



INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
(ISIS) MALAYSIA

Activity report 2024

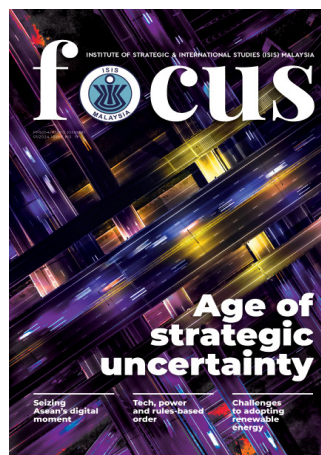


The institute started January with a series of roundtables and visitors with chairman Datuk Prof Dr **Mohd Faiz Abdullah** welcoming US ambassador HE **Edgard Kagan**; Deputy Investment, Trade and Industry Minister **Liew Chin Tong**; ASEAN Secretariat representative Dr **Tang Siew Mun** and Australian high commissioner HE **Danielle Henecke**.

We kicked off with a roundtable with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Indo-Pacific Advisory Group Korea on 17 January. **Thomas Yoshimura** led the roundtable focused on the risk-and-threat perception in the Indo-Pacific with representatives from various institutions – KAS Korea, KAS Malaysia, Chungnam National University, Asan Institute of Policy Studies, Sejong Institute and Korea National Diplomatic Academy.

Our research team comprising of senior fellow **Thomas Daniel**, fellows **Ahmad Afandi**, **Calvin Cheng** and **Farlina Said**; senior analyst **Dhana Raj Markandu**; and analysts **Angeline Tan** and **Yanitha Meena** shared insights into Malaysia's take on middle-power diplomacy, technology, trade, energy and climate. We also explored how these perspectives might shape regional policymaking and strategic decision-making.

Analyst Angeline moderated the session featuring Assoc Prof Dr **Kei Koga**, Dr **Geetha Govindasamy**, Calvin and Assoc Prof Dr **Fumitaka Furuoka**.



On the publication front, Afandi started the ball rolling with an [op-ed piece](#) in *The Edge* on the imperative for Malaysia to start strategically navigating the climate crisis to safeguard economic competitiveness, trade, energy, food security, productivity and address internal displacement. We also [published a focus](#) devoted to the 36th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (36APR) themed 'Age of strategic uncertainty'.

The 19th edition of *focus* featured articles from 37APR role-player and participants, such as **Pou Sothirak**, **Janessa Kong**, **Hosuk Lee-Makiyama** and **Vu Hai Dang**, among others. ISIS Malaysia contributors included Angeline, Farlina, analyst **Izzah Ibrahim**, Meena, analyst **Qarrem Kassim** and Zarina.



At the end of January, we hosted the Japan-ASEAN roundtable, featuring two ambassadors – HE **Kiya Masahiko**, ambassador of Japan to ASEAN, and HE **Takahashi Katsuhiko**, ambassador of Japan to Malaysia.

Managed by analyst **Zarina Zainuddin**, the roundtable examined [50 years of ASEAN-Japan](#) diplomatic relations, acting as a “review” of a relationship built upon the Fukuda Doctrine. Over the decades, Japanese assistance had brought development and prosperity, contributing to the peace dividend throughout Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, both Japan and Southeast Asia now face challenges, which are testing the resilient ties. The shifting security landscape and new geoeconomic realities have influenced policy directions, raising questions about the long-term relations.

New recruit, analyst **Jaideep Singh** contributed an [op-ed](#) in *Star Biz7* on how Malaysia should capitalise on geopolitical shifts, given the rising tensions between the US and China, alongside conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, causing uncertainty in the global economy.

STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

At the end of the month, we conducted a retreat – led by Prof Faiz – to map out the 2024 work plan.

Prof Faiz provided a “master class” on speech writing, covering some high-level pointers on the 5Cs of public speaking. Deputy research director **Harris Zainul** [shared a deck](#), outlining our strategies to increase output and grow



our presence. In pursuit of the 3Is – “interpret, inform and influence” – the organisation will pursue flagship activities, publish more policy papers and engage with other think-tanks, among others.

The communication team would work on the following areas: revitalising ties and engagements, branding, website redesign and redeploy social media posts. Director of public affairs **Deda Ridzwani** and **Tan Wan-Peng**, editorial & social media lead, spearheaded efforts to increase media engagements, and helped host *The Edge* and bfm radio in April and May.

February was filled with visitors, starting with **Bilahari Kausikan**, chairman of the Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore, to HE **Maria Angela Ponce**, the Philippines ambassador. Others included **Erik Forsberg** from the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research & Higher Education, UAE National Defence College and **Ashwad Ismail**, CEO and editor-in-chief of Astro Awani.

On 16 February, we marked Prof Faiz’s first anniversary as chairman.

Another new recruit **Hanson Chong** published a piece on [vernacular schools’ role](#) in the ethnic divide debate. The article was based on a survey in 2023, which examined the friendships formed in universities along ethnic lines and looked at the role of national schools in fostering unity. He revisited the topic at a staff seminar in March.

A few days later, on 20 February, we hosted the final Tun Hussein Onn Chair lecture, marking the end of a 12-year partnership between ISIS Malaysia and the NOAH Foundation. Prof Emeritus Tan Sri Dr **Zakri Abdul Hamid**, the fifth holder of the chair, delivered the [public lecture](#) on ‘The politics of climate change – role of science diplomacy’.

