

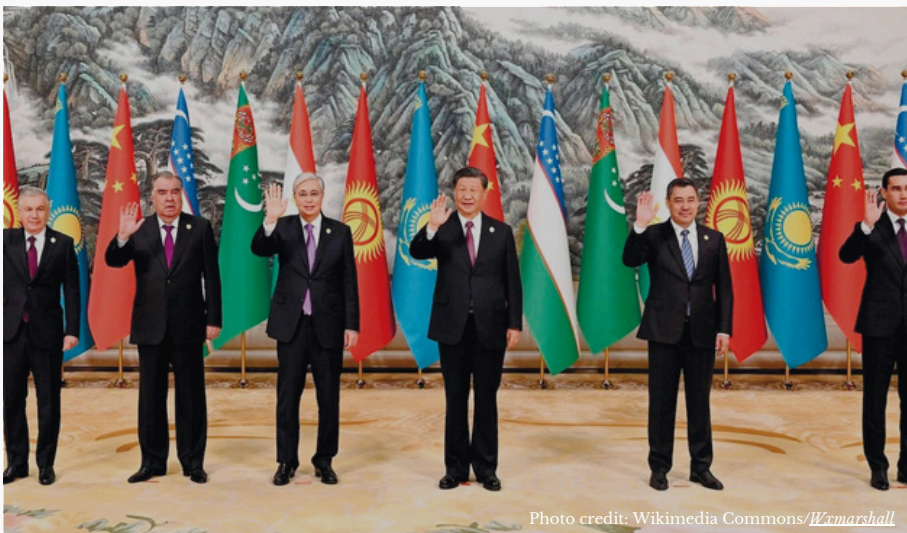
# ASEAN BULLETIN

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## GUEST COMMENTARY

# From Steppes to Seas: Is There Potential for Closer Ties between Central Asia and ASEAN?

By Zhanibek Arynov



In Central Asia, people often ask what ‘ASEAN’ is, and even International Relations scholars there generally have only limited knowledge of Southeast Asian affairs, let alone the broader public. Similarly, in Southeast Asia, the idea of ‘Central Asia’ holds little meaning for most locals. This is understandable, given the geographical distance and the near absence of historical ties between the two regions. At first glance, Central Asia and ASEAN may appear to be unlikely partners. Yet, they share more similarities than one might expect, and considerable untapped potential exists for deeper cooperation between the two regions. At the same time, expectations for such cooperation should remain realistic and focus on issue-specific areas of collaboration.

The *ASEAN Bulletin* is published quarterly by the Centre on Asia and Globalisation at the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. It seeks to bring together a key summary of current news articles, reports, events, and academic publications produced in English on the three pillars of the ASEAN Community - the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

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## Unlikely Partners?

Central Asia lies in the very heart of Eurasia and is made up of five countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The region borders Russia to the north, China to the east, and Afghanistan and Iran to the south. Although strategically located between major powers, Central Asia remains landlocked and far away from the world's main economic hubs and global value chains.

Yet, Central Asia's strategic position between China, Russia, and Europe makes it a vital transportation hub linking East-West and North-South corridors across Eurasia. The region plays a central role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), while the EU's Global Gateway also places strong emphasis on connectivity projects there. In addition, Central Asia's vast natural resources, including reserves of critical raw materials (CRMs), position it as a potentially key supplier of CRMs in an era of intensifying technological competition.

However, while events in Central Asia might initially seem remote from ASEAN's concerns, making closer cooperation between the two regions appear unlikely, the two actually share several important similarities that could provide a foundation for stronger and more meaningful collaboration.

First, both regions are caught between

major power rivalries: Russia-China dynamics in Central Asia and US-China competition in Southeast Asia create significant political and economic pressures. In response, both regions seek to diversify their external relations beyond reliance on great powers.

Second, and relatedly, amid intensifying geopolitical competition, states in both regions practice various forms of hedging. They often occupy the 'middle ground' by advocating international norms and institutions, promoting multipolarity, and working to strengthen their own autonomy and resilience.

Finally, both regions show a willingness to enhance regional cooperation within their own frameworks and to coordinate some responses to global challenges, though this remains a difficult and uneven process.

### Potential for Deeper Cooperation

Despite the currently low level of practical engagement, these shared strategic outlooks could create meaningful opportunities for closer interaction between the two regions. While a major boost in region-to-region collaboration may be difficult to envision, deeper engagement between individual states in specific issue areas remains much more feasible.

