rival China in strategic infrastructure investment, and there is now palpable competition between China and Japan in this respect across Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and East Africa. Together, the likes of the US, Japan, and India can establish norms and principles for sustainable infrastructure financing in the region.

AF: How would the Free and Open Indo-Pacific play out in security terms?

SOEYA: There is a serious danger of isolating and alienating Southeast Asian countries and ASEAN as well as South Korea in security terms. This would give some space for China to manoeuvre to make the concept a source of disagreement rather than unity among the Indo-Pacific nations.

SHAFIAH: Trump emphasised on being "friends, partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific." As such, the US' traditional allies may once more be the US' priorities after a short period of uncertainty at the beginning of the Administration. Moreover, the concept seems to emphasise the overall concern about the rules-based order in the region, with references to China's "provocative" actions in the South China Sea.

JAISHANKAR: Across the Indo-Pacific, the US has unrivalled capabilities, including a network of military bases, treaty alliances, and important security partnerships. The United States' challenge in recent years has been the will to employ

these resources to preserve the status quo, as in the South China Sea, where China has successfully militarised much of the sea and airspace. That said, the US – for political, economic, and other reasons – is increasingly keen on sharing the burden, and this is where Japan, India, and Australia come in. The challenge will involve political will more than material capabilities.

CHONG: This again would have to rest on details that are presently unclear. However, if there is freedom of navigation and overflight in accordance with UNCLOS and other relevant international laws, where no actor is in a position to impose a veto on access, that can be beneficial to stability and facilitate economic interaction — which itself bolsters stability and cooperation.

LOHMAN: The term Indo-Pacific conceives India as part of the strategic space in what has traditionally been America's principal regional focus – the Pacific. However, as the US and India continue to grow steadily closer, the partnership will hold ever more relevance in India's immediate neighbourhood and incorporate Indian security perspectives on both its Western and Northern borders.

AF: What would be the role of the revived Australia-India-Japan-US quadrilateral partnership (Quad) in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific? Could Quad 2.0 be more viable than Quad 1.0?

JAISHANKAR: The Quad is not an alliance. It is merely a gathering of four democratic maritime powers, who have some convergent interests when it comes to a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and the requisite capabilities to uphold that order. What has changed from its first meeting in 2007 to its latest this year are the circumstances. Rather than assuming greater responsibility with its rising power, China has become more authoritarian, opaque, mercantile, and revisionist. Furthermore, in all four countries elected governments attempted to reach accommodation with Beijing, but were spurned. This means that despite a continued willingness to engage China by all four parties, alternative mechanisms to uphold a rules-based order are being sought. For this reason, Quad 2.0 is probably more viable than its predecessor.

SOEYA: Essentially, not much has changed. Among the four countries, the Quad concept has been a case of "different dreams in the same bed," and there has not been a serious attempt to fill the gaps in "different dreams." This has resulted in the leaders of the Quad emphasising obvious elements such as rule of law and freedom of navigation and engaging in associated and limited military operations, with limited impact on Chinese behaviours.

LOHMAN: The Quad is more viable this time because so much has changed in the strategic environment. The Quad is not only about China. But to the extent that it is, some of China's behaviour, in the East and South China Seas and on India's border, has raised concerns among Quad members that will not be as easily dismissed as they were ten years ago.

Also, India, the one member of the Quad not formally allied with the US, has deepened its relationships with each of the other members since 2007 in ways that will make four way consultations more sustainable.

AF: The Quad 1.0 centred on security dialogue and military exercises. What is the possibility of the Quad 2.0 transforming itself into something that should be more economically oriented?

JAISHANKAR: The exact purpose and agenda of the Quad in its present avatar will still have to be defined, although elements of the priorities of the four countries are reflected in their statements. Today, economics are increasingly intertwined with security. I expect we will initially see the four parties sharing views on regional developments, followed by better coordination, a gradual building of habits of cooperation and familiarity, some investment in capacity building, and – should it continue and progress – some contingency planning.

LOHMAN: There is very little possibility, except with regards to the region’s infrastructure needs and the strategic challenge posed by China meeting that demand. There are other venues – bilateral and multilateral – to discuss economic issues. Besides, economic issues present an entirely separate set of complexities, with different institutions, constituencies, and stakeholders – whose interests do not naturally fit with those of geostrategists and security experts.

SOEYA: This would require strong leadership of the Trump presidency, but Trump may not be interested in crafting a regional economic architecture, let alone a strategic one.

AF: India’s foreign policy has always been guarded around the principle of non-alignment. What made India become a more proactive partner in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific?

JAISHANKAR: Non-alignment is long dead. That said, India sees itself as an emerging pole in the international order and therefore is keen on preserving its autonomy and flexibility of decision-making. It has also become a more vocal proponent and supporter of a liberal international order. Finally, India’s multi-faceted relationship with China – involving a long-standing border dispute, differences over regional security, a sizeable if imbalanced trade relationship, and some convergence on global governance – has deteriorated, largely as a result of China’s own evolution. For these reasons, Indian support for a free and open Indo-Pacific is a natural outcome.

AF: How does the Free and Open Indo-Pacific dovetail with India’s Act East policy?

JAISHANKAR: The Act East policy represents a change from an earlier Look East policy in three respects. First, Look East was primarily economic in nature, with India seeking investment, technology, and economic models from dynamic Asian economies. Act East is much more comprehensive and includes a strong security component, including greater capacity building, interoperability, and information sharing with Southeast and Northeast Asian powers. Two, the scope

of Act East has expanded to cover the entire Indo-Pacific, beyond an earlier focus on Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and South Korea. Three, Act East has been more focused on end results rather than direction, which is a natural progression and also a sign of greater urgency.

The idea is that India must be fully integrated into Asia-Pacific institutions (which it is, barring APEC), should be more commercially integrated into regional value chains (which remains a work in progress), and become a net security provider within its capabilities. These objectives, and India’s overall evolution, dovetail nicely with the notion of a free and open Indo-Pacific, whether articulated by the US or by Japan.

AF: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy has been rolled out for a year now. How would it be complemented or augmented with President Trump’s embrace of the same concept?

SOEYA: In PM Abe’s mind and calculation, the concept implies a strategy to counter the rise of China in the regional context, while President Trump may not be interested in taking the initiative in the same direction, let alone in following PM Abe’s initiative other than giving endorsement in words.

AF: How would Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership feature in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy?

SOEYA: Given the precariousness of President Trump’s attitude, the current leaders of Japan and India must be regarding the bilateral partnership as the key element of the strategy. An important task still remains, however, as to the involvement of other partners such as Australia (and Southeast Asian countries and South Korea) in the bilateral scheme, which is a daunting task.

AF: What areas of cooperation that the Quad should focus to support the Free and Open Indo-Pacific?

LOHMAN: The four countries need to have consistent messaging on the application of international law in the East and South China Seas. They should also forge further practical cooperation on maritime security and areas like humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Counterterrorism, counter-proliferation and addressing North Korea’s nuclear weapons program should be other priorities.

AF: How does ASEAN factor in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy? Will ASEAN’s role in the regional security architecture be undermined by the revival of the Quad?

SHAFIAH: Trump gave very little detail about how this Indo-Pacific policy would be implemented, thus it is hard to foresee what the role of different actors (ASEAN, India, Japan, etc.) would be. Nonetheless, ASEAN has been facing tough challenges that undermine its centrality. It does not even have a clear geopolitical outlook amidst the changing regional dynamics. It is imperative that ASEAN steps up its role in the regional security architecture to adapt to the changing geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics.

Will it divide Asia?

Will Trump commit to this concept?

WHAT ARE THE DETAILS?

Is this an alternative to BRI?

Who is in?

INDO-PACIFIC

Where does ASEAN fit in?

Who is the leader?

Does it overlap with the Quad?

Is there a role for China?

Who is out?

