

ASEAN NEWSLETTER

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ASEAN News Updates

ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly

(September 30, 2013)

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting with the United Nations Secretary-General and the President of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, or the ASEAN-UN Ministerial Meeting (AUMM), was held on 26 September 2013 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Meeting was chaired by His Royal Highness Prince Mohamed Bolkiah, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam. H.E. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations; H.E. John Ashe, President of the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly. Other ASEAN Foreign Ministers and their representatives, as well as the Secretary-General of ASEAN were also in attendance. (Source: ASEAN Secretariat)

China, ASEAN must end island disputes 'swiftly' – Kerry

(September 28, 2013)

US Secretary of State John Kerry on Friday, September 27, urged China and its Asian neighbors to resolve territorial disputes over the South China Sea as swiftly as possible.

"Your region is home to the world's busiest ports and the most critical sea lanes. So stability where you live matters deeply to prosperity where we live," Kerry told a meeting with ASEAN foreign ministers in New York. "That's one of the reasons why the United States is so committed to maritime security, to the freedom of navigation on the seas, and to resolving the disputes with respect to territory and achieving a code of conduct," he said. (Source: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE)

Malaysia hosts 35th ASEAN Ministerial meeting on Agriculture and Forestry

(September 24, 2013)

Malaysia hosts the 35th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) discussing cooperation in food supplies security among ASEAN countries. Secretary General at the Malaysian Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry, Mohamad Hashim bin Abdullah, said that the meeting, will discuss the emergency rice reserve and food security information system. AMAF's 35th meeting is held consecutively with the 13th Meeting of ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministers of Agriculture of The People's Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (13th AMAF Plus Three).

(Source: Kuwait News Agency)

9th AMMTC Committed to Combating Transnational Crime

(September 20, 2013)

ASEAN Ministers in charge of transnational crime have reached a consensus in Vientiane to enhance cooperation on anti-transnational crime, a problem that challenges and threatens peace, safety, and security in the ASEAN region. Following four days of discussion in Vientiane the 9th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (9th AMMTC) declared a joint statement which emphasized their cooperation on combating transnational crime under ASEAN and ASEAN plus three frameworks. (Source: Brunei Direct)

ASEAN, China launch official consultations on Code of Conduct in South China Sea

(September 17, 2013)

Senior officials of ASEAN Member States and China agreed to continue official consultations on the Code of Conduct (COC) on a regular basis, and to submit regular reports to Foreign Ministers. This was agreed during the 6th Senior Officials Meeting and 9th Joint Working Group on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) of Parties in the South China Sea in Suzhou, China. A Joint Working Group (JWG) was tasked to hold in-depth discussions on all aspects of the COC, including consideration of expert services that would support the work of official consultations. They also agreed that Senior Officials and the JWG shall hold more frequent meetings on the COC. (Source: Philippine Information Agency)

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The Indonesia-ASEAN nexus in Australian Engagement: Benefits and Constraints

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In 1974, Australia became the first dialogue partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This built on an extensive history of bilateral engagement and aid, such as Australia's Colombo Plan. Today, ASEAN is a critical trading partner for Australia. In 2012, total merchandise trade reached A\$71.1 billion – second only to China (A\$117.7 billion). For ASEAN, Australia became its seventh largest trading partner by 2011 and an important source of raw materials including crude petroleum, wheat, gold, and copper.¹ Further, the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA) entered into force on 1 January 2010, covering a combined economy of US\$4 trillion and 642.8 million people.² In recent years, Australia's trade with ASEAN has in fact been growing faster than that with China and this trend will lead to greater trade diversification and economic stability.

In line with the 2007 Joint Declaration on the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Partnership, Australia has also been cooperating with ASEAN in programs for development, education, and security. Two of ASEAN's institutions for exogenous engagement, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit, also provide an important platform through which Australia can pursue its interests whilst also contributing to the regional affairs of the broader Indo-Pacific. Through these forums, Australia has been participating in discussions and in cooperation on matters such as nuclear non-proliferation, maritime security, transnational crime, disaster relief, and counter terrorism. While Australia also enjoys long-established security partnerships with countries such as Malaysia and Singapore (e.g. via the Five Power Defence Arrangement), the level of security cooperation with Indonesia has proliferated in recent years.