### Potential for Deeper Cooperation

Despite the currently low level of practical engagement, these shared strategic outlooks could create meaningful

opportunities for closer interaction between the two regions. While a major boost in region-to-region collaboration may be difficult to envision, deeper engagement between individual states in specific issue areas remains much more feasible.

In the economic sphere, for instance, Vietnam has emerged as one of the closest trade partners of some Central Asian states. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as members of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), have benefited from Vietnam's free trade agreement with the EAEU signed in 2015, which significantly boosted trade volumes.

Similarly, Indonesia and Singapore have been negotiating their own agreements with the EAEU, whereas Thailand and Malaysia have also expressed interest in starting a dialogue with the EAEU. There is also a separate ASEAN-EAEU dialogue, although its scope remains rather limited.

In this sense, the EAEU framework can serve as a useful vehicle for expanding trade relations between selected ASEAN members and Central Asia states.

Similarly, certain sectors of Central Asian economies could become attractive investment destinations for ASEAN countries. Opportunities are particularly strong in energy (including renewables), critical raw materials, and agriculture. Singapore, for example, has signed a services and investment treaty with Kazakhstan, which took effect on March 1, 2025, and has already invested in several

projects in the region.

Another area where deeper collaboration is both feasible and necessary is people-to-people exchange. Central Asia is one of the youngest regions in the world, and demand for high-quality education is rising every year. Several ASEAN countries with strong higher education systems could become attractive destinations for Central Asian students, especially given their favourable quality-price ratio compared to more expensive Western universities. At the same time, many Central Asian governments are investing in domestic higher education reforms, seeking partnerships with international institutions and encouraging foreign universities to establish joint programs or branch campuses. This creates a timely opportunity for ASEAN universities to expand their outreach and build long-term academic linkages with Central Asia.

Tourism is another area with strong potential for deeper cooperation. In recent years, the number of Central Asian tourists visiting Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia has been steadily increasing, leading to the opening of more direct flight connections. Conversely, Central Asia itself, with its rich cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and adventure tourism opportunities, could also become an attractive destination for travellers from ASEAN countries.

Finally, the ASEAN model of regionalism itself can serve as an attractive reference point for Central Asia. Once divided by serious internal disagreements and conflicts, Central Asia has, in the past decade, shown a positive trend toward strengthening intra-regional cooperation and finding joint solutions to longstanding challenges. Nonetheless, the region still faces the task of upgrading internal connectivity, institutionalising cooperation, and enhancing its agency as a well-organised regional actor. In this respect, the ASEAN model offers valuable lessons for Central Asia. Formal experience-sharing between the two regions could provide a new avenue for dialogue, with potential spillover effects into other areas of cooperation.

### Existing Challenges and A Way Forward

It is also important to recognise the existing challenges and constraints. The biggest barrier to closer trade relations remains logistical: the vast distance between the two regions cannot be overcome without major investment in both hard and soft connectivity infrastructure. Still, some opportunities are emerging through China's Belt and Road Initiative. Kazakhstan, for instance, has been using the Lianyungang terminal in China, its first gateway to the Pacific Ocean. In 2024, the country also opened a major terminal in Xi'an, which further boosted container traffic from China to Kazakhstan. These logistical hubs are designed to help Kazakhstan diversify its

trade beyond China, extending to Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN countries. In September 2025, Kazakhstan shipped its first batch of wheat to Vietnam via the Lianyungang terminal. With further investment and coordination, such corridors hold promise for strengthening trade links between Central Asia and ASEAN.

It is also important to acknowledge that Central Asia currently lacks a regional institutional framework, and unlike ASEAN, the five Central Asian states cannot act as a single economic entity. This fragmentation reduces the region's overall attractiveness to external partners, who must engage with five separate states on most issues rather than with a unified regional body. That said, recent efforts to strengthen intra-regional dialogue and cooperation suggest a gradual move toward greater coordination, which, if sustained, could eventually improve the region's appeal as a collective partner.

Another important constraint is the lack of mutual awareness between the two regions. With business-to-business, university-to-university, and people-to-people exchanges still limited, an information vacuum persists regarding potential opportunities. This challenge, however, is relatively easier to address. A stronger diplomatic presence, combined with a more proactive role for embassies and consulates, could help bridge this gap and facilitate initial contacts among actors interested in cooperation.