CHONG: ASEAN first has to define a clearer role for itself before it can determine what sort of factor it can play in a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. That said, ASEAN member states physically straddle the area covered in the strategy, and therefore have an incentive in engaging with the Quad. This can happen in an individual country-basis or as ASEAN, but what will happen again rests on how member states understand ASEAN's usefulness to them in this context. Of course, if ASEAN member states decide that the organisation does not or should not play a role in engaging the Quad or defining regional security affairs, one possible outcome is that the Quad may supersede ASEAN by default.

AF: What should ASEAN do to play a more proactive role in the regional architecture, in light of competing visions for the region by the major powers?

CHONG: Ideally, ASEAN should have its own vision for the region that can bridge and incorporate the different major power perspectives. Short of that, ASEAN should ideally demonstrate that it can run regional affairs effectively without major power intervention, even as it seeks cooperation with all. However, all this rests on an ASEAN that is well-coordinated and independent – that ASEAN members are able to devise a clear strategy for the grouping and then execute that strategy effectively. Such goals may be highly challenging for ASEAN to even approach given its current lack of capacity, even on coordination grounds, and the susceptibility of some members to outside influence.

If the Quad represents sharper competition between the United States and its allies on one side and China on the other, a stricter reading of the newly released U.S. National Security Strategy may suggest that ASEAN's freedom of action may become more constrained. A clearer and more effectively executed approach to managing regional affairs becomes even more of an imperative under such conditions.

AF: What can be the potentials and pitfalls of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy for Indonesia?

SHAFIAH: Jakarta's free and active foreign policy has meant a tendency to pursue a diversified set of relationships instead of just backing US-led initiatives. It should be similar this time with the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy. Additionally, Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum doctrine does not have a coherent Indo-Pacific vision. For Indonesia, it seems that an Indian Ocean vision revolves around the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), of which Indonesia is a leading proponent. Perhaps it is time for Indonesia to develop an Indo-Pacific strategic vision.

AF: What can be the potentials and pitfalls of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy for Singapore?

CHONG: Singapore straddles the Indian and Pacific oceans. So an Indo-Pacific Strategy will likely open up opportunities for cooperation for Singapore. That Singapore has strong relations and robust cooperation with all members of the Quad can benefit Singapore in terms of engagement with the Quad. That the Quad can commit major powers to the security and stability of the region in which Singapore resides may be a means to manage tensions and conflict in the region. Potential downsides include tensions and friction arise from a China that feels cornered by the Quad, either in fact or simply because of Beijing's own misperceptions. This can be addressed somewhat by greater clarity about the Quad, including how it seeks to assure and work with China even as it pursues its own objectives.

Should the Quad and China do end up having a more intense rivalry, then Singapore's approach of "not choosing sides" across the Pacific may not only be harder to maintain, it may even provide declining strategic and economic dividends at some point. Singapore runs the risk of becoming a suspect to many rather than a friend to all. ■

Famous Last Words by an ASEAN Giant

TERMSAK CHALERMPALANUPAP and MOE THUZAR honour the life and achievements of former ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Surin Pitsuwan.

Dr. Surin during his visit to areas hit by Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, 2008.



ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force Office, Yangon

Research, policy, business and civil society communities across Southeast Asia have reacted with shock and sadness to the sudden death of former Thai foreign minister Surin Pitsuwan, 68, on 30 November 2017.

One of the youngest foreign ministers in Southeast Asia in the late 1990s, and an erudite orator, Dr. Surin is best known – and will be best remembered – for the five years he served as the Secretary-General of ASEAN from January 2008 to December 2012.

And what he said about ASEAN in his last interview before he died carries an important message for the grouping. But more about that later.

Dr. Surin had humble beginnings in Southern Thailand. Born into a Muslim minority family, he excelled in school and won scholarships to pursue higher education, earning himself a PhD from Harvard in 1982. He later joined the

Democrat Party, and won seven parliamentary elections for the seat of Nakhon Si Thammarat, his hometown. He gained his first cabinet appointment in 1992 as Deputy Foreign Minister, later serving as Foreign Minister from 1997 to 2001 in the Chuan Leekpai administration.

His bid for the position of United Nations Secretary-General, to succeed Mr. Kofi Annan in 2006, failed partly as a result of the dynamics of Thailand's domestic politics; the Thaksin administration then in power did not view Dr. Surin's association with the Democrats positively.

Domestic politics were also to affect Dr. Surin's nomination for the ASEAN Secretary-General position. Thailand went through a nation-wide open recruitment process to consider several candidates before confirming Dr. Surin as its nominee.

Dr. Surin took up his ASEAN post at a time when the grouping was moving towards a more rules-based structure,

under the newly adopted ASEAN Charter. He was one of the strongest voices promoting the Charter, and its role in ensuring ASEAN centrality. He also reorganised the structure and duties of the ASEAN Secretariat to meet the Charter's vision for the Secretary-General and his team at the Secretariat to be a "nerve centre" for various regional programmes and initiatives.

This new role as ASEAN's "Chief Administrative Officer" at times caused some cognitive dissonance with his former role as foreign minister sitting on the other side of the ASEAN table.

Dr. Surin also initiated more interactions between the Secretariat and think-tanks for greater intellectual input to regional processes. The ASEAN Studies Centre at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute had the opportunity to work with him on several occasions in giving effect to this vision.

The first such instance was to document in real-time the ASEAN-coordinated response to the humanitarian disaster in the wake of Cyclone Nargis that devastated Myanmar's delta area in May 2008, laying bare the unpreparedness of the military regime then still in power to deal with the situation.

Dr. Surin had described ASEAN's breakthrough in persuading Myanmar's military leaders to accept international humanitarian assistance as "ASEAN's finest hour". This breakthrough was achieved during Singapore's chairmanship of the grouping from July 2007 to July 2008.

With Singapore as the Chair, ASEAN Foreign Ministers fleshed out the details of how the group will contribute to the Nargis response. Dr. Surin, as the Secretary-General, was to implement these decisions on the ground in Myanmar.

Mr. George Yeo, Singapore's foreign minister at the time, presided over an international pledging conference in Myanmar, together with the UN Secretary-General and the Prime Minister of Myanmar.

The Nargis response was a significant marker for ASEAN's engagement with Myanmar. It was the first instance of ASEAN playing a direct coordination role in a member country in the wake of a disaster, thereby catalysing new ways of working among the Member States and opening a space for humanitarian organisations to operate in Myanmar.

These breakthroughs a decade ago are significant in the context of a different – and more challenging – humanitarian crisis in Myanmar today involving the Rohingya, at a time when Singapore will take up the rotational ASEAN chair duties once again. The main impact of Dr. Surin's role, however, was in telling the ASEAN story to the world, to bring the world to ASEAN, politically and economically.

In this, he invested and exerted both personal effort and charm, for which he reaped dividends well after he ended his term as Secretary-General. Still, once an ASEAN Secretary-General, always an ASEAN Secretary-General.

“ASEAN’s centrality is weakening on problems that are on the landscape of ASEAN and should be resolved and managed by ourselves... If we don’t, others will claim centrality.”

Dr. Surin joined his predecessors in continuing to discuss ASEAN with international and regional audiences. Each Secretary-General has added his mark to this continuing role. Tan Sri Ajit Singh's insights on the preparations and concerns surrounding the admission of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar; Mr. Rodolfo Severino's efforts to bring investor confidence back to the region in the wake of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis; Mr. Ong Keng Yong's extensive regional consultations and support in the drafting of the ASEAN Charter and the Terms of Reference of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, all provide important precedents.

Dr. Surin's efforts to link ASEAN with the world in addressing transboundary issues affecting regional security have set even higher standards and expectations for the grouping's performance. He was particularly active in telling the ASEAN story this year, including serving as lead editor of a series of volumes on its 50-year journey, curated and published by the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA).

An active believer in and supporter of ASEAN's continued role and reach, Dr. Surin's literal last words were on ASEAN. Speaking in an interview with the *Nikkei Asian Review* mere hours before his heart attack, he shared his concern that ASEAN risks "losing control of its own future", with member states having different interests and coming under the influence of external powers such as China.