Several developments, including the October 2003 Bali Bombings, demonstrated to Indonesia and Australia the mutual interdependence and trans-territorial nature of a range of security issues.³ Thus, anti-terrorist cooperation between Indonesia's Special Forces (Detachment 88 within Kopassus) and Australia's Special Forces (Special Air Service) was established and there are now wide-ranging partnerships between the two countries, including intelligence, transport and border security, criminal justice and law enforcement. With Australian assistance, since 2002, there have been more than 600 terrorist-related convictions. Further, the joint establishment of the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation has resulted in the professional training of 12,900 officials from 59 countries.⁴ Cooperation has also been enhanced in the military sphere including coordinated maritime patrols, a May 2013 bilateral peacekeeping exercise, and the strengthening of search and rescue cooperation. For Australia, the continued development of close relations with Indonesia will be critical, not only because of the close proximity of the two countries, but also because of Indonesia's role in ASEAN -- as its 'natural born leader' or the 'first among equals.' In this context, a crucial but often underestimated milestone was the collapse of Suharto's 'New Order' regime and Indonesia's subsequent embrace of democratic reforms (*reformasi*). The rising consolidation of democratic values among the leadership and bureaucracy has also affected Jakarta's foreign policy interests. Today, Indonesia and Australia are likeminded partners in many regional and global affairs, including the maintenance of a more stable regional order; the promotion and protection of human rights; and environmental activism on issues such as climate change. Not only can Indonesia help Australia in the pursuit of common interests with its ASEAN partners, but the rising stature of Indonesia means that the two countries can also project a powerful and collective diplomatic voice in the EAS and ARF as well as institutions such as the G20 and the United Nations.

While Indonesia, ASEAN, and the Indo-Pacific may be ripe for engagement with Australia, a key limitation is the capacity of Australia to engage the region effectively. Despite the rhetoric of the Asian Century White Paper, the reality is that education in the areas of both Asian studies and Asian languages has been in decline following cuts to the tertiary sector from 1996 and the early termination of the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program in 2002. For example, current trends indicate that the study of Bahasa Indonesia in

¹ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, located at www.dfat.gov.au.

² 'ASEAN-Australia, New Zealand Free Trade Agreement', *Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, www.dfat.gov.au/fta/aanzfta.

³ While terrorist acts are largely the outcome of socio-economic issues, their economic and security consequences render the act, in some ways, more of a traditional security concern.

⁴ 2013b. *Indonesia Country Brief* [Online]. Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Available: http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/indonesia/indonesia_brief.html [Accessed 6 July 2013].

high school could end within five years.⁵ At the tertiary level, less than 1,100 students were studying Bahasa Indonesia in 2010 and six universities had closed their Indonesian language courses since 2004.⁶

Rectifying the lost capacity in the study of Asia and its languages will require a significant reinvestment. In the interim, Australian engagement will be curtailed by a lack of knowledge and misperceptions, as depicted by a recent survey commissioned by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2013). Among other things, this survey indicated that 53% of Australians believe that Indonesia is not a democracy, 70% think that Bali is not part of Indonesia, and 72% believe that Indonesian law-making is based on 'Islamic Codes.'⁷ In a separate Lowy Institute survey (2013), 54% even indicated that 'Australia is right to worry about Indonesia as a military threat' – nothing could be further from the truth.⁸ One only needs to examine the discourse of Australian politicians as they pander to their domestic constituencies to see how critical it will be to develop a more 'Asia literate' Australia in the future. Thus, a senior defence official also stated that Australian public perceptions are already constraining further improvements to the defence relationship with Indonesia.

Despite some socio-cultural challenges, the relationship between Indonesia and Australia is stronger than ever before. This strength is reinforced by an interdependent mix of common values and interests. Such commonality is broadening the issue areas of bilateral engagement as well as of collective diplomacy in multilateral fora. As this relationship may face some new challenges following Indonesia's Presidential elections in 2014, Australian politicians will need to exercise greater restraint in their foreign policy discourse and, as far as is feasible, practice a *consult first* approach with Jakarta. In the long-term, Australian engagement with the region will need to be underpinned by a very substantial multi-billion dollar investment in Asian studies and languages. Under a democratic environment, this will help depoliticize the Australian government's engagement with the region whilst also strengthening the capacity for societal engagement. This will also generate stronger business-to-business linkages that will help to secure Australia's future in the 'Asian Century'.

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⁷2013a. Australian Attitudes towards Indonesia. Canberra: Newspoll.

⁸Oliver, Alex 2013. *Australia and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*. Sydney: Lowy Institute Poll.

A Higher Stage of ASEAN-Japan Partnership

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Impressive Strides

In December this year, ASEAN leaders will gather in Tokyo for a bilateral summit to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the bilateral partnership since the bilateral forum on synthetic rubber convened in November 1973. This is to be a follow-up summit to the one held in Tokyo in 2003, commemorating the 30th anniversary of the beginning of the bilateral dialogue. The occasion in 2003 was historic, because 10 ASEAN leaders agreed to travel to Tokyo to hold a bilateral summit outside of Southeast Asia with a non-member country, for the first time in the history of ASEAN.