Finally, deeper high-level political dialogue can set the tone for business, academic, and societal actors, opening new opportunities for cooperation. Recent examples include mutual visits between Singapore and Kazakhstan, as well as between Singapore and Uzbekistan, which resulted in tangible agreements. Likewise, the visit of Vietnam's president to Kazakhstan in May 2025 delivered practical economic and political dividends for both sides. Sustaining such diplomatic engagement will be essential for building momentum and expanding cooperation between Central Asian and ASEAN countries in the future.

At the same time, expectations for such cooperation should remain grounded and realistic, guided by a pragmatic, step-by-step, and issue-specific approach.

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*The author acknowledges the use of the Generative Artificial Intelligence tool ChatGPT (version 5.0) for proofreading assistance during the preparation of this essay.*



## FROM THE CAG TEAM

# How do ASEAN countries Conceptualise Economic Security?

By Mrinalini Niranjan and Yujia Zhu



Photo credit: Flickr/  
World Economic Forum/  
Sikarin Fon Thanachaiyari

From the rise of mercantilist tariffs undermining free trade to supply chain disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economic landscape has become increasingly volatile and complex, reflecting the potential risks of economic interdependence. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has, over nearly six decades, sought to foster regional economic cooperation and resilience. Yet, despite multiple frameworks and initiatives aimed at strengthening economic security,

member states continue to hold diverse interpretations of what economic security entails. This lack of a shared understanding limits the coherence of regional policy direction and undermines the institution's preparedness for future economic shocks. This essay first examines the various ways in which the ASEAN countries conceptualise economic security and thereafter provides recommendations for ASEAN to "accelerate the economic growth, social progress, and cultural development in the

region.”

## Economic Security in ASEAN

While there is no regionally accepted definition of economic security, the ASEAN countries have conceptualised economic security into three broad categories. Firstly, economic security is frequently linked to social indicators, including the promotion of social progress, justice, and improvements in education and living standards. Secondly, economic security is often described as an amorphous concept, encompassing a broad array of policies aimed at promoting economic growth, competitiveness, and resilience. This reflects varied interpretations made by different stakeholders, depending on national priorities, sectoral interests, and strategic objectives, across a range of situations and stakeholders. Lastly and most critically, economic security is also framed as an emerging security concern. It is closely tied to national security and is increasingly viewed as a tool for advancing strategic interests and mitigating external vulnerabilities.

There are three main crises that have shaped how the ASEAN countries have approached economic security. One, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis exposed the risks of premature liberalisation, which triggered large amounts of capital flight and mass unemployment. In Indonesia, for instance, the crisis precipitated a severe political breakdown that

culminated in President Suharto’s resignation, underscoring the intricate link between economic instability and governance legitimacy. Two, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis reinforced the region’s vulnerability to external shocks and accelerated efforts to institutionalise regional financial safety nets. The Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation (CMIM), together with the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO), emerged as a collective liquidity backstop and surveillance mechanism to enhance crisis prevention and management. Three, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the excessive dependence on global supply chains, digital infrastructure gaps, and uneven health and logistics capacities. The resulting economic disruptions from factory shutdowns to the lack of digital accessibility prompted ASEAN to securitise critical sectors and invest in regional production resilience to benefit from global reshoring trends. Yet, the definition of critical infrastructure differs significantly across the ASEAN countries, reflecting various national priorities, level of development, and threat perceptions. This divergence further hampers collective action and a coherent and comprehensive regional strategy to manage economic security. As a result, ASEAN’s response to emerging economic risks remains fragmented, reactive, and heavily dependent on national initiatives and priorities rather than collective mechanisms of a regional economic community.

ASEAN's approach towards economic security thus reflects a delicate balancing act shaped by the diverse priorities and vulnerabilities of its member states. The heart of these efforts lie in the drive to strengthen domestic economic conditions. Countries are investing in boosting labour productivity, industrial competitiveness, employment rates, and overall economic capacity to ensure sustained economic growth. For the small and medium-sized ASEAN economies with small domestic markets, a stable access to external markets is particularly critical. To ensure global connectivity and sustained economic growth, the ASEAN countries have established multiple free trade agreements with major economies such as Japan and China, as well as the largest global free trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The ASEAN framework on supply chain efficiency and resilience also aims to "[enhance] competitiveness of ASEAN, accelerating economic recovery during emergencies and ensuring sustainable economic growth despite disruptions." This has shaped supply chain security as an integral part of economic security. For example, Vietnam still relies on overseas supplies for chips due to the lack of domestic capabilities. It is now developing a domestic semiconductor industry to boost production capabilities to mitigate dependency on overseas supplies while positioning itself as a key semiconductor hub in the region.

