



ASEAN & ISIS Malaysia

Activity report | 2025

The year 2025 was a momentous one for Malaysia as it assumed the ASEAN chair. The [chairmanship was tied closely to ISIS Malaysia](#), with chairman Datuk Prof Dr **Mohd Faiz Abdullah** serving as the Malaysian representative on the ASEAN Regional Forum Experts and Eminent Persons (ARF EEP) meeting and hosting the [ASEAN Circle of Eminent Persons \(ACEP\) meeting](#) in April. At the welcoming dinner on 7 April, he alluded to the group’s crucial role in shaping constructive engagement in the Asia-Pacific, especially in its early years.

Starting the ASEAN year off strong, Faiz did back-to-back interviews on 9 January with [TV3’s flagship morning show](#), *Malaysia Hari Ini*, and Astro Awani’s **Melisa Idris** to discuss the significance of [Malaysia’s ASEAN chairmanship](#) theme of “inclusiveness and sustainability”, as well as our focus on a rakyat-centric agenda.

One of the major ASEAN-related events at ISIS Malaysia was a podcast series spearheaded by **Angeline Tan**. The [first episode](#) published on 17 April on [Malaysia’s chairmanship agenda](#) featured Prof **Kuik Cheng-Chwee**, who unpacked Malaysia’s legacies as ASEAN chair and expectations for the year.

Episode 2 featured Assoc Prof **Ngeow Chow Bing** who [discussed the South China Sea](#) – a region rich in natural resources and a crucial shipping lane at the heart of global trade and regional tensions. From overlapping territorial claims to China’s increasing presence and ASEAN’s efforts to negotiate a Code of Conduct, [this episode](#) discussed the complexity of Malaysia’s approach – both bilaterally and within ASEAN.

In the third episode in September, Tan Sri Dr **Rebecca Sta Maria**, former secretary-general of the Ministry of Investment, Trade & Industry (MITI), shared her insights and experience in the [ASEAN Economic Community’s formation](#), negotiating free trade agreements and the implementation of the Digital Economy Framework Agreement.



Episode 4 focused on the [Myanmar crisis](#). **Lilianne Fan**, head of secretariat for the Malaysian Advisory Group on Myanmar, discussed the current situation in Myanmar and the complex dynamics at play; challenges in delivering humanitarian assistance; and the Rohingya question within Myanmar’s broader crisis.

Faiz capped off the podcast series, reflecting on [Malaysia’s chairmanship year](#) of diplomacy, challenges and breakthroughs. Among the highlights were Timor-Leste’s historic accession to ASEAN; the inaugural ASEAN-GCC-China trilateral summit; and navigating regional challenges like the Thai-Cambodia border clash.

The series of ASEAN-related events culminated in the publication of a book launched on 24 October during the [2nd ASEAN Summit](#). Developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *ASEAN in 2025: shaping an inclusive and sustainable future*, offered insights into the challenges and opportunities facing Southeast Asia.

With contributions from more than 30 leading thinkers, *ASEAN in 2025* served both as a legacy of Malaysia’s chairmanship year and a forward-looking guide to build a stronger and more resilient ASEAN. The launch was officiated by Minister of Foreign Affairs Dato’ Seri Utama **Mohamad Hasan** (Tok Mat).





VISITORS GALORE

We started off on 10 January hosting more than 40 students from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and reviving a tradition of [engaging with youth](#) keen to learn about public policy. **Yvonne Tan** and **Kieran Li Nair** shared their insights into social and climate policies, sparking lively discussions on the care economy and climate action.

A fortnight later, we welcomed a student delegation from Universiti Sains Malaysia’s Econ Quest Expedition. They participated in a [briefing session](#) with the Economics, Trade and Regional Integration (ETRI) team, led by **Calvin Cheng**, **Qarrem Kassim**, **Jaideep Singh** and **Hanson Chong**, diving deep into the world of policy research, exploring the dynamic landscape of professional careers in policy, workings of the policymaking process and the challenges of targeted subsidies and fiscal policy.

