

# ASEAN NEWSLETTER

*Prepared for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea by  
the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia*

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## ASEAN News Updates

### **ASEAN and China Review the Progress of Cooperation**

(March 25, 2014)

The 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASEAN-China Joint Cooperation Committee (ACJCC) was held at the ASEAN Secretariat. The Meeting reviewed the progress of ASEAN-China cooperation in the past year, particularly the implementation of the ASEAN-China Plan of Action 2011-2015, follow-up actions on the decisions and proposals made by the Leaders at the 16<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-China Summit. The intergovernmental organisation representing ASEAN and China sought to further opportunities such as promoting education, improving relations and cooperation between China and Southeast Asian nations, especially Indonesia. ASEAN and China have set a program called “Double 100,000 Students Plan.” Currently, there are 70,000 ASEAN students in China and 110,000 Chinese students in ASEAN countries and China promised to offer ASEAN members 15,000 government scholarships in the next three to five years, according to China Daily. Ma Mingqiang, the secretary general of the Beijing-based ASEAN-China center, told the Jakarta Globe: “Last year, we held the China-Indonesia Vocational College Cooperation seminar in Jakarta, sent delegations representing 11 vocational colleges from China and they met and discussed with around 50 Indonesian vocational colleges and high school counterparts.” On top of which he mentioned that Education is an important foundation for communication, investment and understanding and is necessary for Chinese and ASEAN students in order for them to get to know and understand each other better. (Source: JakartaPost)

### **Civil Society Forum in Myanmar to Advance ASEAN Solidarity**

(March 23, 2014)

The annual ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples’ Forum (ACSC/APF) took place from the 21-23 March in Yangon, Myanmar and saw a record breaking 3,000-plus participants. Based on the theme “Advancing Peoples’ Solidarity toward sustainable peace, development, justice and democratization”, the meeting brought together civil society organisations from all ASEAN Member States and Timor Leste as well as International Non-governmental organisations. The purpose of the ACSC/APF was underlined as a space for the people of ASEAN to network and build their solidarity, as well as engage with the ASEAN governments on issues impacting peoples’ lives. U Tin Oo, Patron of the National League for Democracy, representing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, highlighted that Myanmar urgently needed development that is centred on people to ensure the progress of the youth to secure the future of the region. The Forum featured four Plenary Sessions and 35 parallel Workshops covering the topics of peace, justice and human rights, development and democratization. (Source: ASEAN Secretariat)

### **ASEAN launches “One Village One Product” Guidelines**

(March 13, 2014)

The “ASEAN Guidelines on Improvement of Rural Living Condition Through One Village One Product (OVOP) Movement” was launched at the end of an ASEAN Workshop in Yogyakarta. The OVOP Movement started at Oita prefecture of Japan in 1979 and became one of the successful regional economic programmes due to its approaches in transforming local products into competitive products in local, national, as well as global markets. This movement has been proven as an effective tool in improving the welfare of rural people, village economic dynamism, local income, and social solidarity by creating unique and value-added products. The overwhelming success of Oita’s OVOP movement has motivated several ASEAN Member States (AMS) to adopt it into their own models, under different names, for instance, Satu Kampung Satu Produk (Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia), One Village One Product, Balik Desa (Indonesia) and One Tambon One

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Product (Cambodia and Thailand). ASEAN Member States, with assistance from Japan, decided to develop an ASEAN's OVOP guideline for the local and central governments to adopt and adjust to their respective social and economic landscape, government administrative structure and support, and the development phase of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) in their countries. (Source: ASEAN Secretariat)

### **ASEAN Virtual Learning Resources Centre**

(March 12, 2014)

A cross-sectoral meeting virtual learning was held in Jakarta as a response to the call of the 22<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Summit on promoting ASEAN awareness and communicating ASEAN efforts to relevant sectors, people and stakeholders about the benefits of regional integration. About 50 delegates, including representatives from different sectors and coordinating bodies in ASEAN and technical experts attended the meeting. Participants agreed that the ASEAN Virtual Learning Resources Centre should be an extensive database providing a common platform to gather information on the ASEAN Member States, or ASEAN as a Community. "It will be an innovative and creative platform to give the public more information on what is going on in ASEAN, tell them how they can benefit from ASEAN, ask them to share what they have learned from the ASEAN integration, and encourage them to contribute to ASEAN community building process," said Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, H.E. Alicia dela Rosa Bala. (Source: HighBeam Research)