Beyond direct economic interests, the conception of ASEAN's economic security extends to social and environmental concerns. Ensuring food, nutrition, and water security is essential for the well-being of the citizens of the country. The ASEAN Integrated Food Security (AIFS) Framework and the Strategic Plan of Action on Food Security (SPA-FS 2021–2025) is explicitly designed to ensure food availability, access, and resilience to shocks. In the ASEAN Plus Three Leaders' Statement (2024), ASEAN and its partners have committed towards enhancing cooperation in food and agriculture sectors and establishing an emergency food stockpile to mitigate effects of a potential crisis.

Meanwhile, environmental sustainability remains critical in supporting long-term economic security. ASEAN uses "environmental sustainability" to refer to managing natural resources wisely, preventing environmental degradation, and cooperation both within the region and with external partners and industries to address cross-border environmental risks. For instance, the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution is a binding instrument intended to prevent and manage haze events across borders. While these social and environmental aspects might not be directly related to the economy, non-economic factors such as food security, health, and environmental sustainability can have a profound impact on economic stability and resilience.



Disruptions to these areas can undermine societal well-being and affect labour markets, supply chain, and industrial productivity.

Additionally, protecting critical infrastructure is particularly important in supporting socio-economic development. The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 invests in transport infrastructure to strengthen regional connectivity and ensure that systems are integrated to buffer against disruptions. Likewise, the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC) and the ASEAN Power Grid (APG) aim to interconnect national electricity grids and facilitate cross-border power trade, thereby reducing the vulnerability of individual states. Under the APAEC Phase II, ASEAN continues to promote collaboration to enhance connectivity, energy security, and sustainability across the region.

Finally, emerging strategic and technological challenges have also become central to ASEAN's pursuit of economic security. As Southeast Asian countries seek to transform into a regional digital hub, protecting sensitive and strategic technologies from external threats have become increasingly important. Rising cyberattacks, data breaches, and disinformation campaigns have revealed vulnerabilities of the region's digital infrastructure as the ASEAN countries increasingly face more cyber and data security risks.

To manage this, ASEAN has adopted frameworks such as the Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy to harmonise regional cyber policies and build capacity.

Overall, Southeast Asia faces a convergence of traditional and non-traditional threats to economic security. Externally, the region remains exposed to global volatility, from financial crises to supply chain disruptions. The intensifying US-China geoeconomic rivalry has tested ASEAN's foundational principles of neutrality, non-interference, and consensus, pulling member states in competing strategic and economic directions. This rivalry increases the risks of value chain fragmentation and strategic polarisation. Internally, several ASEAN member states grapple with structural vulnerabilities and diverging interests. Lao PDR's heavy reliance on foreign direct investment for infrastructure and energy and Cambodia's external-dependent export profile illustrate the fragility of narrow economic bases and likely dependency on China for developmental support. Informal labour markets and migration flows, particularly between Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, add further pressure to these economies. Climate-induced shocks such as flooding and drought threaten regional food security and the livelihoods of over 100 million smallerholder farmers in Southeast Asia. ASEAN's consensus-based decision-making often delays timely collective action, a challenge compounded by the different economic security priorities of its member states.

This leaves the region exposed to economic shocks and reduces the effectiveness of ASEAN's economic community in managing economic security interests.

### Recommendations for ASEAN

Given these issues, ASEAN should pursue a multi-pronged strategy. Domestically, governments should seek to strengthen competitiveness, broaden their industrial bases, and attract sustainable investments. Externally, they should continue to diversify economic partnerships, maintain strategic balance among major powers, and, where feasible, enhance selective self-reliance in critical sectors. Regionally, ASEAN has promoted collective resilience through trade facilitation, digital connectivity, and macroeconomic surveillance. Yet, achieving timely and coordinated crisis responses will require greater institutional flexibility, clearer decision-making mandates, and more transparent enforcement procedures to complement the consensus principle. These issues also highlight the larger need to collectively conceptualise and safeguard the economic security of ASEAN member states.