In February, we hosted delegates from the [Atlantic Council’s Millennium Leadership Programme](#). Dubbed an ‘Evening conversation: reflections on Malaysia’s domestic and foreign priorities’, the event served as an informal and frank synthesis of the day’s deliberations. **Shahriman Lockman** moderated the proceedings featuring Dr **Syed Hassan Abedin**, National Security Council Director-General Raja Dato’ **Nushirwan Zainal Abidin**, **Harris Zainul** and **Thomas Benjamin**.

The NSC director-general provided a sweeping assessment of the nation’s challenges – the US-Sino trade war, maximising its strategic space, demographic dividends and why the West should fear a “weak” China than a strong one.

On 18 February, we caught up with friends from [Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung \(KAS\)](#) Malaysia’s political dialogue Asia programme and Malaysia office – **Andreas Klein**, **Miriam Fischer**, **Moritz Fink**, **Kathrin Moser** and **Idzaid Idros**. We discussed upcoming programmes and the latest in European political-security developments. The meeting strengthened our long-term partnership and commitment to open policy dialogue.

Less than a week later, we welcomed a delegation from [Universiti Malaysia Sabah](#). Harris, Thomas, **Farlina Said**, Dr **Yanitha Meena Louis**, Angeline, **Izzah Ibrahim** and



Zikri Rosli led discussions centred on leveraging on ISIS Malaysia’s expertise to support UMS’ academic initiatives, particularly in policy analysis and design. We also engaged in insightful dialogues on critical domestic and foreign policy issues, and Malaysia’s role in ASEAN.

In May, it was Taylor’s University’s turn. Our discussion focused on how AI is transforming the way youth engage with knowledge – and what that meant for policymaking in the digital age. We explored everything from crafting national policies and the crucial role of impact measurement to the power of tone and delivery in policy discourse.

On 5 June, we hosted delegates from the Indian National Defence College. Thomas, Meena, Angeline, Izzah and Zikri led the discussion on ASEAN centrality at the heart of regional security strategies, local and regional insights into the Indo-Pacific, the Myanmar crisis and South China Sea dispute.

In August, vibrant minds from Universiti Malaya’s International Relations Society joined us for an inspiring dive into the world of policy research. Our research team shared their journeys, roles and passion for shaping impactful policies.

ACTIVITIES AND ADDITIONS

On 14 January, Harris undertook a review of the past year and shared plans for the year ahead and outlined the research output KPI. **Atikah Ishak** and **Tan Wan-Peng** updated on the event management and editorial and social media plans.

The next day, chief operating officer **Sohana Enver Azyez** led a staff seminar on anti-bribery and corruption. The session also unveiled revised staff benefits, ranging from medical to loans.

On 17 January, the ETRI team led a staff seminar on rare-earth elements (REE) and Malaysia’s bid to go up the REE value chain; and the impact of AI on the workforce.

Qarrem looked at how Malaysia could harness its industrial potential in rare earths, given that the nation is sitting on an estimated 18.2 million tonnes of REE deposits valued at nearly RM1 trillion. Local deposits remain “unbeneficiated”





On 23 January, we marked Chinese New Year with a lunch in the library featuring a yee sang toss and bidding **Zarina Zainuddin** farewell after more than three decades at ISIS Malaysia.

The other major festivities included our annual [Hari Raya Aidilfitri open house](#) in April although our joy was tempered by the devastating earthquake in Myanmar. The Deepavali lunch party on 12 November featured filmmakers **Kumanavannan** and **R Gogularaajan**, who shared the history of Tamil folk songs in Malaysian plantations.

because of challenges like lack of access to extraction technology, intense global competition and insufficient skilled talent in REE extraction and engineering.

Hanson delved into novel AI technologies and the future of work in Malaysia. As the pace of technological change is increasing, its consequences on work are becoming more widespread. The research looked at which jobs and who

March kicked off with [International Women's Day](#) – which we marked with a women of ISIS photoshoot. IWD2025's call to “accelerate action” was a call to empower. While the path to gender equality is long, we are inspired by the women of ISIS Malaysia and countless others who lead, innovate and break barriers every day.



were most vulnerable and what types of policies are needed to maximise the benefits of technology diffusion while limiting its negative impacts. Hanson also shared the report findings at a World Bank seminar on 29 April.