"Economic assistance and political leverage will come in one package" he said, calling on member states to be careful in choosing friends. "ASEAN's centrality is weakening on problems that are on the landscape of ASEAN and should be resolved and managed by ourselves", he said, adding that ASEAN must exercise leadership to "take region into a better future." "If we don't, others will claim centrality."

This is a poignant reminder for ASEAN's continued relevance in its next 50 years. ■

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The ASEAN Secretary-General

TERMSAK CHALERMPALANUPAP discusses the role of the ASEAN Secretary-General.

The parameters of the office of the Secretary-General (SG) of ASEAN are laid out in Article 11 of the ASEAN Charter, but the character and manifestation of this ministerial-ranked position are subject to the style and personality of the holder, as well as his outlook on his own role. Most SGs managed their work within the confines of more a “secretary” than a “general”, as once aptly described by Ambassador Ong Keng Yong of Singapore, the ASEAN SG from 2003-2007.

Some SGs chose to push the envelope as diligently as they could to play a more proactive and high-profile role. The late Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, the ASEAN SG from 2008-2012, belonged to the latter case. He assumed this high post with great ambitions to turn the Secretariat into a networked nerve-centre of ASEAN. The Secretariat under his helm did not become Brussels of the East, principally because it is not meant to be one in the first place. But Dr. Surin, with his charisma and out-of-the-box thinking, did bring ASEAN closer to the world and friendlier to the civil society.

There are limits to what an ASEAN SG can do, as defined in the provisions of the ASEAN Charter and other relevant instruments. In terms of management of the Secretariat, he is subject to the check and balance by the Jakarta-based Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) – comprised of ambassadors from ASEAN Member States accredited to the regional organisation – which is mandated to oversee the work of the ASEAN Secretariat. The SG cannot independently raise funds or accept financial support without authorisation from the CPR. In external relations, he can represent ASEAN in engagement with external parties but such representation must be mandated and in line with the positions that have been agreed to by member states.

The SG shall not speak for ASEAN or get involved in highly sensitive issues without authorisation from the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM). Dr. Surin Pitsuwan learned this hard truth when he was reminded by then Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong to stay out of the hot debate on the South China Sea during the infamous 45th AMM in July 2012. Dr. Surin also had to avoid making any comments about the Cambodian-Thai border conflict. Likewise, SG Le Luong Minh has sometimes landed himself in hot water whenever he commented on disputes in the South China Sea.

The SG, which serves for a fixed non-renewable five-year term, attends ASEAN Summits, ASEAN Community Councils’ Meetings, and ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial Meetings,

among others. This is actually a crucial role since no one else in ASEAN has such an opportunity to cover the whole spectrum of ASEAN cooperation. Therefore, although he has no direct role in ASEAN policy-making which is dictated by the member governments, he is in a unique position to make meaningful impacts through institutional memory and expertise across all areas of ASEAN cooperation, as well as extensive networking with key stakeholders including the academia, the business, the youth, and other external parties.

Even though it is more about a “secretary” than a “general”, being the SG of ASEAN is no small feat. Some of the most important functions of the SG include facilitating and monitoring the implementation of policies and agreements laid down by member governments, coordinating among ASEAN sectoral bodies, and keeping the ASEAN Secretariat running efficiently in his capacity as the “Chief Administrator of ASEAN”.

The incoming SG of ASEAN for 2018-2022, Dato Paduka Lim Jock Hoi has extensive experience and expertise in foreign trade and multilateral economic issues in ASEAN. Dato Paduka Lim will become the sixth person to hold the position of Secretary-General of ASEAN, as his predecessors prior to 1993 were designated as Secretary-General of the ASEAN Secretariat.

Dato Paduka Lim had been the Permanent Secretary of Brunei Darussalam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the trade portfolio since 2006. He represented his country on the ASEAN Senior Economic Officials Meeting (SEOM) and in ASEAN’s FTA negotiations in recent years. He was also the representative of Brunei Darussalam during negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Since June 2011, Dato Paduka Lim has been Chairman of the Governing Board of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). His deep knowledge of foreign trade and multilateral economic issues will be very useful to his role as the Secretary-General of ASEAN, especially in pushing forward the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and in connecting the AEC with the political-security and socio-cultural pillars. Dato Paduka Lim will take over as ASEAN Secretary-General in January 2018, and will be the 14th person to helm the ASEAN Secretariat. ■

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Looking Back, Looking Forward

In his last official interview as ASEAN Secretary-General, LE LUONG MINH looks back at the last five years at the helm of ASEAN and looks forward to its future.



Mr. Le Luong Minh started his five-year term as Secretary-General of ASEAN in January 2013. Before assuming his post as ASEAN Secretary-General, Mr Minh was Vietnam's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. Mr Minh has a long and distinguished career in Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1975, and has served in various senior capacities in the Ministry's key departments and missions abroad. Mr Minh studied Diplomacy at the University of Foreign Affairs (now the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam) in Hanoi, Vietnam and received his degree in 1974. He then studied Linguistics and English Literature at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

AF: Do you think ASEAN is now in a better shape than it was five years ago in terms of regional unity and integration?

SG: ASEAN market integration on the ground still hangs in the balance and will ultimately be judged by whether and how far it helps reduce transaction costs and augment intra-regional trade and investment. Great progress has been achieved on many fronts, but the limitation is in national implementation. I am more encouraged by the fact that countries and people in the region are now more connected, in both the virtual and physical sense. ASEAN skies are being opened, especially with the booming of low-cost carriers. Higher internet penetration and more affordable access have revolutionised the way we communicate and trade. Unfortunately, greater connectivity has not translated into a higher degree of regional unity though basically it has been maintained or restored even in bad times. We need to do more to promote understanding and foster networks of social, cultural, economic and political relations, which in turn could increase mutual empathy and support.

AF: What were the most memorable moments in your term as the Secretary-General? And what was the most difficult point?

SG: I have had the honour of witnessing two ASEAN milestones – the formation of the ASEAN Community and ASEAN's 50th anniversary – which are the result of legions

of dedicated men and women who had served the ASEAN cause, including all my twelve illustrious predecessors. The most memorable moment was when I received for depositary from Prime Minister Najib Razak of Malaysia the ASEAN Declaration announcing the birth of the ASEAN Community in December 2015.

Not quite difficult, but rather uncomfortable, was the fact that while I had always been conscious to keep the exclusively ASEAN character in my messaging about the issues confronting ASEAN, my messages were sometimes twisted otherwise by politically-motivated ASEAN watchers linking them to me being a Vietnamese diplomat. While remaining hundred percent a patriotic national of an integrating Viet Nam, I have served ASEAN with hundred percent of my commitment to the organisation.

AF: The Secretary-General is often considered, wrongly in our opinion, as more of a "secretary" than a "general." How do you answer to these views?

SG: I do not see any relevance in this question. Different secretaries-general may have been subject to different assessments of their performance, but being a Secretary-General has nothing to do with being a "secretary", more so with being a "general". One cannot ask if a governor-general is more of a "governor" than a "general", or an inspector-

general more of an “inspector” than a “general”. The Secretary-General of ASEAN has a mandate to implement as stipulated in the ASEAN Charter and his or her performance is assessed by the Member States.

AF: How has the ASEAN Secretariat transformed in the last few years? If you were empowered to effect one change in the ASEAN Secretariat, what change would you introduce?

SG: All ASEAN countries have strongly and consistently supported the strengthening of the Secretariat. Coordination is being improved across departments within the Secretariat and with national secretariats. Monitoring and evaluation work has been enhanced, and discipline tightened. The Secretariat’s budget has steadily increased and its manpower has been boosted with many new positions added to its structure during my term. In the next few years, we would have more working space with the new building to cater to the Secretariat’s expanding roles and needs.

I would expect the Secretariat staff to be more analytical than descriptive in their reporting, and sharpen their policy analysis rather than being purely process-driven. ASEAN would benefit from a professional Secretariat with sufficient expertise and confidence to inject frank and objective inputs. The Secretariat must be more proactive and innovative in helping ASEAN think through and formulate new ideas. It should also be allowed to be bold and robust in monitoring and reporting the implementation of ASEAN agreements, and making recommendations accordingly.