Southeast Asia's experience shows that economic security does not mean retreating from global markets but building adaptive resilience. By avoiding hard securitisation that could further

escalate geopolitical tensions and mercantilist economic approaches, the ASEAN countries should highlight how economic vulnerabilities can act as strategic priorities for further cooperation. Moving forward, ASEAN's definition of economic security should reflect both the domestic priorities and external considerations of its member states. In an era of geopolitical rivalry and economic uncertainty, Southeast Asia must secure prosperity without sacrificing openness. By prioritising resilience, diversification, and collective action, ASEAN can transform vulnerability into a foundation for sustainable growth.

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*The authors would like to express their gratitude to Denis Hew, Senior Research Fellow, and Barbora Valockova, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre on Asia and Globalisation, for their invaluable mentorship. The authors also thank Mae Chow for her insightful comments.*

## NEWS ARTICLES &amp; COMMENTARIES

## ASEAN POLITICAL-SECURITY COMMUNITY

## News Articles

**Trump gives ‘toothless’ ASEAN summit its moment in the sun****BBC, October 27**

"Trump was here for a photo op... this was just another feather in his cap," says Joseph Liow, dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore. But, he adds, the thinking was that "since he'll be here, let's make the best of it" and Asian leaders would have leveraged on his attendance to "broaden his aperture about the convergence of interests between US and Asia".

**Malaysia warns ASEAN neutrality eroding as global powers compete****AP News, October 26**

Malaysia warned that the shrinking neutrality of Southeast Asian countries risk deepening major-power rivalries at the ASEAN summit.

**East timor, Asia's youngest nation, becomes ASEAN's 11<sup>th</sup> member****Reuters. October 26**

Timor-Leste (East Timor) has officially become the 11<sup>th</sup> ASEAN member, after a 14-year accession process.

**Trump, Gaza and Timor-Leste: Could the ASEAN Summit be its most significant?****CNA, October 25**

The high-profile presence of global leaders such as US President Donald Trump can elevate ASEAN's visibility on the global stage, but this comes with the risk of overshadowing the bloc's priorities, experts say.

**Timor-Leste's ASEAN membership a win for Asia's youngest nation****The Straits Times, October 23**

Timor-Leste's upcoming accession as the 11th member of ASEAN marks both the fulfilment of a decades-long aspiration and a politically symbolic boost for the region's youngest nation.

**Timor-Leste: A Test Case for the 'ASEAN Way'****The Diplomat, October 21**

*By Nuno Canas Mendes, an Associate professor at the Institute of Social and Political Sciences (ISCSP), University of Lisbon.*

Timor Leste's entry into ASEAN "represents both a diplomatic victory for the small nation and an opportunity to rethink ASEAN's procedures and operational logic."

**Timor-Leste Adds a New Wrinkle to U.S.-China Competition****Foreign Policy, October 16**

*By David Grossman, a professor at the University of Southern California*

The accession of Timor-Leste into ASEAN will potentially bolster the rules-based order in Southeast Asia while facing greater pressure to balance ties between US strategic goals and Beijing's economic influence.

**The Rise of Minilateralism in China-ASEAN Defence Cooperation****ISEAS Perspective 2025/77, October 14**

*By Bo Ma, is Associate Professor and Assistant Director, and Zishu Li is Research Officer at the Collaborative Innovation Centre of South China Sea Studies, Nanjing University, China.*

China's growing use of flexible minilateral defence initiatives with Southeast Asia enhances regional security cooperation but faces challenges from mistrust and divergent views.

## NEWS ARTICLES &amp; COMMENTARIES

## ASEAN POLITICAL-SECURITY COMMUNITY

## News Articles

**Myanmar junta chief admits election won't be nationwide, as war continues**

Reuters, October 15

Citing ongoing political turmoil, Myanmar's junta leader acknowledged that the 2025 elections will probably take place in only about one-third of the country's townships.

**The 17<sup>th</sup> Coordinating Conference for the ASEAN Political-Security Community (ASCCO) convenes at the ASEAN Headquarters/ASEAN Secretariat**

ASEAN, August 22

"The Conference focused on the End-Term Review of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025, with the APSC Sectoral Bodies as well as ASEAN Organs and Entities Associated with the APSC sharing their insights on the implementation of the Blueprint for the last 10 years, including on the challenges encountered and lessons learned."

**Cambodia and Thailand agree to ASEAN observers to ensure ceasefire**

Reuters, August 7

Cambodia and Thailand's top defence officials agreed on Thursday to allow observers from the ASEAN regional bloc to inspect disputed border areas and help ensure hostilities do not resume following a violent five-day conflict that ended in a ceasefire late in July.