## **The MH370 Saga, ASEAN And Challenge of Crisis Cooperation**

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### **The MH370 Mystery**

For more than two weeks, the disappearance of flight MH370 baffled everyone. Did the 8 March Beijing bound Boeing 777 jetliner from Kuala Lumpur explode and crash due to an accident or was it hijacked? What was known was that the jetliner changed course following its last communications with Kuala Lumpur's Air Traffic Controllers and flew back westwards. On 24 March, the Malaysian Prime Minister announced that British satellite data has confirmed that the jetliner crashed in the southern Indian Ocean with no chance of any survivors. Many questions have continued to be asked: why was the jetliner's communication systems and transponder turned off and by whom? Why did the plane turned around, flew westwards and then southwards? Earlier satellite data also revealed that the plane continued flying for some seven hours after its last communications. After more than two weeks of guessing, the plane is believed to have crashed, probably due to fuel shortage, or deliberately crashed into the ocean's depth. Until the black box is not found, the big question of what caused the plane to veer from its course, who was in control of the plane and why did it fly into the depths of the Indian Ocean will remain largely unanswered. If there was foul play, which can be largely assumed, who was involved and why? In all this, where was ASEAN?

### **International Search and Rescue (SAR) Collaboration**

Nearly 30 countries have joined forces in the search for the plane but to no avail despite earlier reports of oil slicks and debris that could have come from the plane, be it in the South China Sea or Southern Indian Ocean. The world's best aerospace and maritime technological nations have been deployed, including the US, China, France, India and Australia but with no results. This is an incident that could have happened to anyone and the fear is being exponentially intensified as there are still no answers as to what actually happened, why the plane changed course and the whereabouts of the plane and its 239 passengers and crew.

### **ASEAN's Efforts**

Once the MH370 crisis surfaced, almost every ASEAN member directly involved in the flight zone was mobilized, primarily Vietnam, where MH370 was supposed to have entered its air space but did not. China, ASEAN's dialogue partner, which was also the jetliner's destination and which carried 152 Chinese passengers, also mobilized its resources to search for the plane. Other than Malaysia and Vietnam, the other ASEAN members involved were Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines.

### **ASEAN's SAR Commitments**

Due to the maritime nature of the ASEAN region and the possibilities of aviation distress, ASEAN member states have committed themselves to undertake various measures to mitigate any maritime or aviation disaster in the region. An example of this was the ASEAN Declaration on Cooperation in Search and Rescue of Persons and Vessels in Distress at Sea in Hanoi on 27 October 2010 by ASEAN's foreign ministers.

Here, ASEAN members agreed to designate relevant authorities as Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) to ensure timely assistance to persons and vessels in distress at sea; establish direct communication channels between these RCCs in order to share updated information and assist in search and rescue operations; promptly extend support upon the request of the RCC by providing search and rescue facilities as appropriate as capacities allowed for operations at sea; intensify cooperation in capacity building of ASEAN Member States in dealing with search and rescue operations at sea; promote cooperation and information sharing between ASEAN and Dialogue Partners and relevant maritime international organizations in order to strengthen ASEAN's capabilities to assist persons and vessels in distress at sea; strengthen and where necessary develop coordinated regional approaches, and create or upgrade regional policies, operational mechanisms, plans and communication systems to prepare for and ensure rapid and effective response to distress situations; and task the ASEAN Secretariat to prepare a directory of all RCCs or similar agencies for dissemination to all ASEAN Member States.

The ASEAN 2010 SAR Declaration was built on earlier commitments by member states to enhance SAR cooperation. In April 1972, the then five-member ASEAN states and the International Civil Aviation Organization signed an Agreement for the Facilitation of Search for Aircrafts in Distress and Rescue of Survivors of Aircraft Accidents. ASEAN members also committed themselves to the 1975 Agreement for the

Facilitation of Search of Ships in Distress and Rescue of Survivors of Ship Accidents. In 2006, ASEAN member-states carried out a three-day SAR exercise.

In June 2012, Indonesia organized the International SAR Forum where it proposed the setting up of an ASEAN SAR. Among others, in addition to reviewing ASEAN's commitment to the 1972 and 1975 international SAR agreements, it pushed for the establishment of a regional SAR capability by building on existing mechanisms and the establishment of a more regularized ASEAN SAR forum. This was to be organized through the existing ASEAN-level Air Transport Working Group and the Maritime Transport Working Group. In July 2013, as part of the ASEAN-China cooperation, especially with regard to the Guiding Principles for the Implementing the Declaration of Parties in the South China Sea, the SAR component, especially the rescue of persons and vessels, was highlighted.