In the last four decades, ASEAN-Japan relations have made great strides in building a truly equal partnership for the development and integration of Southeast Asia. This will serve as a foundation of peace and prosperity for East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. During these decades, principles sustaining the bilateral relationship have evolved steadily, from economic development of individual member countries, to wider regional integration since the late 1970s, and, in the late 1990s (particularly between the initial six member countries of ASEAN, and the CLMV countries) and later, to social development, human security, and political stability in Southeast Asia.

These records of evolution are impressive, given that forty years ago, memories of Japanese military aggression were still vivid in the region as shown dramatically by the massive anti-Japan demonstrations in Bangkok and Jakarta when then Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka visited the region in January 1974. Now, although Japan's rather imperfect efforts to face up to the past are certainly not welcome in Southeast Asia, there are some indications that there is a basic trust in Japan assisting ASEAN in its community-building efforts, and a peaceful role played by the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.

The Yamamoto Project

Against these backgrounds, and amid rapidly shifting geo-political and geo-economic landscapes in East Asia, the late Tadashi Yamamoto (then president of the Japan Center for International Exchange, or JCIE) and Surin Pitsuwan (then secretary-general of ASEAN) agreed on the necessity of starting new bilateral initiatives at the Track 2 level. Thus, a study project on a strategic partnership between ASEAN and Japan, named the "ASEAN-Japan Yamamoto Study Project," in honor of the late Tadashi Yamamoto, was established in mid-2012, with financial support from the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF) in the ASEAN Secretariat. The project aims to study the role and contributions of the ASEAN-Japan partnership in promoting regional community-building in Southeast Asia in the first phase (2012-13), and in East Asia as a whole, as well as in global governance in the second phase (2013-14).

As articulated in the policy recommendation report resulting from the first phase of the Yamamoto project, titled "BEYOND 2015: ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership for Democracy, Peace, and Prosperity in Southeast Asia,"⁹ the basic principles guiding the strategic partnership in the years ahead would be democratic, people-centered and rules-based ones. Admittedly, these assumptions are in line with the global trend of democratization, and the increasing importance of human rights as well as the rule of law.

Partnership beyond Southeast Asia

Thus, the significance of the ASEAN-Japan partnership in the coming decades is clear: it should be relevant beyond the Southeast Asia region, and should serve as a guidepost to indicate where regional and global orders should go amid new geo-political and geo-economic uncertainties.

As the ongoing quagmire in major-power relations over the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime in Syria indicates, the dominant leadership role of the United States is in eclipse. In an evolving new configuration of balance among major powers, the roles of China and Russia are becoming more important. Not only is the future of major-power relations precarious, but it is certainly beyond the control of any single

⁹http://www.jcie.org/japan/j/pdf/pub/publst/1450/1st_phase_ASEAN_JPN_recommendations_E.pdf

country, let alone ASEAN and Japan.

At such a time of fluidity, ASEAN and Japan should sit quietly, and not avert their minds and attention from the universal trends of globalization, democratization, integration, and the spreading norms of human rights and rule of law. Building a regional order rooted in these values is nothing but a survival strategy on our part during this uncertain period of transition. Big powers may be able to interrupt our efforts if they so decide, but as interference would certainly involve cost, naturally, the stronger our strategic partnership is, the higher would be the cost of interrupting it.

As the concluding sentence of the policy recommendations of the Yamamoto project says, “At this critical juncture of the 40th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan cooperation, the responsibility to implement is greater than ever.”

Keeping things NEAT

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The Network of East Asian Think Tanks remains a vital body for regional renewal, despite some murmurs to the contrary.

When things are generally running smoothly, it is easy to grow complacent and take things for granted.

This is as common a response to weighty regional matters as it is to local and global issues. Asean is a case in point.

When the Association of South-East Asian Nations was established in 1967, none of the five founding countries had any doubt about its merits.

Since then, situations like Cambodia's horrific civil war provided vivid reminders of Asean's importance. But periods of placid relations tend to lull observers into a false sense of Asean's redundancy.

The same goes for Asean's regional initiatives like Asean plus Three (APT), which includes China, Japan and South Korea, along with the APT's projects like the Network of East Asian Think Tanks (NEAT).

NEAT's rationale is commendable: linking policy-informed think tanks in East Asia through regular dialogues, by associating such institutions in south-east Asia (Asean) with those in north-east Asia.

Occasionally, however, NEAT members may need to be reminded of their collective purpose. This happened at the ISIS-sponsored 11th NEAT annual conference in Kuala Lumpur, when an official Malaysian response was requested to underscore the case for the 13-member network.

Some NEAT members seemed to have forgotten why they were there at all. One result was a Japanese delegate asking, somewhat rhetorically, if NEAT could "open up" its membership to beyond the 13.