AF: There are as many optimists as pessimists when it comes to ASEAN. How would you win the hearts and minds of the pessimists?

SG: As they say, the proof is in the pudding. ASEAN must do a better job to demonstrate to its 645 million people that ASEAN works for them. You do not win over sceptics by declarations and even plans of action if they are more about “plans” than “actions.” Half the battle would be won if all the Member States consistently inform and educate their citizens about the areas and circumstances where ASEAN has made a material and tangible difference to their quality of life. More often than not, when things do not work, ASEAN takes the rap and criticism sometimes comes from unwarranted high expectations. Explaining ASEAN – what it is and what it is not – could promote better understanding of and more grounded support for the Community.

AF: What is the single most challenging issue facing ASEAN today?

SG: Generally, ASEAN is in good shape and there is enough forward momentum to keep ASEAN on an upward trajectory. However, I fear that a silent threat is lurking. The impact of its membership expansion cannot be underestimated. The strategic bond that keeps cohesion and nurtured the intra-mural solidarity thus far cannot be taken as a given in the fast-changing regional context. The increased diversity and divergence in strategic outlooks among the Member States, amplified by external influences, have at times left ASEAN bereft of any effective mechanism to handle disagreements, increasingly turning ASEAN into a “tyranny of one” where a dissenting position can override the will of the other nine. If ASEAN is serious to maintain its centrality, it needs to find a way to work through differences and speak with one voice.

AF: The ASEAN Community has come into being but its presence is hardly felt by the ordinary people. What more can be done?

SG: We should not be expecting an instantaneous payoff. The ASEAN Community could be compared to a fruit tree. We planted the seed in 1967 when the five founding members established ASEAN. By 2015, the tree is robust and while waiting for more flowers to bear fruit, we enjoy the shade that it provides and any early harvest it yields. Constructing a community of ten sovereign states is no small feat. We need a lot of patience, perseverance and faith in regionalism. Most importantly, ASEAN needs to regain and strengthen the commitment to the “we-feeling”. A community only works when it is united in purpose and commitment.

AF: Between “ASEAN should move along at a pace comfortable to all” and “ASEAN could have done more”, which one would you find more palatable?

SG: Both approaches are important and have served ASEAN well in the past 50 years. But I would give more currency to the latter approach. We are witnessing an interesting phenomenon around the world where a large swathe of communities clamour for change. In a fast-changing world with the fourth industrial revolution and the growth of artificial intelligence developing apace, ASEAN may be left behind employing only a slow and steady approach. The Member States must inject greater political will and investment into this regional project so that ASEAN can rise to the expectations of the new generation of Southeast Asians.

“ASEAN is the guarantor of regional peace, the glue that keeps most diverse Southeast Asian nations together and in concerted efforts to achieve shared prosperity.”

SG Minh sharing a light-hearted moment with his wife (left) and former Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr. Marty Natalegawa (right) at his farewell reception at the ASEAN Secretariat.



ASEAN Secretariat

AF: The unfolding power reconfiguration and competition in East Asia are putting a lot of stress on ASEAN unity and centrality. What would be the best way forward for ASEAN?

SG: ASEAN has achieved much more in improving the lives of Southeast Asians in the last decade than at any point in the past 50 years. We therefore have expected more from the Member States' responsibility and efforts to preserve and strengthen ASEAN unity. Having gone through many ups and downs, we must re-learn the lesson that ASEAN succeeds when and only when it is united. Greater regional interdependence and resiliency could help ASEAN navigate through internal and external challenges resulting from differences although achieving this may be a tall order. ASEAN must be able to turn diversity into an asset instead of a liability.

AF: After five years in the trade, how has your view of ASEAN changed?

SG: ASEAN is the guarantor of regional peace, the glue that keeps most diverse Southeast Asian nations together and in concerted efforts to achieve shared prosperity. I have served ASEAN with this conviction that remains.

AF: What is the most important take-away from your five years as the Secretary-General of ASEAN?

SG: The ASEAN Community conceptualised decades ago finally has become a reality. Its far-reaching ASEAN

Community Vision 2025 provides the trajectory for ASEAN's further development and enhancement as a resilient, rules-based, people-centred Community which increasingly plays a greater role regionally and globally. Despite great challenges, ASEAN unity and solidarity have been basically maintained. ASEAN's international standing has never been higher. The ASEAN Secretariat has been substantially strengthened: more organised, more coordinated, better equipped, more responsive and disciplined – or, in the Vision language, more rules-based and people-centred. I am glad to have been part of these positive and transformative changes.

AF: If there is an advice you would like to share with your successor, what would it be?

SG: Dato Paduka Lim Jock Hoi is a distinguished diplomat whom I have known with deep respect over the years working together in different ASEAN platforms. If there is something I would like to share with him, it is this: do not bother with the notion that the Secretary-General of ASEAN may be more of a “secretary” than a “general.” To us, people of conviction, as I have learned throughout my career, leadership is not a position or title; it is action and example.

The ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute thanks SG Minh for his leadership of ASEAN over the past five years, and for his encouragement and support of ASC as well as other think-tanks and research institutes in furthering the study of ASEAN within the region and beyond. ■



Higher Education and Skills Development in ASEAN

N VARAPRASAD gives us an overview of the higher and technical education landscape across ASEAN.

What stands out on the state of higher education and skills development in ASEAN is, firstly, the huge disparity and diversity of systems in each country, and secondly, how the responses are almost uniformly similar.

ASEAN is diverse in almost every aspect, be it in terms of language, religion, colonial past, their struggle for independence, economic and industrial trajectory, urbanisation, governance, or income levels and distribution. School systems still follow the previous colonial models to a great extent, whether they be British, Dutch, French, Spanish or American.

Notwithstanding this diversity, the responses to the prevailing higher education issues in each country have been broadly similar. ASEAN has bought into the narrative of the Human Capital Theory which suggests that higher education levels are essential to transit a knowledge-based economy, and that better jobs would be created as graduates (knowledge workers) generate innovation. This virtuous cycle has become the holy grail of higher education policy for many countries, regardless of where they were in the continuum of development. The knowledge economy beckoned tantalizingly. All ASEAN countries have also adopted the utilitarian approach to higher education as a component of the economic development eco-system.

Furthermore, there was an increasing number of young people who completed schooling and looked to higher education options. From both the supply and demand sides of the equation, an expansion of the higher education sector was inevitable. In less than two decades, the gross tertiary enrolment ratio (GTER) doubled to 36.1% across ASEAN.

GROSS TERTIARY ENROLMENT RATIO IN ASEAN



Source: ASEAN Secretariat

Note: Coverage includes all countries available and varies between years, but is > 70% for all years. *Estimation.

There is still scope for further expansion in higher education, given that post-secondary participation rates are still below the OECD average of 70%, with Thailand (50%), Malaysia (37%), Indonesia (32%) and Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar at below 20%.

Higher education has become or will soon become a norm, as societies reach middle income status. From being previously reserved for the elite (up to 15% GTER), and now approaching massified (defined as 50% GTER) to universal participation, higher education holds great promise for countries hoping to leapfrog to developed economy status. Malaysia, for example, has set a goal of producing 100,000 local PhD graduates by 2020. The road there, however, is not going to be smooth.

With rare exceptions such as Singapore, the rapid expansion of the higher education sector in ASEAN has not received adequate support from their respective governments. The rising needs of the middle class are beyond the ability of the public purse to meet. This has led to the governance issues of accountability and control, quality and accreditation. These issues have not been addressed with any level of coherence or determination. To absorb the additional demand for places in higher institutions, governments have opened up higher education to the private sector to different degrees. Vietnam, for example, envisages private institutions to provide 40% of higher education places by 2020. In the Philippines, more than 80% of students are already in private institutions. Apart from a few prestigious private universities of long-standing repute, most are for-profit entities, catering for students of moderate academic achievement, and offering programmes that are non-capital intensive such as management, humanities and social sciences, information technology, tourism and hospitality. They are primarily teaching institutions with large classes and a transient teaching cadre.