### **Real Crisis Cooperation Still Lacking**

While ASEAN is not short of commitments on SAR, the MH370 saga has shown that much more can and needs to be done. Still, ASEAN member-states should be credited for having come forward to assist Malaysia, through statements and deployments of various military and civilian assets, as a show of solidarity of the regional organization. There was cooperation even in the South China Sea region, where the ownership of its waters and resources, have remain in contest, not just among ASEAN members but also with China.

ASEAN's cooperation and commitments to SAR were, however, more to fight 'the last war' rather than the 'next one'. As was evident from the various ASEAN's SAR commitments, they had more to do with sharing of information and the promise of intensifying cooperation rather than undertaking any joint operations. It was also more focused on 'sea distress' rather than being aviation-oriented. In a way, this was not unexpected as ASEAN members were trying to ameliorate their cooperation and build up their capacity in an area where they had been facing problems and crisis, namely, the maritime zone.

And even if it was aviation-related, ASEAN's SAR was more on the conventional mode. It was to assist in locating survivors, recovering victims and the wreckage of a plane in a known location. The disappearance of MH370 made all these assumptions irrelevant.

Hence, when an aviation-related crisis surfaced through MH370, ASEAN as an organization was caught flat-footed. It was not familiar with crisis cooperation in an area that was largely novel and unprecedented. ASEAN member-states were expecting Malaysia to take the lead even though the area of operation was largely outside Malaysian territorial sovereignty. As the location of the plane was unknown and there was not even an iota of the plane's wreckage anywhere, what SAR was there to undertake?

It was, as stated by Hishamuddin, Malaysia's Defence and Acting Transport Minister, searching for a needle in the ocean, and where Malaysia and in fact all ASEAN states, did not have the technology for the SAR's challenges that were thrown up by MH370. Not just that, even the world's leading technological nations could not come up with answers as far as MH370 was concerned, demonstrating the Herculean challenge the jetliner's disappearance had caused.

ASEAN members were also not also familiar and used to cooperation in the aviation arena. Hence, even though Thailand's military radar were believed to have spotted what appeared to be the silent, communication-less MH370, this information was never communicated to Malaysia on grounds that 'Malaysia did not request for it'. This showed the very serious sorry state of affairs of ASEAN crisis cooperation.

While the Thais might have wanted to hide the capabilities and sophistication of their military radar's surveillance capacity (often referred to as the 'Ultra Syndrome'), yet in a crisis of this mammoth proportion, national security rather than regional cooperation took precedence. Then again, if Malaysian authorities, military and civilians, did not request or alert their ASEAN counterparts for assistance of MH370's whereabouts, they should also be faulted.

### **Still, Malaysia and ASEAN did Well**

Against so many odds, with so many unanswered questions and under the telescope of the international community, Malaysia, under the leadership of Prime Minister Najib and the acting Transport Minister, Hishamuddin, did very well. Under daily pressure, especially from family members of the passengers and crew, and particularly from the PRC, Malaysia demonstrated calmness, understanding and did and said the right things. While it is never possible to please everyone, from the crisis management perspective, despite the

ongoing tragedy, Malaysia definitely did well. Malaysia's handling of the crisis will become a laboratory for others to manage future crises of this nature.

Similarly, despite criticisms being levelled at ASEAN, by standing supporting Malaysia in times of need, Malaysia's neighbours also did much, especially Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia. ASEAN could not do more as the plane only transited through Malaysian and Thai airspace for a few crucial hours and for all intents and purposes, not much more could be expected from ASEAN in such a circumstance.

Singapore's Foreign Minister, K Shanmugam, praised Malaysia for its handling the crisis. He also dismissed criticisms against Malaysia as unfair and unwarranted. According to him, "I don't think enough account has been taken of the fact that there was very little to go on, very little that the Malaysians or anyone knew of the matter". Similarly, on ASEAN's cooperation, Shanmugam noted that "there was no lack of will" and the individual countries resources determined the level of cooperation in the crisis.

### **Conclusion**

Whenever the actual whereabouts of MH370 is found, one major fallout of the tragedy is definitely a wakeup call for ASEAN SAR, especially in crisis communication, management and cooperation. MH370 has clearly demonstrated that while ASEAN member-states have been relatively busy in talking about SAR, in reality, it is one of the weakest links in its cooperation node. ASEAN members have much to learn and do as far as enhancing their SAR capabilities and equally important, in anticipating future challenges rather than conventional ones.