Prof Faiz delivered the [opening remarks](#) at the event featuring guest of honour Johor Menteri Besar Datuk **Onn Hafiz Ghazi**, who also represented Tun Hussein’s family. Zakri expounded on how geopolitics has defined “sustainable development”, with countries from the Global South reminding the industrialised Global North of their responsibility to provide new and additional funding to the poorer countries to mitigate and adapt to global warming.



The next day, we held a [Chinese New Year](#) luncheon at the library.

Capping off a busy February, in the last week, we held a forum on 'Political developments in Myanmar' with Prof **Nic Farelly** from the University of Tasmania. Thomas moderated the session exploring the deteriorating political conditions in Myanmar that have exacerbated the economic and humanitarian challenges facing Southeast Asia's poorest nation and ASEAN's responses. Dr **Andrea Passeri** provided comments.

Meena was one of two representatives from Malaysia in the Future of Leadership – Southeast Asia programme in Melbourne. Over the course of an [intensive week](#), she contributed insights into various topics, including the ASEAN-Australia relationship, multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific region and Quad.



FOCUS ON PUBLICATIONS, MEDIA OUTREACH

In March, we unveiled our revamped policy briefs with the publication of '[Malaysia's long-term food security](#)'. It highlighted the need to strike a balance between self-sufficiency and self-reliance in the face of food security disruptions. The lead author was senior visiting fellow Dr **Larry Wong** and other contributors were Dr **Andrew Kam**; Datin **Zaeidah Mohamed Esa** and Qarrem.

On 8 March, we marked International Women's Day. The theme #InspireInclusion highlighted the need to value and understand women's inclusion. Malaysia has yet to achieve gender equality. According to the World Economic Forum, we ranked 102 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report in 2023 – one of the lowest in the region. Senior analyst **Lee Min Hui** made a special appearance in a [reels](#) shot by **Syahir Adnan**.

On 25 March, we published Calvin's '[Malaysia's Progressive Wage Policy](#)', ahead of PWP's pilot phase launch in June. The policy brief gained much traction. Calvin and co-author **Kevin Zhang** appeared on bfm radio's [Beyond the Ballot Box](#) to discuss how PWP, inspired by Singapore's model, aims to enhance wages, productivity and skills development. While

both Singapore and Malaysia's PWP share common goals, there are substantial differences because of legislative and institutional environments.

Other articles produced in March included researcher Zayana Zaikariah's [comment piece](#) on the European Union's Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) and its implications for palm oil producers, especially smallholders. Meena commented on the months-long Indian elections in a Lowy Institute piece in which she discussed what a [third Modi term](#) would herald for Malaysia.

On 26 March, we held a buka puasa.

As part of our media outreach programme, we hosted a few senior editors from *The Edge* in April. We briefed CEO Datuk Ho Kay Tat, editor-in-chief **Kathy Fong** and associate editor **Rash Behari Bhattacharjee** on our flagship events – 37APR and PRAXIS 2024.

A few days after Hari Raya Aidilfitri, on 16 April, we held a forum on the 'Impact of geoeconomics on strategic equilibrium in the Indo-Pacific' with Dr **Darren Lim** from Australian National University. The forum highlighted how nations are shifting from purely economic priorities to national security considerations, deploying "tools", such as economic containment, sanctions and supply chain realignment. The next day, we hosted a Hari Raya Aidilfitri open house.



On 30 April, we hosted a forum on 'Seoul's strategic outlook on the Indo-Pacific and ASEAN', featuring Dr **Park Cheol Hee** and Dr **Nurliana Kamaruddin**. The forum focused on where ASEAN and Malaysia stood in Seoul's strategic repositioning towards the Indo-Pacific.

May was the "calm before the storm" of the 37APR. On the 10th, the [Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration](#) dinner was held at our premises. The ADFM meeting addressed Southeast Asia's response to forced displacement/migration, focusing on commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, regional developments on the Bali Process, ASEAN's stocktake report and opportunities when Malaysia takes over the ASEAN chair in 2025. Among the guests were **Dewi Fortuna Anwar**, **Lilian Fan**, **Andrew Hudson** and **Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin**.



As part of our staff seminar series, Dhana, Min Hui and Zayana led a discussion on the energy transition in Malaysia on the same day as ADFM. Min Hui and Zayana looked at how rural community-based renewable energy transitions offer cost-effective solutions, improve rural folk's quality of life and empower them as active stakeholders in the energy value chain. Dhana discussed Malaysia's decarbonisation efforts, taking a critical look at the clean-energy trajectory and regional ambitions.

LARGEST FLAGSHIP EVENT

June was a hectic month with the 37APR taking place from 4-6 at Hilton Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

ISIS Malaysia organises the APR on behalf of the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic & International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) network. This year, more than 300 delegates from 31 countries were present at our flagship conference.

There was a packed schedule of five plenary sessions, three concurrent sessions, a keynote and four dinner and lunch addresses. Dr **Yose Rizal Damuri**, executive director of CSIS Indonesia and 2024 chair of the ASEAN-ISIS Network, and Prof Faiz delivered the opening remarks. The latter also delivered the closing remarks on 6 June.