Even among public institutions, budget constraints have resulted in the privatisation of campus services such as campus housing, increased tuition fees, introduction of student loans, and revenue-generating initiatives. It has also put faculty appointments and pay under stress.

There have been several worthwhile initiatives at the ASEAN level to harmonise the quality of outcomes, at least among the public university sector. Among these is the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF) which is still in its infancy. Given ASEAN's consultative nature, the AQAF is voluntary, and is in danger of becoming procedural, whereas quality issues go deeper into student learning, pedagogy and the educational development of teaching faculty.

The outcome, while producing large numbers of college graduates, does not match the narrative of human capital in a knowledge-based technology-driven technology economy. The large graduate pool in the Philippines, for example, finds work overseas more rewarding, even though underemployment is rampant in jobs that do not require degree-level training. Such a mismatch between educational outcomes and the labour market can be vertical or horizontal.

Vertical mismatch occurs when individuals invest in qualifications that are too high for what is actually required in the workplace. Meanwhile, horizontal mismatch occurs when qualified job-seekers are not in the fields of demand by the labour market. This leads to a skills gap, where the training provided to students is not suitable for entry to certain occupations, as well as a skills shortage, when employers are unable or have difficulty in filling vacancies available. There is much evidence to suggest that there is much misalignment between the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by the labour market and the curricula, pedagogy and faculty competencies found in higher education.

Graduate unemployment can become a serious social and political issue, and governments are realising that their respective public sectors cannot continue to bear the strain of absorbing significant numbers of graduates. Graduate unemployment rates can be correlated to the gross enrolment rates in higher education. For example, Korea, which has a high GTER of 93% in 2015 (down from 100% in 2010), and Taiwan (84%) exhibit high youth unemployment rates of 9.5% and 12.7% respectively. Youth unemployment in the Philippines, which has a GTER of 35%, is 30% for the 25 to 34 age group.

One main reason for the growth of the university sector is gross under-investment in the technical and vocational sector. Almost all countries have made Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) a route for academic under-achievers, leaving it stigmatized and unpopular. The only areas which are acceptable for para-professional training appears to be in healthcare, hospitality, marine and aircraft maintenance, all of which have their own industry accreditation and licensing authorities.

To attract more students into skills training, TVET needs to be rebranded, competencies need to be accredited by industry bodies, and pathways have to be provided for career progress and upward certification. Salaries and wages need to be pegged to a qualification framework, and publicized widely. Attractive "Earn and Learn" schemes, together with apprenticeships and internships will provide early returns to the students. At the end of the day, quick absorption into the labour market will change attitudes of parents and students to skills development. All of this has to be backed by strong political support, in terms of incentives to training providers and trainees.

ASEAN is caught in a conundrum – with skills education being highly unpopular and university education has taken on a highly utilitarian sheen. A more calibrated approach would be to develop an attractive TVET sector in place of mediocre universities, while developing high quality universities to produce broad-based intellectual capital capable of driving the future. This is a policy challenge that has to be addressed. However, given that the private sector is presently well-entrenched in higher education, a new approach is needed.

ASEAN economies are developing quickly with massive investments in infrastructure. These need to be supported by competent professionals and skilled para-professionals. There needs to be a rebalancing of resources into TVET, together with better career guidance in partnership with industry. Once this change is achieved, ASEAN can move to the next important educational goal, that of lifelong learning. With longer lifespans and shorter technological half-lives, constant reskilling will become critical. ■

Dr. N Varaprasad was the founding Principal/CEO of Temasek Polytechnic, former Deputy President of the National University of Singapore (NUS) and CEO of the National Library Board (NLB). He is now a partner with the Singapore Education Consulting Group.

FLOW OF TERTIARY-LEVEL STUDENTS

Amongst the ASEAN countries, Malaysia had the most number of tertiary education students studying abroad with **64,500** students in 2016, followed by Vietnam with **63,700** students. Brunei had the least with only 3,500 students studying abroad. (UNESCO, 2017)

Singapore has the highest percentage of international students in the total tertiary enrolment (inbound mobility ratio) within ASEAN, reaching **19.2%** in 2013, compared to only 3.6% in Malaysia. (UNESCO, 2017)

More than 10,000 ASEAN students studied in Malaysia in 2015, **56%** of which came from Indonesia. Of the 5,000 ASEAN students studying in Thailand in 2015, **33%** hailed from Myanmar and **24%** from Cambodia. (UNESCO, 2017)

In 2016, local students formed **95.15%** of the total enrolled students in Malaysian public higher education institutes, with the remaining 4.85% being international students. (Ministry of Education of Malaysia, 2017)



BUDGET FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION



The government budget for higher education in 2017 was **US\$1.5 billion** in the Philippines, and **US\$3.4 billion** each in Malaysia and Singapore. (Rappler, 2016; Malay Mail Online, 2017; Ministry of Finance Singapore, 2017)

Expenditure on tertiary education accounts for **27%** of the total government expenditure on education in Malaysia, and 16% in Indonesia in 2015. (World Bank, 2017)

Singapore's total government expenditure on education in 2016 was **S\$12.66 billion**, of which S\$4.58 billion or 36% was for tertiary education. (Department of Statistics of Singapore, 2017)

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

In February 2015, **55%** of senior secondary school students were enrolled in Indonesia's General Senior Secondary Schools (SMAs) rather than in Vocational Senior Secondary Schools (SMKs). (Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, 2016)

4.2 million students were enrolled in vocational programmes at public and private secondary education institutions in Indonesia in 2015. (World Bank, 2017).

Malaysia has 80 vocational secondary schools in 2017, representing just **3.3%** of the total number of secondary schools in

the country. (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017)

Malaysia allocated **RM4.9 billion** (US\$1.2 billion) in its 2018 budget for implementing the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Malaysia Master Plan. (New Straits Times, 2017)

The number of graduates from the Philippines' Technical-Vocational Education and Training Programmes (TVET) increased from **1.78 million** in 2014 to **2.15 million** in 2016. (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority of the Philippines, 2017)

The total number of students enrolled in vocational education at the pre-university level (i.e. Polytechnics and Institute of Technical Education) in Singapore in 2016 was **101,000**, compared to 28,000 in non-vocational pre-university education (i.e. Junior Colleges), and 66,530 in university education. (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2017).

The budget for public vocational education in Singapore in FY 2017 is **S\$1.29 billion** for Polytechnics and **S\$0.46 billion** for Institutes of Technical Education. (Ministry of Finance Singapore, 2017)

DID YOU KNOW?

When Indonesian President Joko Widodo was Mayor of Solo, he commissioned a group of local vocational senior secondary school students to design and build a car from scratch. The ESEMKA (a homonym for SMK, the Indonesian acronym for vocational senior secondary schools) became his official car during his mayoral tenure.





Creating the University of the 21st Century

ARNOUD DE MEYER predicts the nature of the university of the future, and how it will respond to the challenges of the time.

The world is changing rapidly. Our future will be influenced heavily by the increasing impact of technology, in particular the fields of life sciences and digital technology. The shift of the economic point of gravity towards East Asia will also transform our region into a global source of innovations. Globalisation will continue, perhaps in a different way than in the recent past. Rather than being driven by trade, it may well be the globalisation of investment, mobility, or cultural and political influences. The world requires different forms and methods of governance in order to cope with the growing challenges of sustainability and the consequences of global warming. Such changes will make for a very different world and society. What does this imply for that revered institution of the university?

Universities were traditionally well-established institutions, often hundreds of years old, almost exclusively in one place, catering to people of 18 to 28 years old, disciplinary if not “silo-ed” in nature, and detached from their environment.

Such universities are not sustainable anymore, and the Singapore Management University (SMU) is at the forefront of reformulating what the university stands for.

What do universities need to do well to stay in tune with the times? For me, education is a set of rituals and processes that produce adults that meet the society’s needs. In a narrow sense, that means that we imbue students with the skills needed to operate in the organisations that they will join upon graduation. But a university is, of course, more than a college that merely teaches skills.