While having humanitarian commitments and capabilities to search and rescue distressed vessels and aircrafts are important, equally important is the need to undertake regular joint exercises in the waters and air spaces of Southeast Asia, and beyond to prepare for future MH370s, which might be even more challenging. While capacity building through training and assets' acquisition would constitute one aspect of this preparation, equally important would be to think through new threats, be they emanating from within or without the vessels or aircrafts. While a major tragedy, if the right lessons are learnt, for all the anxiety and pain, there is at least some silver lining from MH370 in the future.

## Can ASEAN Really Be People-Centred?

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The Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Wisma Putra), in conjunction with Universiti Teknologi MARA and the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, recently organised a two-and-a-half day forum to brainstorm Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2015. Plenary and parallel sessions covered all three pillars of ASEAN Community, with a half-day devoted to discussion of proposals.

In his address to the Forum, Prime Minister Dato' Seri Najib Tun Razak, stressed that the eyes of the world would be on ASEAN and Malaysia, especially with respect to any declaration on ASEAN Community. While lauding ASEAN's achievements (as is standard practice), he emphasised that the overarching theme of a People-Centred ASEAN meant that the more ways had to be found to focus the benefits of ASEAN on its peoples and to directly involve all sectors of society. In his words, "we have built the house, now we have to make it a home". He gave, as an example, Thailand's declaration of universal healthcare in the post-Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration period.

People-centredness is, of course, very much in keeping with the sentiment of the times. By most accounts, trust and confidence levels in politicians and governments worldwide are at a low, while suspicions about their elitist and self-serving ways are, by most global opinion surveys, at a high. Low economic growth, high rates of unemployment and slow income increases for the working class have not helped endeared people to their governments. By catching this zeitgeist, ASEAN's leaders have shown themselves to be sensitive to these perceptions.

Turning ASEAN from the organisation that it is, to one that is functional, however, is going to be easier said than done. In the first place, public awareness of ASEAN is not high. As Prime Minister Najib himself admitted, only 34 per cent of Malaysians know something about ASEAN. (This compares with 96 per cent of Laotians, which is a much smaller country.) Awareness levels may be higher in other ASEAN Member States but again mostly at a superficial level. Malaysia has been attempting to counter this with more aggressive public outreach work in the run-up to its taking on the ASEAN Chair.

More challenging still are ASEAN's work programmes, which must not only widen in scope but be made more concrete operationally. Highly specific, realisable and time-bound outcomes are not things that ASEAN does particularly well. Projects in transportation and education, for example, have a tendency to have inordinately long gestation periods. Others seem to be prone to half-measures and be lacking in genuine sincerity. Mutual recognition agreements (MRAs), for instance, have been signed in some areas but formidable barriers to commercial presence (such as licensing, for example) continue to dog implementation.

As in many things, national interests often have an overriding role to play in leading to these outcomes. Incrementalism is fine if it ensures that all countries feel comfortable and are able to 'buy-in' but the fact of the matter is that many efforts end up as dead-ends, leading to questions being asked about their sincerity. Countries that want to move faster and deeper often have no recourse but to undertake such efforts with different configurations of countries, including those not within ASEAN. (The Trans-Pacific Partnership is one such example.) Rising nationalist sentiments in many member states paradoxically thwart rather than promote ASEAN's goal of being more people centred.

One of the ways that Malaysia is keen to move ASEAN's people-centred agenda forward is in the area of good governance and the environment. Good governance is a general rubric that encompasses many aspects but one that the country would be keen to focus on is that of economic development and poverty reduction. This is given the recognition that has been accorded to the country in these two areas. Another aspect is that of managing inter-communal conflicts. Such conflicts, such as the Rohingya problem in Myanmar, are black marks against ASEAN and Malaysia believes that it can contribute, as it has in the Southern Philippines and is trying to do in Southern Thailand.

ASEAN's paranoia of external interference, however, remains undimmed and thus make these more statements of broad intent rather than committed goals. This is irrespective of the fact that the People's Republic of China's influence is pervasive in many parts of the region but this is not seen as comprising national sovereignty.

Indeed, the attention of super-powers, to counteract China, may even be actively courted by some ASEAN Member States embroiled in territorial disputes but this is not regarded as interference.

These ironies and conundrums, of course, are lost on many, if not the majority, of ASEAN peoples. In many cases, the rising tide of nationalism, abetted by politicians seeking re-election or diversion, may be clear evidence of the public's support for the view that non-interference is essential. This not only shades regionalism as a whole but may also shape the concept of ASEAN's 'people-centredness'.