The highlight of 37APR was the [keynote address](#) by Prime Minister Datuk Seri **Anwar Ibrahim**. In his second keynote to the APR, the PM spoke about Malaysia's resolute emphasis on non-alignment, as well as developments in the Gaza and Myanmar crises. He also touched on Malaysia's role as ASEAN chair in 2025 and the broad principles that would guide it.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Utama **Mohamad Hasan** spoke at the [welcoming dinner](#). His remarks focused on the priorities of Malaysia's foreign policy and his vision for how the ministry was working with other stakeholders to achieve Malaysia's strategic priorities. Another big-name speaker was ASEAN secretary-general HE Dr **Kao Kim Hourn**, who was the main speaker in plenary 2, which focused on the past and future of the regional organisation in the lead up to its post-2025 vision.

Plenary 1 focused on the prospects and opportunities of mitigation and cooperation when it came to major-power rivalry. This was a deliberate reframing of the 36th APR's first plenary, which focused on whether China and the United States were locked in an inevitable march to conflict. **Herve Lemahieu** instigated the session featuring **Yun Sun**, **Victor Gao**, HE **Sujiro Seam**, HE **Ong Keng Yong** and Raja Dato' **Nushirwan Zainal Abidin**.



Plenary 2 examined ASEAN in 2025, ahead of Malaysia's chairmanship. Dr **Thitinan Pongsudhirak** moderated a panel featuring Kim Hourn, Dewi and Dr **David Capie**.

The lunch and dinner addresses on 5 and 6 June were delivered by three heads of missions to Malaysia – HE **Michalis Rokas**, ambassador of the European Union; HE **Ouyang Yujing**, ambassador of China; and Australia's Heinecke.

Rokas, who ended his four-year stint in Malaysia, reflected on a three-decade diplomatic career and how the opportunities of the past have shaped the issues in the ongoing interregnum.



Yujing spoke on the prospects for bilateral and multilateral cooperation between China and Southeast Asian states, and how the successful development of both parties was mutually tied.

Heinecke, in her first address to the APR, highlighted Australia's multicultural heritage in reflecting how it engaged with the region, its self-perception as an Asia-Pacific middle power and the depth of Australian-Malaysian relations.

Other plenaries focused on the mega-trends shaping the global economy and their impact on Asia-Pacific, as well as the roles and agencies of regional middle powers. Another hot-button topic was the global ramifications of geopolitical developments in the Middle East.

At plenary 3, director of special projects **Shahriman Lockman** instigated Dr **Ebtesam al-Ketbi**, Dr James

Dorsey, Dr **Dino Patti Djalal** and Dr **Khalil Shirgholami** on the strategic and conflict reconfigurations in the Middle East.

Plenary 4 featured **Eduardo Pedrosa**, **Hosuk Lee-Makiyama**, **Nguyen Trinh**, Yose Rizal, Dr **Yang Yao** and HE **Chung Keeyong** on how the escalating US-China economic rivalry would impact on Asia-Pacific.

The final plenary looked at the rise of regional powers and the struggle to assert agency. Dr **Hoo Chiew-Ping** instigated the session featuring Prof **C Raja Mohan**, Dr **Akiko Fukushima**, **Helen Mitchell**, Dr **Frank Umbach** and Dr **Vu Le Thai Hoang**.



The concurrent sessions touched on the growing discourse shaping the Global South and evolution of its multilateral mechanisms; importance of reframing the global climate discourse, taking into account the priorities of developing countries; and the future of military conflicts influenced by the growing adaptation of artificial intelligence. Concurrent session 1 on connecting the Global South featured Prof **Antoinette Raquiza**, Dr **Lina Alexandra**, Prof **Harsh Pant** and Meena.

Concurrent session 2 on the widening gap between impact and promises on climate action was led by Dr **Annabelle Workman** with speakers Gen (rtd) **ANM Muniruzzaman**, Dr **Frederick Kliem** and **Prakriti Koirala**.

Concurrent session 3 explored key points concerning the integration of AI in military contexts, including the varying success rate, risks of deploying AI in military scenarios

and mitigation, geopolitical implications, ethical and legal considerations, and international cooperation. Farlina moderated Dr **Michael Raska**, Lt-Gen (Dr) **RS Panwar** and Dr **Su Wai Mon**.

The texts of the speeches are included in the [37APR report](#). Video recordings of the key remarks are available on our [YouTube channel](#).

PRAXIS OUTCOMES

Following the publication of the policy brief '[Building a cradle-to-grave care economy for Malaysia](#)', a [launch](#) was held on 21 June. The policy paper was among the tangible outcomes of our flagship conference [PRAXIS2023](#).



At the launch, Min and Calvin presented on what it means to build a cradle-to-grave care economy, followed by a panel discussion featuring Datuk Prof Dr **Denison Jayasooria**, Datuk Prof Dr **Norma Mansor**, **Shazana Agha**, Dr **Teoh Ai Hua** and **Tengku Aira Tengku Razif**.

On 27 June, we teamed up with MyDigital Corp's Malaysia Centre for 4IR and Microsoft to conduct a [workshop on AI governance](#). Farlina and analyst **Farah Nabilah** took a lead in the project, which explored Malaysia's regulatory environment and seeking ways to develop an AI regulatory ecosystem that aligns with international approaches and standards.

The workshop led to a white paper later in the year, which became part of the launch of the National AI Office (NAIO) in December.

The second half of the year started with intern **Hemaapadmaashini Prakash's** staff presentation on the 'Prospects of Malaysia's cooperation in India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative' on 2 July.