**First direct land cable connecting Vietnam and Singapore launched**

VnEconomy, August 5

The Vietnam Posts and Telecommunications Group (VNPT) officially launched the Vietnam-Singapore Terrestrial Network (VSTN), marking the first direct overland fiber-optic cable line linking the two countries, reducing reliance on undersea cable systems.

**ASEAN's centrality depends on a shift to collective security**

RSIS Commentary, October 8

*By Henrick Tsjeng, an Associate Research Fellow with the Regional Security Architecture Programme, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, RSIS.*

China's hosting of major events like the Xiangshan Forum, Victory Day Parade, and SCO Summit underscores its growing ambition to reshape the international order and highlights its rising influence and recognition among Southeast Asian states.

**The Two Southeast Asias**

Foreign Affairs, September 25

*By Susannah Patton, Director of the Southeast Asia Program at the Lowy Institute.*

Southeast Asia is becoming more divided, with maritime countries working with multiple partners to balance China's influence, while continental countries are moving closer to China's orbit. Thereby, reflecting deepening regional asymmetries in power and alignment.

**Media Discussions**

**Pursuing Pragmatic Multilateralism  
in a Multipolar World**  
RSIS, October 7

## NEWS ARTICLES &amp; COMMENTARIES

## ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

## News Articles

**Did Asean members get short-changed by Trump on trade deals with 'strings attached'?****South China Morning Post, October 29**

For Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, the deals offered greater short-term market access to the US, but they did not significantly alter a global trade landscape dominated by tariffs and non-tariff barriers.

The four countries "now face increased imports of US agricultural and industrial products and commitments that favour American exporters", Vu Lam, a policy analyst and ASEAN observer, told This Week in Asia.

**Malaysia minister defends trade deal with US amid claims it undermines economic sovereignty.****CNA, October 29**

Malaysia's Trade Minister Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz maintains that Malaysia retains full decision-making power and only acts on trade or security issues it shares with the US under its own laws.

**China and ASEAN, hit by US tariffs, sign upgraded free trade pact****Reuters, October 28**

China is seeking further engagement with ASEAN to counter hefty import tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump.

**Singapore talks with the US on sectoral tariffs still at 'early stage': PM Wong****The Straits Times, October 28**

Singapore's Prime Minister shares that talks with the US over potential semiconductor tariffs, a crucial export sector for the country, reaffirming ASEAN's commitment to engage all partners amid trade uncertainty.

## Selected Commentaries &amp; Publications

**Green opportunities for 'blue economy'****China Daily, October 29**

*By Zhu Feng, the Dean of the School of International Studies, Nanjing University.*

Strengthening the China-ASEAN blue economy partnership is not just an economic necessity but an environmental imperative.

**At ASEAN, Trump Pushes for Deals While China Seeks Free Trade****Council on Foreign Relations, October 28**

*By Joshua Kurlantzick, Senior Fellow at the CFR.*

The Donald Trump-led U.S. push for bilateral deals stands in contrast to China's campaign for a multilateral free-trade framework, leaving ASEAN countries caught between competition and choice.

**For ASEAN Members, Trump's Bilateral Trade Deals May Be the Least-Worst Option****Carnegie Endowment, October 24**

*By Barbara Wiesel, a Nonresident Scholar at the Carnegie Endowment's Asia Program.*

Trump pledged long-term partnership with ASEAN, but past tariffs and trade policies have left the bloc cautiously optimistic while pressuring other members to follow.



## NEWS ARTICLES &amp; COMMENTARIES

## ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

## News Articles

**ASEAN's growing geopolitical and economic clout draws attention from world leaders: Former sec-gen CNA, October 24**

The Kuala Lumpur ASEAN Summit underscores both the bloc's economic priorities and its wider agenda, including addressing the Myanmar crisis, advancing Timor-Leste's membership, and strengthening ASEAN's unity amid global geopolitical tensions.

**Asean set to sign digital economy agreement in 2026 to boost cross-border trade, services**

**The Strait Times, October 24**

"Defa aims to facilitate the seamless and secure flow of goods, services, with data security at its core, underpinned by enabling regulation, infrastructure and talent," said Datuk Seri Zafrul, who is the AECC chairman.

**Progress in Asean trade pact review at month-end summit in Kuala Lumpur**

**Financial Express, October 19**

India is hopeful of a major breakthrough in the review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) before the next joint commission meeting.

