



ASEAN NEWSLETTER

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ASEAN News Updates

ASEAN and Japan Cooperation in Food, Agriculture and Forestry

(January 24, 2014)

In a courtesy call on the Secretary-General of ASEAN, H.E. Le Luong Minh this week, the Senior Vice Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) of Japan, H.E. Takamori Yoshizawa stressed Japan's high interest in forging cooperation with ASEAN in agriculture, especially in the human resource development. As part of the 40th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation celebration, MAFF was holding "Symposium on Human Resources Development in Food-related Area through Partnership with ASEAN Universities" on 21 January 2014 in Jakarta, Indonesia. He expressed that the output of Symposium could be explored more through partnership in enhancing human resources development in agriculture between ASEAN and Japan (Source: ASEAN Secretariat)

ASEAN and Kazakhstan to Promote Bilateral and Regional Cooperation

(January 24, 2014)

During the presentation of his letter of Credence to H.E. Le Luong Minh, Secretary-General of ASEAN, H.E. Askhat T. Orazabay, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to ASEAN expressed that Kazakhstan is keen in cooperating with ASEAN in the potential areas comfortable to both ASEAN and Kazakhstan. He also informed SG Minh that Kazakhstan wishes to nurture close cooperation in many areas with ASEAN through bilateral as well as region organization to organization. (Source: ASEAN Secretariat)

ASEAN Tourism Forum 2014

(January 23, 2014)

The 33rd ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) was held in Sarawak, Malaysia from January 16-23, 2014. The theme of this year's ATF was ASEAN – Advancing Tourism Together. This year's forum raised the tourism industry value-chain to a higher level through strong cooperation among ASEAN member states. It continued ASEAN's objective to explore the sustainable development of tourism and reviewed various tourism initiatives and plans, in line with the mantra of Tourism Conserves, Preserves, and Protects. The presence of over 1,600 delegates, including 100 foreign and local travel trade media graced the event. The Minister of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, declared that ASEAN has completed 75% of the measures outlined under the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2011-2015, on track to achieving 100% by 2015. The following year's ATF will be hosted by Myanmar in Naypidaw with the theme being ASEAN – Tourism Towards Peace, Prosperity and Partnership. (Source: Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism)

ASEAN-Germany Joint Cooperation Review

(January 23, 2014)

ASEAN and German representatives met at the GIZ Office in Jakarta to discuss the ASEAN-Germany Joint Cooperation Review. During the review, participants agreed that the existing support from Germany suited ASEAN's needs and priorities. ASEAN-Germany cooperation projects currently fall under three focal areas: Environment and Climate Change; Regional Economic Integration; and Institutional Strengthening/Capacity Development. To date, Germany has contributed approximately €70 million to ASEAN projects and activities. The review highlighted several topics for further discussion. Both ASEAN and Germany agreed to continue aiming at better linkages between national and regional-level activities within ASEAN. The focus of this year's review lied on the evaluation of achieved impacts and the questions of how to further improve the existing cooperation and efficiency between ASEAN and Germany. (Source: ASEAN Secretariat)

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Training for ASEAN Disaster Management Future Leaders

(January 16, 2014)

The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management announced the commencement of an executive training program for selected disaster management officers from ASEAN countries. Under this program, the officers will be involved in intensive six-month training that covers emergency management, incident command system, emergency logistics system, international humanitarian system and emergency communications. Enhancing preparedness and effective emergency responses are top priorities in a region that has seen massive destructions and losses brought about by some of the biggest calamities ever recorded in humankind history. This ASEAN Executive Program aims to prepare future disaster management leaders to have a great set of skills in both disaster management and strong leadership to tackle future disaster management challenges. At the end of the six-months, participants will be expected to develop strategy papers for the improvement of disaster management in ASEAN region. (Source: ASEAN Secretariat)

Challenges of the ASEAN Chair

Steven C.M. Wong

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A turn at being the Chair of ASEAN is something that member countries usually look forward to eagerly. The opportunity of playing host to the leaders of not just the other nine ASEAN members but also the organisation's important dialogue partners is unrivalled as a diplomatic event. Countries that would not otherwise feature on the world stage are able to draw considerable attention – at least for the period of a year. For them, this more than justifies the considerable effort and expense spent.