How should Malaysia then proceed in its bid? Should people-centredness be taken as a lost cause? The answer appears to yes and no. Yes, many of the ASEAN's challenges in doing so are in common with those stifling deeper regionalism. No, continually chipping away at the 'givens' in ASEAN have had some effect and may continue to do so. Measures to strengthen regional identity through socialisation can change the realities on the ground in a way that changing the atmospherics may not be able to.



### **Note on the Inaugural ASEAN-US Defense Ministers Meeting**

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United States Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel hosted a ministerial meeting with his 10 ASEAN counterparts in Hawaii from April 1, 2014 to April 3, 2014. It was the first time the United States had hosted such a ministerial meeting on its own soil, and it came at a time when it is trying to build the partnerships necessary for its Asia rebalancing strategy. Prior to this event, the United States participated in the ADMM-Plus (made up of the 10 ASEAN defense ministers and those of the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, India, New Zealand and Russia).

At this inaugural ADMM-Plus US, ministers agreed on five areas of practical cooperation: maritime security, counter-terrorism, disaster management, peacekeeping operations and military medicine. The meeting gave the Obama administration the opportunity to go beyond commonly discussed global threats like terrorism and state-on-state conflict and give its view of the particular security challenges facing Southeast Asia, .

The meeting deliberated on non-traditional security matters and participants visited the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's tsunami-threat and detection facility. Secretary Hagel also focused on one of its top priorities: climate change. In a blog post on the White House website describing the meeting, influential Obama adviser John Podesta wrote that ASEAN members are among those “expected to face some of the worst effects of climate change.” He stressed that the US and partner nations needed to “identify how our militaries can work together more effectively to tackle non-traditional security challenges, including climate change and natural disasters.”

Linking the meeting in Hawaii to language in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review, Podesta wrote that “climate change is not just an environmental problem; it’s an economic and security problem as well.” Quoting from the recent report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that the Asia Pacific falls victim to more than 70 per cent of all recorded natural disasters, US International Aid administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah concluded that it was necessary for governments to collaborate and work together to mitigate the impact of typhoons, flooding and other extreme weather events.

Natural disasters and climate change are long-term problems with no simple one-time fixes. They are also traditionally 'safe harbour issues, ones that do not generate too much controversy, at least insofar as defense ministers are concerned. The absence of focus on the behaviour of specific countries also means that discussions can be conducted in a non-confrontational manner. This would no doubt explain why there is duplication on these matters within ASEAN.

At the same time, the ASEAN-US defense ministers meeting served to highlight the US military's capabilities and technology, two things that would no doubt underscore what ASEAN already knows and that is the importance of having the US as a friend and ally. On April 2, ASEAN defense ministers toured Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam where they were shown B-52 and B2 bombers and F-22 fighters. The defense ministers also paid a visit to the USS Anchorage (LPD 23), an amphibious transport dock. The USS Anchorage houses an advanced command and control center. It is capable of embarking land craft air cushion and amphibious assault vehicles as well as the MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft. All together, the USS Anchorage is capable of conducting ship-to-shore missions ranging from combat to delivering humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

As is to be expected, the territorial disputes in the South China Sea were a major topic of interest. It was revealed later that Secretary Hagel and the Defense Ministers had only touched on the issue during the formal segment of their meeting and continued further during an informal session on regional security issues. The need to convene an informal session clearly demonstrates yet again the sensitivities of some ASEAN countries to unnecessarily antagonising China by conducting discussions on the issue within the Plus One format. Placing the issue front-and-centre of the meeting would have been more likely to provoke a strong response from the super-power.

Even then, the South China Sea disputes were only one of the topics discussed albeit the one with the closest and most direct relevance to ASEAN. Other matters up for discussion were Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the role of NATO in bringing European nations together to deal with the Crimean Crisis and U.S. fiscal restraints. It



is not known what ASEAN defense ministers' position on the former matter were but going by later attempts to include it in a ministerial state clearly showed that most were concerned by it.

All in all, the exploratory inaugural ASEAN-US Defense Ministers Meeting appeared to be carried off without incident, setting the stage for the institutionalisation of further meetings. It helped boost confidence that such meetings could be held without negative fallout. Many ASEAN countries would unquestionably want this given their strategic security perspectives and the opportunity to be given quality face time by the US. Still, the possible implications and reactions of this on China, and the need for high comfort levels among ASEAN participants themselves, however, did not seem to go astray. When Secretary Hagel was asked at a press conference if he had any plans to make the U.S.-ASEAN Defense Forum an annual event, he diplomatically replied, "That's not my decision, that is the ASEAN ministers' decision."