A week later, Harris, Calvin and Hanson facilitated a [working group meeting](#) in George Town to advance the cultural and economic significance of cross-border tourism between ASEAN member states and China. They discussed ways to promote greater people-to-people exchanges and cross-border payment integration.



On 12 July, Calvin led a [roundtable](#) looking into how PWP could shift Malaysia's labour market landscape with its promise to increase wage growth, enhance human capital development and drive productivity gains. The discussants looked at critical decisions regarding its design and scope, particularly if the PWP transitions to nationwide implementation. Calvin also led a roundtable on 'Creating fiscal space for constructing Malaysia's social protection floor' more than a fortnight later.

On 15 July, we published '[Shaping a nature-positive economy in Malaysia](#)', a policy brief authored by Afandi, Dr **Reuben Clements** and Zayana, and another product from PRAXIS 2023. The paper calls for placing nature conservation at the core of the economy to mitigate climate change and curb

deforestation. NPE, they argued, is novel in that it seeks to create a market for conservation by utilising various innovative financial instruments – such as carbon credits, biodiversity credits and payments for ecosystem services – equitably and responsibly to achieve positive conservation outcomes.

Throughout July, we welcomed visitors, such as **Carolyn Nash** and **Ashley Collins**, representatives of Amnesty International US; Hungarian Ambassador HE Dr **Petra Ponevács-Pana**; Economy Ministry Secretary-General Datuk **Azmie Diron**; and Uzbekistan Ambassador HE Dr **Karomidin Gadoev**, among others.

SOLUTIONS TO DOMESTIC CONCERNS

In the Merdeka month of August, our attention moved to another flagship event – PRAXIS 2024. PRAXIS' central

complexity ranking under the New Industrial Master Plan (NIMP) 2030.

Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry **Tengku Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz** delivered the keynote address, stressing that all eyes will be on Malaysia to tap into ASEAN's potential for regional action to confront unfolding challenges. He alluded to NIMP 2030 to build Malaysia's industrial resilience while urging regional integration to address global mega-trends and strategise on key issues, such as ASEAN's energy security, digitalisation as well as trade, industrial and economic resilience.

Human Resources Minister **Steven Sim Chee Keong** delivered the second keynote address, touching on Malaysia's aspirations, not only to keep pace with technological advancements, but also to lead in the digital age.



tenet is translating theory and knowledge into practice. The theme, 'Policies for a better tomorrow', explored the challenges that our nation faced on the societal, economic and environmental front.

The two-day conference featured four spotlight sessions and four research sessions. The topics ranged from Malaysia's trade and economic priorities to the care economy. On day 1, Jaideep moderated the spotlight session featuring senior fellow **Arividya Arimuthu**, Dr **Lili Yan Ing** and **Rozieyanahayu Ab Rahman**, who discussed what a highly open and trade-dependent economy like ours faced amid escalating geopolitical uncertainty, trade protectionism and shifting economic alliances.

At the second spotlight session, **Aedreena Reeza Alwi**, **Jan Noether** and Prof Dr **VGR Chandran Govindaraju** discussed Malaysia's efforts to increase its economic

The nation must continuously identify skills of the future and focus on reskilling and upskilling its workforce to meet the demands of the digital economy to remain relevant and competitive.

At research session 1, the focus moved to adapting Malaysia's future of work to Gen AI. **Alyssa Farha Jasmin**, Dr **Jasmine Begum**, **Mohd Khairi Man** and **Thomas Mathew** discussed how technological advancement will accelerate skill-biased technological change and further widen the gap between high-skilled and low-skilled workers in Malaysia.

Research session 2 highlighted efforts to regulate social media platforms while protecting free speech. Harris moderated panellists **Anuar Fariz Fadzil**, **Gayathry Venkiteswaran** and **Mediha Mahmood** on Malaysia's strategies to protect its information environment.



On the second day, research session 3 delved into diversifying technology options for Malaysia's energy transition. The discussants – Raja Dato' Dr **Abdul Aziz Raja Adnan**, Dr **Afiza Idris**, **Ikmal Hisham Maharon** and Datin **Nor Zihha Zainol Abidin** – focused on the National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR), designed to spearhead the decarbonisation of the energy sector.

At spotlight session 3, Datuk Sri **Darwis Abdul Razak**, Dr **Khairul Naim Adham**, Dr **Mark Rayan Darmajan** and **Zara Phang** looked at Malaysia's management of human-wildlife conflicts and overall approach to biodiversity conservation.

At research session 4, attention once again turned to the care economy. Assoc Prof **Angelique Chan**, Dr **Matthew Dornan** and Dr **Sheleaswani Inche Zainal Abidin** tackled the aged care economy and best practices from across the region to prepare for an ageing nation while delving into systemic reforms surrounding the care economy, community-based care and long-term care insurance.

The final spotlight session 4 dealt with ageing in the city and the need to mobilise planning policies to develop age-friendly urban infrastructure. **Chai Sen Tyng** moderated the session featuring **Daniel Lim**, **Norliza Hashim** and Prof **Sumarni Ismail**.

MERDEKA SPIRIT

A day after PRAXIS, we hosted the high-level [ASEAN policy dialogue](#) with East Asian Bureau of Economic Research, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia and CSIS Indonesia. The roundtable focused on the convergence crisis, urging the bloc to be more agile when it comes to dealing with challenges like climate change, technology, human capital, uncertainty and supply chains.



ASEAN also needed to deal with internal matters with Myanmar being the most pertinent. Other issues it must address include the South China Sea and Mekong River.