Being the ASEAN Chair also gives the country a chance to leave a unique and lasting imprint through the initiatives that it undertakes. Ones like the 1967 Bangkok Declaration, the 1976 Bali Concord I (and later 2003 Bali Concord II) are milestones for not only the region but tributes to the countries after which they are named. A great deal of thought is therefore usually given in the year running-up to its assumption, with seminars and studies being conducted.

Of course all of this presumes that there are no controversies to detract from what is supposed to be the host country's finest hour. In the past, it was often possible to sweep these under the carpet under the guise of adherence to ASEAN norms. If this was not so, it was at least understood that whatever disagreements or domestic tensions were to be handled by senior officials behind the scenes and far away from the public view so as not to bring shame to the host.

Increasingly, however, the nature of developments and the growing expectations of ASEAN have made this a tenuous proposition. The inability of the July 2012 ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia to reach agreement on a joint communique, the first time in 45 years, was a severe embarrassment to Cambodia, if not the regional organisation. The fact that China had put immense pressure on the host not to make references to the South China Sea was not given much sympathy.

A year earlier, in 2011, Indonesia had, as the ASEAN Chair, the task of mediating the outbreak of hostilities between Thailand and Cambodia. That it failed to do so, with the matter eventually being referred to the International Court of Justice, should have been regarded as a bigger failure than it was. The herculean efforts of Indonesian Foreign Minister, Marty Natalegawa, no doubt counted a great deal in the eyes of the international community even if achievements fell short of the mark, something which Thailand has been blamed for.

Brunei Darussalam's assumption of the ASEAN Chair in 2013 was almost immediately swamped with the challenge of the Philippines initiating an international arbitration process under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). While well within its legal rights to do so, this was guaranteed to infuriate China and potentially make the process of helming the ASEAN-China, ASEAN Plus Three, ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit meetings extremely difficult. That Brunei was able to do so speak volumes for the astute diplomats of this tiny nation state.

Myanmar's long-awaited turn at the helm in 2014 almost immediately ran into controversy when it insisted that its internal problems with the Rohingya in Arakan state would not be included on the agenda of ASEAN Foreign Ministers retreat in Bagan, Myanmar or any other ASEAN meetings. This gave rise to criticism that Myanmar was acting in a heavy-handed manner and in a way that would not reflect positively on ASEAN. Myanmar must have felt that it rather unfairly not credited with undertaking sweeping political reforms, mass release of political prisoners and significant peace efforts with ethnic separatists. (See, following article, 'Myanmar's First Act'.)

What these incidences show is that the days of carefree ASEAN Chairmanships are well and truly over. Rather than merely going for the glory, harping on grand themes and glossing over the cracks and disputes that are never far from the surface in the process, members taking the ASEAN Chair must prepared to engage in diplomatic efforts and manage regional issues as and when they arise. ASEAN cannot afford to continue being criticised as 'burying its head in the sand' as has often happened in the past.

As the Association tries to deepen inwardly even while reaching outwardly, all in an effort to establish its relevance and credibility, the contradictions of not acting in a coherent manner in areas that affect the region will become ever more apparent and untenable. Whether these can be effectively addressed by just one country

over the period of a year or whether they require greater continuity, as in the sometimes discussed proposal of a troika of countries (comprising past, present and in-coming ASEAN Chairs), ought to be more seriously examined.

Holders of the ASEAN Chair will also need to rely on resources other than their ministries. The ASEAN Secretary General should be given a more active role in working on these issues while directed by and reporting to the ASEAN Chair. The view that a Secretary General in some sense 'competes' with the ASEAN Chair and dilutes national prerogatives should give way to the more mature and pragmatic perspective that a fully engaged Secretary General can actually help the ASEAN Chair by undertaking some of the more time-consuming, difficult and risky tasks that need to be done.