As part of HR initiatives, we hosted a simple Labour Day luncheon and birthday celebration on 8 May.

The year also saw a few additions, starting with human resources executive **Dinie Zulkafli** in January; public affairs senior manager **Rachel Priya** and researcher **Zikri** in February; researcher **Fahad Ijlal Nizam**, driver/clerk **Syariman**, admin assistant **Irdina Azli** and personal assistant to COO **Faridah Nasuha** in March; and event executive **Nur Umairah Ramli** in April.



In June, we welcomed senior strategic communications manager **Kristine Yap**; librarian **Nor Asfasyuhada Abdullah** joined in July. In August **Nyoomi Kamani** joined as a project manager; driver/clerk **Muhammad Faries Shazlee** and fellow **Tan Heang-Lee** joined in September; and HR assistant **Fatin Nabilah** in October.

Angeline and Jaideep teamed up for a staff seminar on 10 July themed ‘Malaysia and the great realignment’. Jaideep examined [Trump, tariffs and trade](#), the subject of a policy brief co-authored with Calvin. The paper broke down what was at stake and how policymakers should respond to mitigate risks arising from the Trump administration’s 24% “reciprocal” tariffs on Malaysian imports.

Angeline published a research note on the driving factors behind [China Plus One](#) – one of the major talking points in the supply chain conversation at the 38th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (38APR). Longer-term supply chain shifts, driven by “China Plus One” strategies, created both threats and openings.

This staff seminar examined both developments as interconnected features of a broader global transformation: the great realignment of the flows of commerce and development across the world.

A major part of an internship at ISIS Malaysia is a staff presentation at the end of their tenure. **Allyson Wong** talked about celebrity diplomacy in tourism on 12 September. Melaka’s appointment of Chinese actress Fan Bingbing as its tourism ambassador is a prime example of how foreign celebrities are utilised as tools of cultural diplomacy and economic strategy. Yet, despite the rising use of such endorsements, their effectiveness remains contested and underexplored.

Fahad was the second presenter, discussing Malaysia’s sugar “war”. Despite well-intentioned policies, interventions fall short, failing to influence consumer behaviour and improve public health outcomes.

A fortnight later, Zikri talked about Indonesia-China joint development, taking a critical look at the poor track record between China and Southeast Asian states. He analysed

Indonesia’s motivations for pursuing joint development and attempted to understand how the joint initiative on extracting hydrocarbon resources might unfold.

In October, intern **Nadzmi Wajdi** spoke about bolstering ASEAN-Korea people-to-people connectivity through visa liberalisation.

The staff seminars continued with **Ahmad Farhan** sharing how to utilise geographic information systems (GIS) and mapping with QGIS for policy analysis and Izzah on understanding Malaysia’s peacekeeping and conflict-resolution engagements.

ROUNDTABLES AND MORE

On 21 January, we co-hosted with the Embassy of Uzbekistan a [roundtable on strategic engagement between Uzbekistan and Malaysia](#). While Uzbekistan is Malaysia’s second-largest trading partner in Central Asia, both nations are keen to align strategies and explore synergies for stronger ASEAN-Central Asia cooperation, focusing on politics and security, economics and trade, education, tourism and sustainable development. We also inked a memorandum of understanding with the Development Strategy Centre.

Among the speakers and moderators were **Anis Rifhan Rosli**, Dr **Bakhtiyor Mustafae**v, Assoc Prof Dr **Roy Anthony Rogers**, Qarrem, Dr **Umid Abidkhojaev**, Dr **Kelvin Yii**, **Shakhzod Islamov** and HE **Kennedy Mayong**.

Less than a fortnight later, Izzah coordinated a British High Commission peace-making and mediation workshop, which aimed to exchange approaches to peace-making and mediation between UK experts from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM) and Malaysian experts, practitioners and policymakers.