**Thailand Pushes for Landmark ASEAN Digital Economy Agreement**

**The Nation, August 27**

Thailand is leading ASEAN's negotiations on the pioneering Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), set to unify digital trade rules and boost the region's digital economy to \$2 trillion by 2030.

## Selected Commentaries &amp; Publications

**Securing the ASEAN Economy in an Over-securitised World**

**Fulcrum, October 21**

*By Julia Tijaja, Associate Senior Fellow at the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute; Muhammad Habib Abiyan Dzakwan, Researcher at CSIS Indonesia; and Rania Teguh, Researcher at the East Asian Bureau of Economic Research, Australian National University.*

ASEAN needs to secure its economy on its own terms, resisting externally driven efforts to over-securitise economic affairs.

## Media Discussions

**Assessing the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Strategic Plan 2026-2030: Is It Fit For Purpose?**

**Centre on Asia and Globalisation, October 6**



**Manufacturing Malaysia's Future: Hope or Hype?**  
ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute,  
July 18

## NEWS ARTICLES &amp; COMMENTARIES

## ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

## News Articles

**ASEAN Intensifies Efforts To Align Cultural Preservation With Ecological Sustainability - Tiong Tatoli, October 20**

As Timor Leste prepares for its imminent accession into ASEAN, its participation in the ASSC forum demonstrates the nation's commitment to contributing to a more inclusive, dynamic and sustainable regional community.

**Malaysia reinforces ASEAN socio-cultural cooperation under ASSC 2025 chairmanship**

**The Malaysian Reserve, October 17**

Malaysia has reaffirmed its commitment to advancing a resilient, innovative, and people-centered ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, focusing on five 2025 priorities: culture and heritage, AI and the green sector, public health, youth and sports, and climate action.

**Ramo-Horta: Timor-Leste's Cultural and Societal Diversity to Enrich ASEAN**

**Bernama, October 8**

President José Ramos-Horta emphasised that Timor-Leste's cultural diversity, media freedom, and social inclusivity will be valuable assets that strengthen and enrich ASEAN upon its accession to the regional bloc.

**Vietnam proposes three pillars for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community**

**Vietnam Plus, October 8**

Vietnam proposes that the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community be built on three pillars: digital education equity, fair job access (including reskilling/upskilling), and inclusive governance that embeds ethics, transparency and human rights in the age of AI and innovation.

## Selected Commentaries &amp; Publications

**The Gender Dimension in ASEAN-Canada Relations: A Beacon of Hope Fulcrum, October 1**

*By Mutiara Indriani, an Australia Awards PhD scholar and Research Officer at the Australian National University's School of Regulation and Global Governance (RegNet); Bernadette (Babette) P. Resurrección, a Professor and Queen's National Scholar in Development in Practice at Queen's University; and Cynthia Couette, a cotutelle PhD candidate in political science at Université Laval and in regulation and governance at ANU.*

Beyond symbolism, advancing gender equality can unlock labour potential, boost economic growth, and support regional stability-making it beneficial to ASEAN-Canada cooperation.

**Women Leadership and Its Contribution to Poverty Eradication in Rural Coastal Area**

**ASSC, August 27**

Women in ASEAN's coastal areas face compounded gender and climate challenges that threaten livelihoods and poverty reduction.

## Media Discussions



**From Vulnerability to Vision: Redefining Development in the Age of Climate Change**  
ISEAS-Yusof Ishak, September 12



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## THE CENTRE ON ASIA AND GLOBALISATION

The Centre on Asia and Globalisation is a research centre at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. It conducts in-depth research on developments in the Asia-Pacific and beyond, and aims to provide academics, decision-makers, and the general public with objective analysis on issues of regional and global significance. The Centre's motto "Objective Research with Impact" reflects its commitment towards ensuring that its analysis informs policy and decision makers in and about Asia.

## OTHER CAG PUBLICATIONS

- *Strategic choices for middle powers in developing AI capabilities: a case study of Singapore* by Jassie Hsi Cheng, Byron Chong and Miguel Alberto Gomez (Asia Security, 2025)
- *Operationalising the AEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030: From Aspirations to Real Action* by Denis Hew (Fulcrum Focus Plus, September 25, 2025)
- *Washington's Ironclad Commitments Are Rusting in the Indo-Pacific* by Gregory H. Winger, Miguel Alberto Gomez and Lauren Sukin (War on the rocks, September 24, 2025)
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