Among the speakers were **Peter Drysdale**, **Mari Pangestu**, **Vu Le Thai Hoang**, **Shiro Armstrong**, **Donna Gultom**, **Buavanh Vilavong**, **Vo Tri Thanh**, **Chin Tong**, **Jaime Naval**, **Tetsuya Watanabe** and **Jayant Meno**.

On 23 August, staff members attended the [Postnormal Times exhibition](#). Organised by the Centre for Postnormal Policy and Futures Studies and curated by Prof **Ziauddin Sardar** and **Scott Jordan**, the exhibition attempted to distil the concept of "post-normal times" through the works of six artists working in various media.



Prof Faiz delivered the opening remarks, alluding to the Malaysia Madani framework, which promotes values like sustainability, care, respect, innovation, prosperity and trust to ensure development benefits all while preserving the environment, as helping us to navigate the tempestuous waters ahead.

On 28 August, we held the US-Malaysia comprehensive partnership dialogue, focusing on the decade-long comprehensive strategic partnership. US Ambassador HE **Edgard Kagan** was the main speaker while Arividya

moderated the closed-door forum reflecting on why Malaysia's relations with the US were crucial to its economic vibrancy, strategic security and national interests.

In the spirit of Merdeka, account assistant **Abu Bakar** organised a blood donation drive at the National Blood Centre.



We hosted the forum '[A more internationalist Indonesia under Prabowo](#)', featuring Dr **Evan Laksamana** on 5 September. **Prabowo Subianto** won February's presidential elections in a landslide victory and Evan addressed both the personal and political experiences that have shaped the new president's views on governance, national identity and how Indonesia defines its role in the region and international arena.

On the 6th, Jaideep led a staff seminar on the way forward for Malaysia's semiconductor industry. He had been part of a tour of the Klang Valley and Negeri Sembilan cluster of semiconductor companies to understand how this region fitted into Malaysia's overall E&E ecosystem. This presentation shed light on the findings from a tour to more than 10 factories in Penang, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan, providing food for thought on the role of Penang and the Klang Valley in the dynamic semiconductor industry.



A couple of days later, intern **Samantha Khoo** presented her research into social media governance. In the digital age, the rise of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) presents a critical global challenge, exacerbated by the anonymity and reach of social media platforms. The presentation proposed a multi-faceted approach to combat

OCSEA, focusing on enhancing child-friendly reporting mechanisms, leveraging on advanced technologies and strengthening legal frameworks to ensure a safer online environment for children.

On 12 September, we held a [Merdeka-Malaysia Day picnic](#). This was our first time celebrating a national day in a "picnic-potluck" format.

The next day, intern **Cheng Xin Hui** presented at a staff seminar on the impacts of large-scale solar deployment on land use, emissions reduction, grid stability and electricity generation configuration on a macro level, considering the inherent weather dependency of solar energy. The findings offered insights into and practical policy recommendations to plan the unprecedented scaling-up of solar energy in Malaysia's energy mix.

At the end of September, we hosted a care economy roundtable, spearheaded by APPGM-SDG. It focused on Malaysia's critical demographic challenges – an ageing population and a declining birth rate. Participants tried to reframe paradigms of the provision of care as an investment and economic growth engine to meet care needs. One of the outcomes of the roundtable would be a book set for publication in 2025.



HIGHLIGHTS OF CHAIRMAN'S ACTIVITIES

In 2024, the chairman played a pivotal role in shaping diplomatic relations and advancing national interests through high-profile engagements and strategic travels alongside Prime Minister Dato' Seri **Anwar Ibrahim**.

One of the chairman's highlights was the conferment of the "Datuk" title in March. His Majesty **Sultan Ibrahim**, King of Malaysia, [bestowed upon Prof Faiz](#) the Darjah Kebesaran Panglima Mahkota Wilayah in conjunction with Federal Territory Day 2024. The award was in recognition of his work as an educator and thought leader at UNISEL and ISIS Malaysia.



Throughout the year, Prof Faiz met with diplomats, CEOs and other leaders to foster stronger ties and facilitate agreements on bilateral relations and climate change, among others.

From meeting New Zealand Prime Minister **Christopher Luxon** at the reception in honour of his [official visit to Malaysia](#) to receiving HE Dr **Tawfig AlRabiah**, Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umrah in the [first-ever engagement](#) between the ministry and a Malaysian think-tank, Prof Faiz maintained a hectic pace throughout 2024.

In March, Prof Faiz accompanied PM Anwar to Germany, where the latter delivered the [ceremonial address](#) 'Germany and Malaysia: Partners in [ASEAN](#) and beyond' at the 101st Ostasiatisches Liebesmahl in Hamburg.

The prime minister also nominated Prof Faiz as Malaysia's representative to the ASEAN Regional Forum Experts and Eminent Persons (ARF EEP) forum. As an ARF eminent person, the chairman will be able to advance Malaysia's strategic interests in ASEAN and pursuing ARF's agenda



to enhance peace and security in the region. These will be pivotal as Malaysia closes in on its chairmanship of ASEAN and the region's geostrategic landscape becomes increasingly challenging.

On 29 May, Prof Faiz [gave a talk on the Indo-Pacific](#) at the National Resilience College. He touched on the escalating Sino-US rivalry in the region, ranging from the South China Sea territorial disputes to supply chain resilience and proliferation of mini-lateral initiatives.