A few days later, on 21 February, Dr **Kai Ostwald**, the HSBC chair in Asian research, University of British Columbia, spoke on [Canada being neighbours \(again\) with Trump's America](#) and outlining its Indo-Pacific strategy. He examined the “generational shift” in foreign policy, explored the opportunities and challenges faced by Canada in engaging with the Indo-Pacific, reflecting on historical patterns and contemporary shifts.

Towards the end of February, we held one of our larger in-house roundtables with the High Commission of India on [‘India’s Act East Policy](#) in the second decade: perspectives from ASEAN and India’.

As AEP enters its second decade, New Delhi seeks to reinvigorate its strategic ties with Southeast Asia, reflecting current geopolitical realities and the dynamic international order. The conference – supported by Meena, Jaideep and **Zayana Zakariah** – aimed to understand better how India could shape its AEP in the next decade and its implications for Southeast Asia.

Speakers Dr **Shristi Pukhrem**, Dr **Ton Sinh Thanh**, Prof Dr **Ravichandran Moorthy**, **Apurv Kumar Mishra**, **Neil Irwin Moreno**, Prof Dr **Evelyn Devadason**, **Shuva Raha**, **Meenakshi Raman** and Dr **Mirza Sadaqat Huda** delivered thought-provoking insights that would shape the future of India-ASEAN cooperation. We also [signed an MoU](#) with India’s Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) – a game-changing step towards strengthening green economic cooperation between Malaysia and India.

On 12 March, we hosted the [sandwich-generation crisis roundtable](#). The multi-stakeholder policy dialogue focused on easing the dual burdens of caring for ageing parents and children on Malaysian families, focusing on pension gaps for Malaysia’s sandwich generation; case for consumption-based contributory pensions; costs of inaction as rising childcare, eldercare and healthcare costs are straining middle-income households; ageing population impact; the role of women and care.

Among the speakers were Dr **Amjad Rabi**, Dr **Matthew Dornan**, Prof Datuk Dr **Norma Mansor**, Dr **Juanita Vasquez**, **Lee Min Hui**, **Chai Sen Tyng** and Calvin.



Ramadan is generally a quiet month but on 25 March, we held a joint workshop with King’s College London on supply chains and geopolitical crisis. The working paper presentation by Dr **Daniel Salisbury** and Dr **Rishika Chauhan** analysed frameworks of supply chain resilience, focusing on Malaysia’s role in the semiconductor supply chain, trade and investment patterns as well as ongoing risks and vulnerabilities.

The second session looked at Malaysia’s supply chain resilience with Prof **Matthew Moran**, **Andrew Chan**, **Li Lian Lim** and **Kalai Selvan Subramaniam** discussing the biggest challenges for semiconductor supply chain surety in Malaysia; opportunities for building resilience; and actions the government, industry and civil society could take to help build resilience.

Farlina convened a colloquium on ‘Military AI governance amid geopolitical rivalry’ on 25 April. The half-day workshop focused on the implications of military AI for Southeast Asia in an era of geopolitical competition. **Manoj Hajrani** highlighted the global gaps in rules in UN talks on lethal autonomous weapons and warned that Southeast Asia risks remaining consumers – not producers – of military AI tech without a unified regional voice in global discussions.

On 6 May, Harris, **Farah Nabilah**, **Nazran Johari** and **Samantha Khoo** spearheaded a workshop on ‘Guidelines for the safe and responsible use of social media platforms for ASEAN’. Its purpose was to gain feedback on the draft recommendations across four pillars – regulation, education, collaboration and sustainability – to support a harmonised and inclusive approach to social media governance in the region.

The follow-up workshop was held on 22 May to validate research findings and refine draft guidelines, ensuring they were relevant, coherent, feasible and reflective of regional priorities for effective implementation across all ASEAN member states.

June started with another publication – **Dhana Raj’s** [methane-emission report](#) produced jointly with the

HIGHLIGHTS OF CHAIRMAN'S 2025



As a major contributor to Malaysia's ASEAN chair year, chairman Datuk Prof Dr **Mohd Faiz Abdullah** had a packed diary taking him from Ankara to Pretoria.