The concept of the university comes from *Universitas Magistrorum et Scholarum*, or the Community of Masters and Scholars. As Cardinal Newman, one of the great thinkers of the 19th century about what a university is, implied: it is the community of young men, interacting with each other, that prepares them to contribute to society through their creative ideas and decisive and effective actions. This model has been

a very successful for research-intensive universities where teaching goes hand-in-hand with research.

What does the new society expect today from a graduate? It is my belief that basic disciplinary knowledge will remain important. Robots and artificial intelligence (AI) will not replace that basic mastery. At SMU, we will still require our students to master the fundamentals of business, accountancy, IT, economics, psychology, sociology, political sciences or law. However, four additional clusters of graduate proficiency may be observed: critical thinking and creativity; resilience or the ability to be nimble, to adapt and to adopt change; the ability to work across teams and experiences and be able to handle diversity in all its forms; and design thinking.

WHAT DOES THIS IMPLY FOR ASEAN UNIVERSITIES? THERE ARE SIX KEY AREAS OF CHANGE.

1 Data is going to drastically change our world and the university. The 21st century university will have a larger portfolio of research paradigms, and the inductive exploitation of large databases will become more prominent. Many universities, including SMU, have recognised this and embarked on large-scale research programmes on Living Analytics and its applications. We want students to learn how to use data, and how to interface and to work and think “together with machines”.

2 Technology will play a much bigger role in learning. Universities as a physical infrastructure may become obsolete and professors may have to transform their roles, but learning will always survive. The learning environment will look different: it will be a far less constrained physical place with traditional lecture theatres and seminar rooms. One will learn anywhere and anytime. We will need to convert existing physical spaces for other purposes such as project work, discussion areas and meeting places in order to stimulate students’ interaction and collaboration.

3 The new university will be multi-disciplinary. Big problems do not have narrow disciplinary solutions. Students do not have too much of an issue with this. Although I notice that the recruitment groups in companies still feel uncomfortable with it, I am absolutely convinced that this will change very quickly. Two of the undergraduate programmes that SMU recently launched (Politics, Law and Economics last year and this year the Smart City-Management and Technology) are adopting this multi-disciplinary approach and are examples of what is to come.

“It is my belief that basic disciplinary knowledge will remain important... however, four additional clusters of graduate proficiency may be observed: critical thinking and creativity; resilience or the ability to be nimble, to adapt and to adopt change; the ability to work across teams and experiences and be able to handle diversity in all its forms; and design thinking.”

4 The 21st century university will be more flexible in its organisation.

Currently, universities are neatly organised along the lines of four years and two-semester formats, where the university more or less imposes what students have to do, when and in which sequence. This is an almost universal model. The new university will put much more responsibility on the student who should manage his or her own progression in learning. They may well choose to interrupt their studies, go and work for a while, have new

experiences, and come back for a few additional courses. We may well share the learning experience with partners, i.e., education may not be limited to the university itself. This will require much better learning analytics and the university may need to provide the student with a continuously improving learning support system. Life-long learning will become the norm and universities will have to take their responsibility in understanding and organising education for senior adults.

5 University graduates from the 21st century university will need to take responsibility for the development of a sustainable society. Current students are the future leaders and change agents who will have to take responsibility for the society.

6 I also believe that the *homo sapiens* will become more of a *homo ludens*, and the 21st century university should also become a sort of playground, where students can experiment, simulate and try out new things. John Seeley Brown has argued that “the ability to play may well be the most important skill to develop for the 21st century”. He defines play as “the tension between the rules of the game and the freedom to act within those rules”. Playing games is being inventive and exploring the options within the rules of the game, often imagining that which does not yet exist, bringing the new into being. That is what society wants you to do as change agents. Therefore, we may well evolve towards a more “ludic” university!

The university of tomorrow will be a technology-savvy, multi-disciplinary playground where you become a partner in organising your own flexible learning path, where you learn in a physical and virtual community, where you enhance your skills to interact with AI and machines, and where research also embraces inductive methods. SMU is striving to create just such a new platform through its Vision for 2025. ■

Prof. Arnoud De Meyer is President of the Singapore Management University (SMU).



Business Expectations of Today's University and Technical Graduates

VICTOR MILLS contends that engagement + adaptability = relevance.

What business owners and employers expect from fresh graduates has not changed much over many decades. Employers look for three main attributes from potential hires. First, the ability to communicate effectively at all levels. Secondly, the ability to work in cross-cultural and global teams. Thirdly, a consistent positive attitude coupled with adaptability.

It does not matter how well a person is educated or how many qualifications or degrees he or she may have. What really matters is an individual's ability to communicate verbally and in writing in a clear, effective and respectful way. Who is your target audience and what are your key messages? These are essential skills that many graduates today do not often demonstrate. For instance, emails and social media communication modes, with their often truncated or shortcut use of language, do not help and are inappropriate when writing a contract or a speech. Equally, with the exception of students with debating or drama experience, there is a marked lack of understanding about the power of language

and voice projection. Many well qualified people are unable to hold a conversation or make a presentation without the overuse of words such as "actually", "basically" and "like". The lack of these skills will hold back their progress in any business. The solution can be found in continuing education courses with the British Council for English and with similar institutions for other languages.

Today's workplace is "glocal" meaning it is both local and global. This has always been the case for us in Singapore as a city-state. Many people today have local and overseas friends, colleagues and clients. Many companies operate complex functional reporting lines across continents, and use multiple local teams across the world to work together on problem solving or client solution projects. It is not enough to be able to relate to people like yourself. You need to be able to relate to everyone, regardless of nationality or culture, and still communicate effectively and respectfully. Building capabilities in regional languages will help realise the ASEAN Economic Community, which is today an aspiration and not a fact.

The third most important attribute is attitudinal. Too many people today are disengaged from their work, which goes a long way to explain low rates of productivity and the consequent failure by businesses to implement their strategies. Too many people today are focused on the unattainable “perfect” job, which is unattainable because it does not exist. There are aspects of all jobs that are enjoyable, and there always aspects of all jobs that are not.

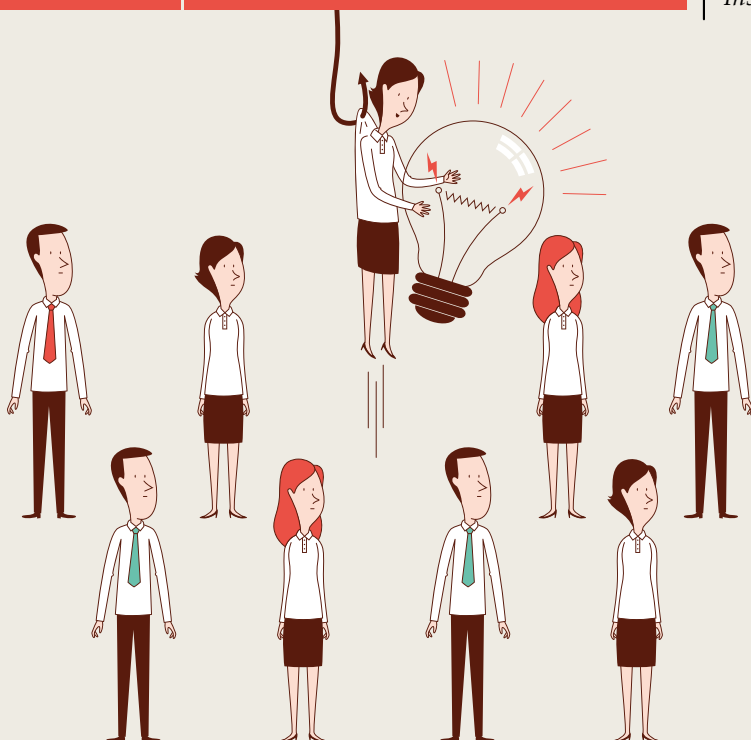
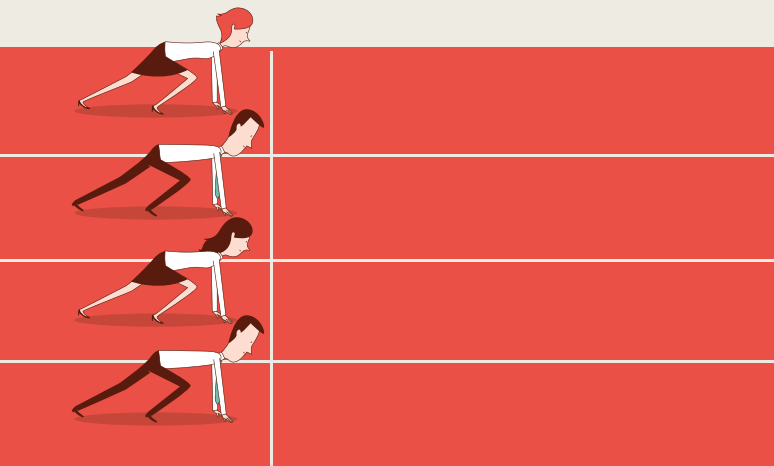
Frequent job changes mean that people do not have sufficient time to learn and apply skills. Arguably, the best way to cope is to be 100% engaged in our job for as long as we have it. Employers want their team members to care about the financial success of the company they work for and their part in helping ensure its success. Employees who care about outcomes produce positive individual and corporate results. This is doubled when employers play their part by providing an optimal workplace culture that allows everyone to succeed. Selfless leadership that seeks to remove whatever barriers prevent people from maximising their potential and effectiveness is a prerequisite of optimal workplace culture just as much as fully engaged employees.