A couple of days later, Prof Faiz delivered the remarks at the opening of the Sentro Rizal Kuala Lumpur. As an "ardent admirer of José Rizal", Prof Faiz reminded the audience that PM Anwar once called Rizal the "greatest Malayan and the pride of the Malay race". A cursory examination of the current international order and the multiple crises that we have to grapple with shows that Rizal's unshakable humanism and sense of justice is very much relevant today as it was when he penned *Noli Me Tángere* and *El Filibusterismo* at the turn of the 19th century.

The inauguration of the Sentro Rizal was part of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Malaysia.



At the 37APR in June, Prof Faiz delivered the opening and welcoming remarks for PM [Anwar's keynote address](#). The PM laid out Malaysia's position on international conflicts, saying that forcing nations to choose sides is not only counter-productive but will only add on to the brewing cauldron of mistrust and suspicion.

On 30 September, Prof Faiz spoke at the [Climate Change Forum 2024: Path to COP29 Baku](#), where Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability **Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad** officially launched the National Climate Change Policy 2.0, following a comprehensive review of the 2009 policy.



Malaysia is accused of adopting a so-called “strategic pivot” but the truth is Malaysia was, is, and will be, on the side of Malaysia.

ISIS Malaysia served as a consultant for the review of the National Policy on Climate Change 2009 and the drafting of the updated National Climate Change Policy 2.0.

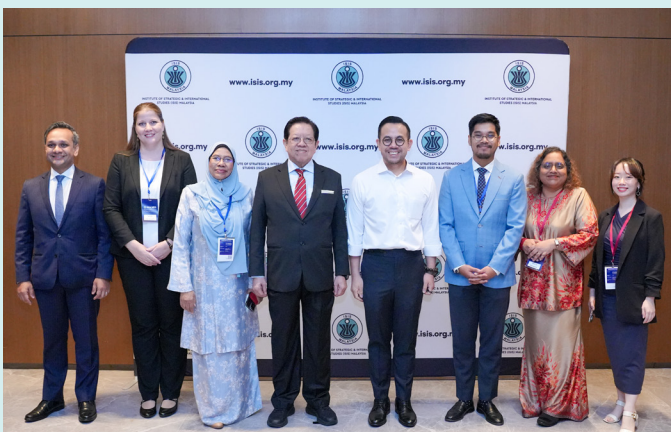
Malaysia stands for peace and progress, fellow feeling and, above all, abiding adherence to international law and cooperation. Nor will the nation choose sides when it comes to the US-Sino rivalry. The keynote also focused on ASEAN, pointing out that is in a position of strength to embrace the future with confidence and vigour.

In October, the chairman accompanied the prime minister to [Pakistan](#) where the latter, quoting the renowned Pakistani poet-philosopher Iqbal, called on the Muslim world to chart a path towards renewal and progress while accepting an honorary doctorate conferred by the prestigious National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST).

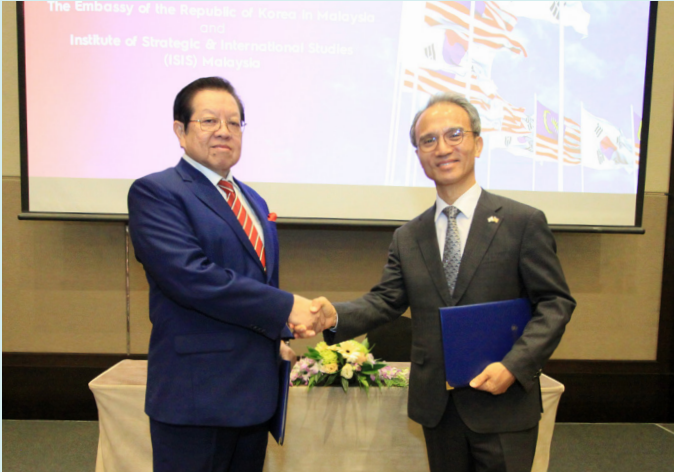
ASEAN's dynamism and achievements, however, do not detract from the fact that existing mechanisms like the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit are underutilised when it comes to addressing, for instance, the crisis in Myanmar, given the scale of death, displacement and fighting there.

The chairman also engaged in high-level travels with the prime minister to the [44th and 45th ASEAN Summits](#) in Vientiane as Malaysia geared up for its ASEAN chairmanship in 2025; Cairo where PM Anwar delivered a [public lecture](#) at Al-Azhar University; and in November, [Peru hosted the APEC summit](#) and as the world braced for a second [Trump administration](#) and the spectre of a tariff showdown, leaders from 21 of the Pacific basin's largest economies gathered in Lima to grapple with the unsettling prospect of witnessing the unravelling of a decades-old consensus: the credo that free trade is an unequivocal good for all.

At our flagship PRAXIS 2024 in August, Prof Faiz delivered the welcoming remarks where he alluded to the theme ‘Policies for a better tomorrow’, asking how public policies could play a role to advance economic equity, social progress and sustainable development.



Prof Faiz opened the Malaysia Scholars on Korea (MASK) public seminar in October, which focused on elevating ROK-Malaysia ties during the ASEAN chairmanship year. Korean ambassador HE **Yeo Seung-bae** on behalf of the Korean Embassy signed an MoU with ISIS Malaysia to continue promoting knowledge generation and exchanges, as well as connectivity among people and connectivity of ideas.