But one of the milestones was the [publication of his book *Strategic Shift: Preparing Malaysia for a Turbulent Future*](#), launched by Minister of Foreign Affairs Dato' Seri Utama **Mohamad Hasan**, on 8 October.

The compilation of Faiz's writings and speeches between 2023 and 2024 discussed how Malaysia could position itself amid US-China rivalry, Indo-Pacific tensions and technological disruption. It also explored Malaysia's strategic response to a rapidly changing world order – where great-power competition, shifting regional dynamics and emerging technologies redefine the global landscape.

Raja Dato' **Nushirwan Zainal Abidin**, Director-General of National Security Council, provided opening remarks at the launch. Astro Awani's **Melisa Idris** moderated the fireside chat.

Among his ASEAN-related responsibilities, Prof Faiz [chaired the 17th ASEAN Regional Forum Experts and Eminent Persons meeting](#), where he urged the bloc to discard its "business-as-usual" approach. He highlighted how the chair's theme of "inclusivity and sustainability" reflected a bold vision for ASEAN – one where we proactively shaped regional dynamics rather than react to them.

At the sidelines of the 17th ARF meeting in April, Faiz [spoke with Astro Awani](#), discussing how the meeting tackled urgent political-security challenges with open, candid discussions; preventive diplomacy; and Trump's tariffs, among others.

At the [Boao Forum for Asia](#) annual conference in March, he emphasised the critical need for deeper ASEAN-led cooperation. At the roundtable, 'Towards the future of regional integration: openness & connectivity', he highlighted the stark contrast between our region's commitment to inclusive frameworks and the potential shift towards unilateralism. As traditional Western partners look inwards, revitalising ASEAN Plus Three becomes a strategic imperative.

Faiz also appeared in the [Boao Forum for Asia academic conference](#) in November in Chengdu, where he joined a distinguished panel for the roundtable on Asia-Pacific regional cooperation. The panel addressed pressing questions on upholding open regionalism in a fragmented world, transforming crisis into opportunity, and shaping the next phase of regional cooperation.

The ASEAN theme continued when Faiz met Australian High Commissioner HE **Danielle Heinecke** on 20 March where they discussed AHC's [steadfast support](#) of key initiatives like the Asia-Pacific Roundtable and ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Dialogue (ANZ). On the same day, Faiz met ASEAN



Secretary-General Dr **Kao Kim Hourn** and the [ASEAN Secretariat team](#). They dove deep into current regional challenges and charted a course for deeper collaboration. The discussion also focused on ASEAN Community Vision 2045, and Myanmar and Timor-Leste’s membership.

In Türkiye, during the [Antalya Diplomacy Forum \(ADF\) in April](#), he spoke about ASEAN’s evolving role on the global stage amid rising fragmentation and pressing challenges like supply chain vulnerabilities, climate change, AI governance and the shadow of Trump 2.0 tariffs.

Faiz moderated a crucial session with Türkiye Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs **Ayşe Berris Ekinci**; Malaysian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Datuk **Mohamad Alamin** and Assoc Prof Dr **Hatice Çelik**, exploring how ASEAN mechanisms could provide resilient and collaborative solutions.

As an adviser to the prime minister, Faiz also took part in the cabinet retreat on 22-23 February. The [retreat](#) was a mix of buzz sessions and breakout huddles where he presented

Malaysia’s diplomatic strategies, covering everything from Trump 2.0 to the Middle East, global conflicts and importance of our international partnerships.

In the same month, Faiz opened the conference on [India’s Act East Policy](#) (AEP) in the second decade, a collaboration between ISIS Malaysia and High Commission of India in Kuala Lumpur.

He highlighted how the next decade of AEP will define India-ASEAN relations amid global shifts, urging New Delhi to deepen collaboration in semiconductors, digital trade and green technology.

As the co-chair of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), Faiz [chaired a session](#) focused on ASEAN’s response and the future of Myanmar in the first week of February. The meeting sought to leverage on CSCAP’s expertise to generate insights into and recommendations to address the deepening political instability, violence and humanitarian crisis.