He questioned the "relevance" of the existing membership structure. He was repeating the exercise that earlier befell the East Asia Summit, when the original 13 members gave way to 18 with the addition of Australia, India and New Zealand and then the US and Russia.

The original aim of Asean centrality in East Asia melted and evaporated. In its place was a ballooning organization, no longer lithe but tubby and putting on more weight, heading the way of Apec.

For added effect, the Japanese delegate, a former diplomat, asked if NEAT members were "confident enough" to admit larger and more powerful countries as members to work alongside with.

The unrehearsed response was impressive in favour of preserving NEAT as it is, which is, as it was intended to be. Vietnamese, Cambodian and Myanmar delegates said the original structure of NEAT should remain. A young Korean delegate gave a brief historical account in favour of keeping NEAT neatly packaged.

A Malaysian delegate said NEAT was a product of the 13-member APT, tasked with delivering what had been its brief in East Asia proper. Besides, the cross-fertilization of ideas between think tanks in all regions would continue in other settings and so is not a reason to tinker with NEAT.

Privately, a Thai delegate said there was no question about NEAT's continuing relevance, particularly in the APT context. A Chinese delegate said NEAT should remain as it was for the larger regional interest.

Since doubts seem to persist for some, the case for NEAT as it was originally designed may need to be remade. There are at least 20 reasons for it, beginning with what NEAT should not be.

- NEAT should not duplicate the efforts of other, larger organizations and their membership structure such as the EAS and Apec. Duplication is unnecessary and wasteful.

- NEAT should not compromise, dilute, undermine or usurp these larger organizations, or risk doing so, by replicating their membership. NEAT has its own purpose and “territory”.
- NEAT must not be captive to extraneous concerns or larger powers with different priorities, or an agenda that does not consistently place the region’s interests uppermost.
- Since NEAT is the only network of its kind at the 13-member APT level, it should not abandon East Asia by leaving this region without a policy research network of its own.
- As for what NEAT needs to be, it should continue with its dedicated membership to serve the region in ways no other institution can. The APT emerged from the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis so that projects like NEAT would provide analysis, early warning and contingency options for similar crises.
- Where regional groupings of different sizes act as concentric rings, NEAT fits between smaller groupings like Asean and larger ones such as the EAS. Absent one of these “rings,” and the jump between adjacent groupings may be too large to bridge. The rings of an onion, a nest of tables and Russian matryoshka dolls all need sequential spacing, not irregular gaps in between.
- Essential dialogue occurs within groupings as well as between groupings of countries. NEAT occupies a critical niche that no other institution does.
- NEAT also serves as a practical means of developing vital relations between China, Japan and South Korea. Asean is seen as a neutral and trustworthy partner that can help as an example, an interested stakeholder, and an impartial moderator.
- Economic integration in East Asia is developing as never before. Its consequences and implications need to be better understood, and that is the task of NEAT more than any other body. Besides, since regional economies have grown since the 1990s, the stakes are now higher. The need for both the APT and NEAT are now greater than ever before.
- As a regional policy research network, NEAT may also develop solutions to challenges unique to East Asia. If and when disaster strikes, NEAT is also best placed to know how to contain and neutralize it.
- A Korean delegate recalled how, even before the 1997 crisis, investors and speculators from outside East Asia were more aware of the region’s connectivity than East Asians. That situation needs to be reversed in the regional interest.
- China, Japan and South Korea need to engage one another meaningfully through confidence-building measures. NEAT as a Track Two (independent, government-informed) body provides just the right autonomy and heft for it.
- For Asean itself, NEAT is not only another positive achievement but an excellent instrument of consolidating Asean centrality in East Asian affairs. This is not for the greater glory of Asean but the larger interests of East Asia.
- NEAT also provides the necessary space for East Asian nations to explore and develop multifaceted engagements on all levels. This may start at the regional level but need not be confined to that.
- Asean’s presence and influence in NEAT may also encourage the best Asean qualities in North-East Asia. Such qualities as moderation and the acceptance of diversity should be good for that neighbourhood.
- Asean’s forte in constructive and activist diplomacy may also be infused in North-East Asia. The results would be good, not only for the region, but for the international community as a whole.
- Vital concerns such as the proposed Asian Monetary Fund for East Asia may be developed and refined better with a fully energized NEAT. Where the EAS is not even addressing such issues, the need for NEAT becomes that much greater.

- And where NEAT has room for improvement, logically it should be improved rather than abandoned or modified beyond any functional recognition.
- NEAT's 13 members are also more manageable than anything larger and unwieldy. For pragmatic and other reasons, there is just no substitute for NEAT.
- The question is not whether NEAT members have the confidence to include others outside the region, but whether they have the commitment, courage and cojones to do a better job amongst themselves.

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** The article has been edited