Another high-profile visit took place at the end of November, with Prof Faiz accompanying the PM to Seoul. The PM delivered a lecture titled 'Strategic partners in a complex world: Malaysia, Korea and the future of Asia' where he spoke of his own student activism days, the complexity of international relations because of the disregard of international norms and heightening competition.

This was a call for [Malaysia and South Korea](#) to steer the path of economic justice through proactive collaboration. Both should take advantage of South Korea's APEC chairmanship in 2025 as Malaysia helms ASEAN in the same year.

The year 2025 will also be the 65th anniversary of Malaysia-South Korea relations. The relationship elevated to a strategic partnership with the PM's visit could be the catalyst for further relations between Malaysia and South Korea, especially in AI, technology development and engagements on international norms.



In December, Prof Faiz chaired the [14th general conference](#) of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific or CSCAP. In Malaysia's ASEAN chair year, Asia-Pacific must rise to the challenges and seize the opportunities ahead. Resilience is key. And to build such resilience, the region should diversify supply chains; establish strategic reserves and maintain strategic reserves to stabilise our economies and ensure availability of resources; and invest in digital infrastructure for trade, such as blockchain, AI and automation.

But Prof Faiz was in his element at the year-end family retreat in Ipoh. He stole the show at the karaoke session, belting out oldies but goldies from Diana Ross, Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley and more!



ASEAN, KOREAN THEMES

The pace did not slow down in the last quarter of the year. On 9 October, ISIS Malaysia in collaboration with Third World Network hosted the COP29 masterclass. As a precursor to the 29th Conference of Parties (COP29) taking place on 11–22 November in Baku, Azerbaijan, the programme brought together various national stakeholders, emphasising on learning through sharing by experts and interactive breakout sessions. **Kieran Li Nair** and **Afandi** later authored a [report based on the masterclass](#).

The closed-door roundtable ‘Mitigating tensions and fostering collaborative approaches in the South China Sea’ took place on 15 October, with Angeline, Thomas and Shahriman leading the ISIS Malaysia team. The visitors included Capt (rtd) **Andy Shichen Tian**, Dr **Albrecht Schnabel**, **Rohit Karki**, **Sumathy Permal**, Dr **Ngeow Chow Bing** and Dr **Adam Leong**.



We also hosted two major events in October – the NextGen and [16th ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand \(AANZ\) dialogue](#), and the MASK (Malaysia Scholars on Korea) programme.

The NextGen masterclass kicked off on 22 October with a programme focused on the world of Track 2 diplomacy, featuring Dr **James To**, Dr **Julia Macdonald**, **Kenneth Leong**, **Caleb Hoyle** and Dr **Pia Dannhauer**.

Over the next two days, participants took part in eight sessions focused on the AANZ relationship today; bolstering regional resilience; the US elections and the Indo-Pacific; changing media landscape; strengthening investment in ASEAN’s developmental imperatives; 50th anniversary of dialogue partnership; ageing populations, intra/inter-regional migration and the future of work as foreign policy issues; and ASEAN in 2025 and beyond.

Among the moderators and speakers were HE **Datuk Astanah Abdul Aziz**, Dr **Mohamad Azmi**, **Bianca Birdsall**, **Kavi Chongkittavorn**, Dr **Thi Bich Tran**, **Colin Peacock**, **Fithra Faisal Hastiadi**, **Penny Burt**, **Hone McGregor**, **Jean Clarisse Carlos**, Prof **Nicholas Farrelly**, HE **Tiffany McDonald**, **Jean Clarisse Carlos**, Prof Dr **Lan Anh Hoang**, **Hoang Thi Ha**, Dr **Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc** and HE **Stuart Calman**.



On 29 October, the MASK programme looked at elevating [Malaysia-ROK relations](#) to the next level, especially in economic areas. It explored Malaysia’s ASEAN chairmanship while investigating meaningful engagements for ASEAN beyond 2025.

Amid geostrategic flux and geopolitical power competition, Malaysia and South Korea could catalyse a partnership that strengthens ASEAN and its approaches towards security, economy and socio-cultural prosperity.

Ambassador HE **Yeo Seung-bae** and Prof **Faiz** delivered the welcoming and opening remarks, followed by two panel sessions.



Meena moderated panel 1 on the ASEAN-South Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, featuring Dr **Lee Jaehyon**, Geetha and **Jukhee Hong**. Arividya moderated panel 2 on the economic route to stronger Malaysia-South Korea ties with panellists Dr **Ko Young Kyung**, Dr **Pieter Stek** and Chin Tong.

Throughout the month, we continued to welcome a spate of visitors, including representatives from Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Malaysia; Dr **Xu Bu**, a member of the High-level Board on Effective Multilateralism of Secretary-General of the United Nations; high commissioner-designate of Canada **Jodi Robinson**; and ambassador of Malaysia to Italy HE **Zahid Rastam**.

Deepavali rounded off October, falling on the last day of the month.

On 8 November, the ETRI team led an internal workshop on data science for policy research with R. Hanson ran the workshop to provide participants with a conceptual framework for understanding big data and build practical skills required to apply data science techniques to policy research.

The year 2024 also marked 50 years of diplomatic ties between Malaysia and China. To commemorate the golden jubilee, we produced a [special focus](#) on the “enduring friendship” between the two nations.