Myanmar's First Act

Zhi Ming Gan

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This year's ASEAN Ministers' Meeting Retreat held historical importance, not because it took place in the ancient city of Bagan, Myanmar, but because it was the first-ever high-level ASEAN Ministerial Meeting hosted by Myanmar under its inaugural ASEAN Chairmanship since joining the group in 1997. For Myanmar, chairing ASEAN signifies gradual acceptance by the international community as it was passed over the chairmanship in 2006. President Thein Sein's government has since won praise for freeing hundreds of political prisoners, lifting censorship laws and holding elections in which many opposition members won seats in parliament.

During the retreat, Myanmar showed the ASEAN community that it was serious about upholding this year's theme: "Moving forward in Unity to a Peaceful and Prosperous Community". It took the leadership role by having Foreign Ministers exchange views on regional and international issues, including recent developments in the East China Sea and South China Sea, as well as on the Korean Peninsula. The ministers reaffirmed ASEAN's Six-Point Principles on the South China Sea and the importance of maintaining peace and stability, maritime security, freedom of navigation and over flight. On top of which, they urged self-restraint in the conduct of activities to promote regional peace and stability in today's complex geopolitical environment. In this pressing issue, they called on all parties concerned to resolve their disputes by peaceful means in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Finally, they also urged parties to undertake the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea to build an environment of mutual trust and confidence.

Although having guidelines and structures in place are very important to peaceful, effective and successful negotiations, maybe Myanmar can urge ASEAN countries involved in the South China Sea dispute to take a play out of Myanmar's own playbook by pleading all parties to compromise. Within Myanmar, the Myanmar government and some 20 ethnic armed groups' leaders met in November to negotiate a national ceasefire. Myanmar's ministers often stress that taking compromises is the key ingredient needed for all parties to work together to build mutual understanding to better cooperation and peace.

At the Retreat, apart from discussing the main issue of South China Sea conflicts, the Foreign Ministers took stock of ASEAN's Community-building and regional integration efforts. Noting that two years remained to the establishment of an ASEAN Community on 31 December 2015, the Ministers affirmed the need to energize efforts to fulfill the Blueprint goals for the three Community pillars. Ministers also claim that 80% of the blueprints have been implemented, on track to meet targets by 2015. But, the remaining task apparently is promoting common norms and values such as good governance, transparency, anti-corruption, enhancing regional connectivity, particularly institutional and people aspects, improving disaster management capacity, particularly on relief and recovery phases, and narrowing the development gaps. Perhaps the last 10% of ASEAN's Community Blueprint goals will be tougher to come by. But with a statement produced by Myanmar following this retreat, it seems as though Myanmar is looking to put words into action, which is a bright sign for both the nation and the international community.

Another topic that ASEAN Foreign Ministers discussed was the priorities of ASEAN. Their discussions were centered on the development of ASEAN Vision of Post 2015 ASEAN Community as guided by ASEAN Leaders' Statement at the 23rd ASEAN Summit. They agreed to enhance cooperation on important issues affecting the region and explored ways for ASEAN to support the Philippines' reconstruction efforts in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan. Also, with the dry season approaching, Ministers were urged to take steps to tackle the issue of trans boundary haze pollution to protect the health and welfare of their peoples.

The retreat saw some productivity, even the emergence of Myanmar externally, before the international community's eyes, and internally, as Myanmar's Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin vowed that during Myanmar's term of ASEAN Chairmanship, the country will take the lead to intensify efforts to develop small and medium enterprises (SME).

Unfortunately, there was a reported massacre of 48 Muslims in Du Chee Ya Tan village in northern Rakhline State early this month, which Myanmar vehemently denied, looking to undermine the recent progress made by Myanmar. ASEAN Muslim neighbours such as Malaysia, Indonesia and including Buddhist Thailand have been

extremely uneasy but have so far abstained from criticizing the treatments of the Rohingya by Nayphidaw. These events do not bode too well with the much-heralded theme of Myanmar's ASEAN chairmanship focusing on peaceful community building.