It is not sufficient to just demonstrate a consistent and positive attitude. We must couple it with the quality of adaptability. This has always been important but has now become essential given the impact of the digital revolution, artificial intelligence and robotics on the future of jobs. What does it take to be adaptable? It takes self-confidence, but never over-confidence. It takes a willingness to learn, and to keep learning. It takes an enquiring mind fed by imagination and creativity. Many fresh graduates have these qualities. Singapore and our region need as many creative people as possible coming together to collaborate to solve problems and to build sustainable businesses which provide jobs for themselves and for others.

Whether you are a student of engineering, or social sciences, or any other discipline is unimportant. What is important is how you apply the knowledge you have acquired during your initial period of formal education in whatever job you do. Whatever you learn will need to be supplemented by specific on-the-job training and additional learning throughout your life. When you think about it, this is logical. The days of getting a degree and coasting through life are over. The pace of business and societal change mean that none of us stay relevant for very long. We need to keep learning to stay relevant to employers and to society.

The mid-career hire fully understands all these points. Many people need to completely re-engineer the way they present themselves. Often retrenchment is a blessing in disguise. It forces people to change, to adapt, to unlearn habits and learn new skills to stay relevant. This is not a bad thing. It is an inescapable part of life for all of us whatever our age. We should all embrace reality, not fight against it. ■

Mr. Victor Mills is Chief Executive of the Singapore International Chamber of Commerce and a member of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute Board of Trustees.



“It is not sufficient to just demonstrate a consistent and positive attitude. We must couple it with the quality of adaptability. This has always been important but has now become essential given the impact of the digital revolution, artificial intelligence and robotics on the future of jobs.”

Tony Jaa as Ong Bak



Sahamongkol Film International

From Paddy Fields to the Silver Screen

Tony Jaa's love for Muay Thai and his perseverance have shot him to stardom.

BY CHERYL TEH

A blade slices through the air, wielded by several snarling armed opponents. The burly men advance, their sights set on their target, but they have bitten off more than they can chew. From the shadows, a man emerges. With a fearsome war cry, he leaps, kicking and punching. His opponents attack, one after another, but they all fall like dominoes, helpless in the face of this warrior.

This man – who battles with the ferocity of a hundred – is none other than Tony Jaa. Known affectionately in Thailand as Jaa Phanom, he is a famous Thai martial artist, stunt choreographer and director who has made a name for himself on the international stage.

Before his meteoric rise to fame, Jaa was just another teenager in a rural area in Surin Province, Thailand. Unlike other youths, however, Jaa was entranced by the films he saw at temple fairs starring martial arts stars Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li. Inspired by the slick moves and heroic actions of these martial arts superstars, Jaa began practicing martial arts on his own whenever he could, be it while he worked in the rice paddy fields, or when he was playing with his friends.

After training for five years at a local temple, Jaa's hard work paid off. At fifteen, Jaa became a protégé of stuntman and director Panna Rittikrai. Under his tutelage, Jaa went on to work as a stuntman for 14 years, specialising in Muay Thai action films.

While working as a stuntman, Jaa developed a strong interest in Muay Boran, a preliminary form of Muay Thai. Jaa's mastery of the traditional Muay Boran fighting style led to his first break-out role as a lead actor, when he starred in the 2003 film, *Ong-Bak: Muay Thai Warrior*. In this film, Jaa showcased his ability to pull off extreme acrobatic stunts, completing all the scenes without a stunt double or CGI effects.

Jaa showed immense professionalism and perseverance during the course of production, soldiering on despite a series

of mishaps suffered during filming, including an injured ligament and a badly sprained ankle. In an interview in 2005, Jaa shared that he sustained some injuries during a recording session when his clothes caught fire. "The flames spread upwards very fast and burnt my eyebrows, my eyelashes, and my nose," Jaa said, matter-of-factly. "Then we had to do a couple more takes to get it right."

Sure enough, *Ong-Bak: Muay Thai Warrior* opened to resounding success at the box office. Jaa has had nothing short of an illustrious career ever since, having starred in over twenty martial arts films. In the last decade, Jaa worked hard to popularise and promote Thai martial arts, even making his Hollywood debut in *Furious 7* and *Vin Diesel's XXX: Return of Xander Cage*. Jaa has also broken into the regional market, starring in Hong Kong-Chinese action films like the *Sha Po Lang* movie series and Chinese film *SPL-II*.

"My happiness is being able to present my talents for people to see, and I feel like I'm an ambassador of Thai history and Thai culture on film, so that people can see Muay Thai."

Jaa's films even captured the attention of one of his heroes, Jackie Chan, who recommended that he be cast in Chan's own film, *Rush Hour 3*. It felt like a dream came true for a once little boy who used to practise Jackie Chan's moves in rural Thailand, even though Jaa had to decline in the end because of his scheduling conflicts.

Tony Jaa has come a long way from his home village's paddy fields to the silver screen. Now he stands enshrined in the Thai film history as a homegrown martial arts superstar – in turn, perhaps, inspiring another starry-eyed youth gazing at a television screen in rapt attention, as a Muay Thai warrior takes centre-stage, shining ever so bright. ■

Ms. Cheryl Teh is Research Associate at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Prambanan: The Hindu Gem of Java

An architectural masterpiece, Prambanan bears fine testimony to the Hindu roots of the rich Javanese civilisation. BY NUR AZIEMAH AZIZ



Wikimedia Commons

Yogyakarta, the royal heart of Java in Indonesia, is home to two iconic and stunning temples that can be seen from miles away. While everyone raves about the epic sunrise in the Borobudur complex, the Prambanan temples, located 17 kilometres northeast of Yogyakarta's city centre, are no less charming. A UNESCO World Heritage site and a masterpiece of Javanese Hindu architecture and culture, it has withstood the test of time, surviving earthquakes, volcanoes and the ever blowing wind of cultural, religious and political changes that swept through Java since the 10th century.

Built by the Mataram Kingdom during the reigns of King Rakai Pakatan and King Rakai Balitung, Prambanan, in the eyes of historians, was a monument to commemorate the return of the Hindu dynasty in Java after being controlled by the Buddhist Sailendra Dynasty. In its early beginnings, the complex was made up of three different zones with over 500 temples.

Just like Borobudur, the architecture formula follows a hierarchy of temples from the lowest to the holiest of realms. The three main temples are dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma, symbols of Trimurti in Hindu belief. The temples with tall spires are adorned with the Indonesian version of illustrations and stone carvings of the Ramayana epic. The Shiva temple, the main attraction in the complex, is built on elevated grounds at 47 metres high. There visitors would find the Shiva statue standing on a gigantic lotus flower – a sign of the symbiosis between Hinduism and Buddhism in early Javanese civilisations.