Prof Faiz, Nushirwan, Ma Bo, Prof **Evelyn Devadason**, **Ke Yian**, Farah, Angeline, Dr **Nur Shahadah Jamil**, Dr **Ngeow Chow Bing**, Prof **Wang Ruifang** and Jaideep contributed articles ranging from youth engagement to Global South solidarity, Digital Silk Road, Belt and Road Initiative and trade.

On 12 November, we hosted a closed-door dialogue featuring Lowy Institute’s **Richard McGregor**, who discussed President **Xi Jinping** and China’s foreign policy.



HECTIC LAST QUARTER

We ended the year hosting another major conference – the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific or CSCAP. The three-day [CSCAP general conference](#) took place on 2-4 December at KL Hilton, starting with a welcoming dinner followed by two days of sessions.

Prof Faiz and Prof **Ralph Cossa** opened the 14th general conference and Foreign Affairs Minister Mat Hasan delivered the keynote address.

The first session on day 1 covered the international order – who sets the rules and norms? Can multilateralism “save” the established order? Thomas moderated the session featuring Dr **Joel Ng**, Prof Dr **Kirill Babaev**, Dr **Liu Qing** and **Lizza Bomassi**.

Shahriman led session 2 on the security and economic implications of political change in Asia-Pacific. **Andrew Mantong**, Prof Dr **Ken Jimbo**, **Philip Turner** and Cossa discussed Indonesian foreign policy; instability in Japanese politics; voting trends and the impact on smaller states; and what to expect from a second Trump administration.

Session 3 evaluated the security dimensions of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus frameworks. HE Dr **Luan Thuy Duong**, **Huy Kanthoul Vora**, Gen (rtd) **Jerdwut Kraprayoon**, **Lawrence Anderson** and Prof Faiz discussed the US-Sino rivalry in the region, South China Sea dispute, Myanmar, ASEAN centrality, Quad and AUSKUS.



On day 2, Mohamad delivered the keynote address where he urged the Global South to navigate an everchanging geopolitical environment and build its own resilience – by strengthening regional defence frameworks, developing conflict-resolution mechanisms and enhancing maritime security collaboration.

the discussion featuring Dr **Go Myong-Hyun**, **Jaime B Naval**, Ma Bo, Azmi and Keng Yong on ASEAN’s security threats. Rivalry, free trade, rules of power, trust, and the importance of transparency and institutions were just some of the highlighted topics.



Session 4 covered economic resilience and supply chain diversification. Dr **Bradley Murg** moderated **Elena Burova**, Prof Dr **Prabir De**, **Sam Hardwick** and Dr **To Anh Tuan**.

Session 5 looked at a big topic – impact and role of tech in a region most vulnerable to climate change. Dr **Aaron Jed Rabena** moderated Dr **Dhruba Purkayastha**, who cautioned against technology’s failure to capture policies; **Asoka Rasphone**, who spoke about the agricultural transformation in land-locked Laos; and Afandi, who touched on Malaysia’s green transition.

The final session was on the “explosive” subject of geopolitical uncertainty in Asia-Pacific with Capie leading

Malaysia has been a key partner for Japan since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1957. In December 2023, Japan-Malaysia relations were elevated to a Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership, leading to wide-ranging collaborative initiatives.



As Malaysia assumes the ASEAN chairmanship in 2025 on the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the East Asia Summit, both nations are seizing the opportunity to align their strategic interests.

On 13 December, we hosted the [Malaysia-Japan relations forum](#) with Prof Faiz and Japanese ambassador to Malaysia HE **Noriyuki Shikata** making the opening remarks. Angeline moderated the session on Japan’s foreign policy evolution,

Global South aspirations and Malaysia's perspective, featuring Prof **Tosh Minohara** and Prof Datuk Dr **Zakaria Ahmad**.

The lively discussion saw some hard-hitting Q&A on Malaysia's attempt to remain neutral in the face of the US-Sino rivalry in our backyard; defence ties; green transformation; the possibility of Japan joining [AUKUS](#); expectations of Malaysia's ASEAN chair year; joint Malaysia-Japan operations in the maritime domain; and production of nuclear-powered submarines, among others.

The full proceedings are available on our [YouTube](#) channel.



On 15 December saw the launch of NAIIO with My Digital Corp sponsoring 1,000 copies of the white paper authored by Farlina and Farah.

At the NAIIO launch, [Farlina joined a panel](#) on the future of Malaysia's AI governance. She shared key takeaways from the white paper, including the need for a captain to steer Malaysia's AI efforts, address legal gaps, refine approaches to AI safety and consider ethical and innovative data governance.

In mid-December, the entire office decamped to Ipoh for a family retreat at the Haven All Suite Resort.



This was a much-needed bonding session for all staff members. More than 110 employees and family members enjoyed an array of activities and food, including a convivial evening of karaoke.



The limestone hills and tranquil lake at the resort provided a stunning backdrop for two days of team building. There were a series of challenges – mapping and brainstorming – designed to “test” our abilities to work together and communicate effectively.

And in the third week of December, Farah presented the final staff presentation on gig workers ahead of the tabling of the gig workers' bill. She argued that the ride-hailing and delivery service sectors have created a misclassification of gig workers' employment status. These workers are considered as “independent contractors” and assumed to be protected under the Malaysia Contract Act 1950 and Self-Employed Act 2017. However, their nature of work does not fit into either an “independent contractor” or “employee” category.

Farah is pushing for a third employment category as the optimal solution to the gig work landscape to balance flexibility and fairness/equity.

Activity report 2024

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