One of Faiz's favourite lecture duties is the [National Resilience College in Putrajaya](#). In his fifth appearance at NRC, he shared insights into Malaysia's ASEAN chairmanship and discussed shifting geopolitical currents, turbulence in Southeast Asia and how ASEAN must rise to meet the challenge.

At the sidelines of [COP30 in Belem](#), Faiz participated in the bilateral agenda between President **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva** and Prime Minister Dato' Seri **Anwar Ibrahim**, particularly the exchange of a memorandum of understanding between ISIS Malaysia and Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão (FUNAG), a public foundation affiliated with Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

For updates on the chairman's activities, see <https://www.linkedin.com/in/profdrmohdfaizabdullah/>

On 26 May, he took part in the [World Economic Forum's Energy Transition in ASEAN forum](#). Sharing the forum with Deputy Investment, Trade & Investment Minister **Liew Chin Tong** and other speakers from Japan, Singapore and Indonesia, they discussed how Malaysia is leading with "inclusivity and sustainability" as ASEAN chair. Malaysia is championing the ASEAN power grid; stronger regional cooperation, harmonised policies and convergence of capital and markets to fast-track the clean economy; and a holistic vision, leading the global charge to a cleaner and fairer future.

In the run-up to the ASEAN-GCC-China Summit in May, Faiz [published an op-ed](#) in *The Edge* on how this summit was a pivotal moment for building resilience and exploring innovative solutions in key sectors like green energy, semiconductors, food security and digital economy.





Environmental Defence Fund – on Malaysia’s methane-reduction initiatives within the oil and gas (O&G) sector.

The report highlighted that meaningful methane reductions in O&G have been achieved by focusing on our most asset: people. By upskilling, reskilling and expanding job scopes, the Malaysian workforce is adapting to meet the demands of the energy transition. This proactive approach is key to cleaner operations.

The events team marked a milestone moment when Atikah and **Nani Aris** organised their [first international workshop](#) in Siem Reap, Cambodia, on 10-11 June.

Farlina and Farah ran the workshop to advance the conversation on ASEAN’s cybersecurity cooperation strategy. The discussions covered key milestones since

ASEAN’s cyber cooperation journey began in 2017 and looked at emerging digital threats and technology vulnerabilities, among others.

FLAGSHIP EVENTS

On 29 May, in the lead-up to the 38APR, we hosted a [media high tea](#) to share what to expect from our flagship event in June and the new tools to support timely and thoughtful coverage of the event.

As ISIS Malaysia’s flagship international conference, APR convened more than 395 delegates from 44 countries, from 17-19 June.

Prime Minister Dato’ Seri **Anwar Ibrahim** returned for his third keynote address, highlighting ASEAN’s enduring relevance amid regional tensions. Foreign Minister Tok Mat also addressed participants, underscoring the importance of inclusivity, resilience, and multilateralism.

Plenary sessions covered leadership transitions in Southeast Asia, the China Plus One strategy, changing regional attitudes towards conflict, Myanmar crisis and the evolving role of the US. Concurrent sessions explored maritime security and the rise of unilateralism.

Distinguished speakers from the European Union, China and Australia contributed diplomatic perspectives during special addresses.

Full transcripts and recordings are available at apr.isis.org.my/media. The 38APR report is available [here](#). A [focus from](#)



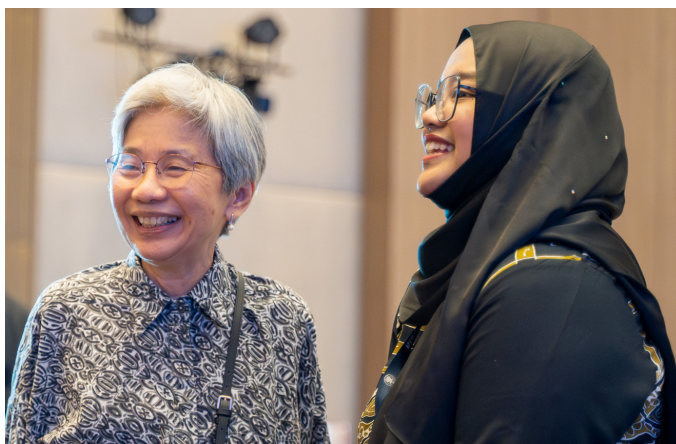


[38APR](#) was published in November featuring a number of panellists and keynote speakers.