At the Bagan meeting, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers did not discuss the Rohingya issue knowing full well its sensitivity. Although a possible bright spot at the end of the tunnel for Myanmar could be hope. Hope that they are able to attend to this issue without jeopardizing the flow of goodwill and support from the international community in terms of foreign assistance, investment, tourism and other forms of engagement coming into the country at the moment.

With peace comes progress, and with progress comes stability. Our hope is that Myanmar can continue along its current course to a peaceful, robust community.

Reshaping Indonesia's political landscape

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For better or worse, Indonesia is scheduled for change come Indonesia's parliamentary election in April and its presidential election in July.

Around 67 million first-time voters will go to the polls this year, starting with legislative elections in April which will shape Indonesia's political landscape with their votes. This group of voters want improved living standards, an end to Indonesia's endemic corruption, equality, fair distribution of economic growth, and better paying jobs. These young people did not experience reformasi or life during the New Order period. In fact, they were only small children during the rule of Suharto's centralized, authoritarian government and the chaos that followed his ouster in 1998. These voters never had to struggle for democracy and freedom. They will most likely be chasing after their own dreams. In fact, a statistic that could add to this is the rate of urbanization which has also increased. The 2010 national census found that 120 million people or 49 percent of Indonesians live in cities and this number will continue to grow with the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) estimating Indonesia will reach a 68 percent urbanization rate by 2025, thus showing that mainly young people are leaving their villages and living in cities to seek a better life.

The big watchword for the upcoming Indonesian legislative and presidential elections in 2014 is *golput*. *Golput* represents a form of protest vote against the current political establishment that eligible voters choose to abstain from voting. Since 2004, the rate of *golput* has been rising from around 26-28 percent previously to an estimated 30 percent and beyond this year. A statistical figure that can help further explain this phenomenon is based on a study on whether Indonesians believe in politics and an astounding 50 percent do not believe in politics! It is also said that close to 40 percent of the Indonesian electorate for the 2014 elections will consist of first and second-time voters which percentage of voters who intend to do a *golput* is highest among the voting group. The growth of *golput* is best attributed to rampant corruption within the political establishment and a perception of paying lip service to the interests of the electorate.

Both major issues of first-time voters and *golput* have the potential to be addressed if the leader of PDI-P, Megawati chooses to nominate Indonesia's most popular politician, Mr Joko Widodo or known by his nickname as 'Jokowi', Jakarta's governor to represent PDI-P as a presidential candidate. He is known to the public, especially the youth as an action oriented politician, a problem solver, who helped develop Jakarta into the megacity of over 20 million it is today. Apparently, a poll which was released this month showed that Jokowi's approval rating was at nearly 33 percent. Prabowo Subianto, came second with 11 percent and Megawati only got six percent. This recent poll is representative of the support he receives from the youth. Jokowi taking serious action to resolve issues troubling his people is displayed clearly as he announced 4 Transparency Programs under his administration in May 2013 aimed at upholding the principles of transparency. His administration planed to cooperate with the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK), to print copies of the regional budget (APBD) in sub-districts and villages, to implement Transjakarta electronic ticketing to keep a controlled record, and create efficiency and accuracy in calculating the ticket sales income, and to finally, implement an online taxation system, aimed to maximize tax revenue as well as monitor tax transactions. It is also reported that Jokowi has every deal made by his administration streamed live to the public. There is without a doubt that he is the man to beat in this coming presidential election.

On April 9, Indonesians will vote for their legislators at the national, provincial, and district levels. Having covered first-time voters (youth), *golput* and Jokowi, the final force influencing Indonesia's politics could be the decentralization of power from Jakarta to 33 of Indonesia's 34 provinces. Indonesia's newest province, North Kalimantan, will not be represented until 2019. With in this mind, politicians are having greater focus on their individual provinces rather than tackling national politics head on. This will be the issue of greatest concern for international bodies if one would have to deal with 33 Indonesias.