This sacred religious site is known to locals as Rara Jonggrang, in tribute to a popular legend about the beautiful daughter of the mythical King Boko. To win her heart, Prince Bandung Bondowoso accepted her challenge to build a thousand temples in one night before the sun rose. He used his magical powers and called for assistance from the spirits. In no time, countless temples were erected and he was left with the last one when Rara Jonggrang ordered the village women to begin pounding rice and set a fire in the east of the temples to trick the prince and the spirits that the sun was about to rise. Fooled by the sounds

of daybreak and the light, the spirits left the human world and returned to the supernatural realm. When the prince found out that he was tricked, he cursed and turned her into stone. Some said the image of Durga in the north cell of the Shiva Temple is known as Rara Jonggrang.

Prambanan went into decline when the Mataram kings moved from Central to East Java in the 10th century. Then Mount Merapi erupted, and Prambanan was entirely abandoned. The temple further lost its significance due to power struggles and shifts between the different dynasties in Java. Eventually, the temples went hidden and unnoticed, consumed by wild vegetation and even collapsed from a major earthquake in the 16th century. It was only rediscovered in 1811, when a surveyor who worked under Sir Stamford Raffles stumbled upon its ruins.

Proper restoration works on Prambanan began in the 1930s under Dutch colonial rule, but the temple was only restored to its former glories in 1953, when Indonesian President Sukarno travelled all the way to unveil the restored main Shiva complex. Restoration is still ongoing, but is continually hampered by Java's constant brushes with natural disasters. The most recent earthquakes that hit Yogyakarta in 2006 caused substantial damages to the main temples.

Even though the days of Hinduism as the dominant religion in Java are long gone, the largest Hindu temple in Indonesia and one of the biggest in Southeast Asia is still a major religious site and tourist attraction. Many Hindus come to the temples for religious processions, and visitors who are fortunate enough to be there during those proceedings would travel back in time to the days when the Hindu divine and the earthly realm were closely intertwined. Looking at the very fine details on the bas-relief of the scriptures, one will realise that Prambanan is a historical treasure that attests to the peaceful co-existence between different religions, then as it is now. ■

Ms. Nur Aziemah Aziz is Research Officer at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

JANUARY

The Philippines assumes the ASEAN Chairmanship with the theme “Partnering for Change, Engaging the World.”

The 20th ASEAN Tourism Ministers Meeting in Singapore witnesses the launch of the “Visit ASEAN@50” campaign to promote ASEAN as a single travel destination.

Upon his inauguration as the 45th President of the US, Donald Trump signs an executive order withdrawing the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP).

Germany becomes ASEAN’s first Development Partner.

FEBRUARY

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Council endorses the AEC 2025 Consolidated Strategic Action Plan to guide the implementation of the AEC 2025 Blueprint.

ASEAN Foreign Ministers express their “grave concern” in a statement over the DPRK’s ballistic missile launch on 12 February. They subsequently reiterated their “grave concern” four more times on 8 March, 20 April, 28 April, and 5 August as the DPRK stepped up its nuclear capabilities.

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers meet at a retreat in Boracay, the Philippines, to discuss the six priorities of the Philippines’ ASEAN Chairmanship and regional issues of common concern, including the South China Sea.

MARCH

The ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) enters into force.

At their meeting in the Philippines’ Iloilo City, the ASEAN Social-Cultural Community Council resolves to push for the realisation of a “people-centred, people-oriented and resilient” ASEAN Community.

The ASEAN Economic Ministers and the EU Trade Commissioner agree to develop a framework encompassing the parameters of a future ASEAN-EU FTA.

DECEMBER

The 17th ASEAN Telecommunications and Information Technology Ministers Meeting (TELMIN) in Siem Reap welcomes the adoption of the ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy which guides ASEAN countries in taking a coordinated approach to build their national cybersecurity capacity.

NOVEMBER

On the sidelines of the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting in Da Nang, Vietnam, the TPP-11 members agrees to revive the TPP under the newly titled Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) though the timeline for the signing has not been fixed yet.

The ASEAN Economic Ministers and their Hong Kong SAR counterpart sign the ASEAN-Hong Kong Free Trade Agreement and Investment Agreement in Manila.

ASEAN hold its 31st ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in Manila. Key deliverables include the ASEAN Declaration to Prevent and Combat Cybercrime, ASEAN Declaration on Innovation, and the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

The ASEAN Leaders appoint Dato Paduka Lim Jock Hoi, Permanent Secretary of Brunei Darussalam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as the Secretary-General of ASEAN (2018–2022).

The ASEAN Leaders meet with their Dialogue Partners’ counterparts, including US President Donald Trump, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and the European Council President Donald Tusk to celebrate their 40th anniversary of relations with ASEAN respectively.

Despite his earlier commitment, President Trump left without attending the 12th EAS, and was represented by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Counter-terrorism was high on the EAS’ agenda, especially on the aspects of terrorism financing and terrorist ideologies and propaganda.

APRIL

US Vice President Mike Pence calls on ASEAN Secretary-General Le Luong Minh during an official visit to the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, announcing that President Donald Trump would attend the ASEAN-US Summit and the East Asia Summit (EAS) in November.

The ASEAN Leaders gather for the 30th ASEAN Summit in Manila, and sign the ASEAN Declaration on the Role of the Civil Service as a Catalyst for Achieving the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

MAY

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers meet for the first time with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in a special meeting in Washington D.C.

ASEAN-China senior officials agree on the draft framework of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) in their meeting in Guiyang, China. The framework was then endorsed at the ASEAN-China Post-Ministerial Meeting in August.

JUNE

The ASEAN Secretariat launches the first ASEAN Economic Integration Brief (AEIB) to inform the public of the AEC progress. The second AEIB was released on 12 November during the 31st ASEAN Summit.

JULY

The United Nations General Assembly adopts by consensus a resolution commemorating the 50th anniversary of ASEAN – reportedly the first-ever commemorative resolution for a regional organisation adopted by the world body.

OCTOBER

Cross-border movement of people and goods in ASEAN takes a major step forward with the signing of the ASEAN Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Cross Border Transport of Passengers by Road Vehicles at the 23rd ASEAN Transport Ministers Meeting in Singapore.

The 4th ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) held in Clark, the Philippines, called on the DPRK to abandon its nuclear weapon programme and resume dialogue with all parties concerned. The frequency of the ADMM-Plus will be increased to once every year, instead of biennially.

SEPTEMBER

The 49th ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting (AEM) in Pasay City, the Philippines, adopts the ASEAN Work Programme on Electronic Commerce 2017-2025 and the AEC 2025 Trade Facilitation Strategic Action Plan.

Obesity and diabetes top the list of health issues that the 13th ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting in Bandar Seri Begawan under the theme “Together Towards a Healthy ASEAN” was committed to tackling.

At a roundtable in Manila, the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) agree to counter fake news as a new area of cooperation under the framework of READI (Responsibility, Empathy, Authenticity, Discernment, and Integrity).

The 11th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime adopts the Manila Declaration to Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism, in which they outlined concerted efforts, including the development of an ASEAN Plan of Action in this area.

The ASEAN Chair issues a statement, expressing concerns over the “humanitarian situation in Rakhine State” on the sidelines of the UNGA. Malaysia later disowned the statement, saying that it was “a misrepresentation of reality”, including the omission of the Rohingyas as an affected community.

AUGUST

The ASEAN Leaders issue the Declaration on the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN on 8 August.

Manila hosts the 50th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM) and Related Meetings. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers and their counterparts from Dialogue Partners and external parties also attended the Grand Celebration of ASEAN's 50th Anniversary on 8 August.

Turkey becomes a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN, a status that has also been accorded to Pakistan, Norway and Switzerland.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pays an official visit to the ASEAN Secretariat and opens the Russian Permanent Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta.



The national flowers of Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam (clockwise from top left): padauk, jasmine, ratchaphruk and pink lotus.

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