

**Australia's ambassador to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Gillian Bird, who is also a deputy secretary at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra, explained on March 19 that Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's proposal for an Asia-Pacific community was part of Australia's enduring interest in regional arrangements.**



Speaking at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, Ambassador Bird stressed that the Rudd proposal was not a criticism of existing institutions but sought to build on institutions already in place, including those related to ASEAN. She was speaking at a seminar organised by the ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS as part of the Centre's ASEAN ambassadors lecture series. Pointing out that Australia's trade with ASEAN amounted to 15 percent of its total trade, Ambassador Bird noted that the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand free-trade agreement had entered into force at the beginning of the year. She expressed Australia's support for the proposal for a comprehensive economic partnership, including a free-trade area, in the East Asia Summit, which groups the ten ASEAN members, Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea and New Zealand. She recalled that Australia had been the first country to enter into a Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN, in 1974, and that its relationship with ASEAN had gone beyond trade and economic relations and included migration, education and cooperation against terrorism, people smuggling, climate change and nuclear proliferation.

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