In the same week as 38APR, on 10 July, Australian Foreign Minister **Penny Wong** was the featured speaker at a special forum organised jointly with the Australian High Commission.

The minister expounded on Australia’s approach to the region in her first foreign policy speech in Southeast Asia since the re-election of the Albanese government in May 2025. She then joined Faiz in a fireside chat, which was followed by a panel discussion on conflict prevention efforts in the region with Australia’s ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Expert and Eminent Persons – Dr **Huong Le Thu** and Prof **Rory Medcalf**.

July was also the month when we focused on PRAXIS 2025, which took place on 7 August. The first pre-PRAXIS 2025 roundtable was held on 17 July to explore the topic of the Southern Corridor as model for cross-border connectivity. **Benedict Kwok** spoke about digital economy infrastructure



investments; **Wan Agyl Wan Hassan** on high-speed rail and opportunities for cross-border connectivity; and Dr **Celia Lee** on talent attraction and development.

Less than a week later, the second roundtable focused on shaping Southeast Asia’s climate security for Malaysia’s future. Dr **Alistair Cook** led discussions on climate security in Southeast Asia.

The theme of [PRAXIS 2025](#) was ‘From fracture to future’ with the focus on how prepared Malaysia was to build what comes next in a shifting world. Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry Senator **Tengku Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz** was the keynote speaker.

Arividya Arimuthu moderated Session 1, which explored how external pressures, including shifting trade flows and new economic alignments, were reshaping Malaysia. The session featured Prof Dr **Sufian Jusoh**, Datin **Lorela Chia** and HE Dato’ **Astanah Abdul Aziz**.

Kieran moderated Session 2 on Southeast Asia’s climate security featuring Prof Tan Sri Dr **Jemilah Mahmood**, Prof **Mely Caballero-Anthony** and **Tomokazu Serizawa**.

Tan Sri Rebecca moderated Session 3 on Malaysia’s Southern Corridor as a model for cross-border connectivity. The speakers included Datuk **Syed Mohamed Syed Ibrahim**, Dr **Fauziah Zen** and Dr **Francis E Hutchinson**.

The finale featured Minister of Human Resources **Steven Sim**, who discussed the rapid changes in Malaysia’s labour landscape with Faiz. The session explored key reforms since 2023, including wage improvements, enhanced worker protections and upskilling initiatives.



HECTIC LAST TWO QUARTERS

Shortly after the successful conclusion of PRAXIS 2025, we co-organised the [Thai-Malaysia strategic dialogue](#) to foster the exchange of perspectives and the development of ideas to shape the Thailand-Malaysia Strategic Vision 2027. Ambassador of Thailand to Malaysia HE **Lada Phumas** was the keynote speaker.

Serving as an “intermission” was our [Malaysia Day potluck breakfast](#) held on 12 September. The morning tested our Merdeka knowledge with fun quizzes, including one on iconic Merdeka songs. The highlight? A Kedai Runcit Tok Abah set-up where staff could “shop” for nostalgic snacks!

Building on the success of the collaboration between ISIS Malaysia and Third World Network (TWN) in 2024 and ahead of the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) in Belem, Brazil, we held a [COP30 masterclass](#) themed ‘Climate in a divided world’ to examine the outcomes of COP29.



The key objectives were to assess national and regional climate agendas in the context of broader UNFCCC geopolitical developments and leveraging on Malaysia’s ASEAN chairmanship to unite stakeholders for ASEAN and South-South advocacy. HE **Daniella Ortega Menezes**, ambassador-designate of Brazil to Malaysia and Brunei, was the keynote speaker.

On 10-11 September, we joined Architects of Diversity Malaysia to organise a [workshop on platform and algorithm governance](#) in Malaysia. Harris represented us at the workshop bringing together researchers, policymakers, civil society leaders and lawyers to explore algorithmic bias, platform regulation and strategic litigation, surfacing key research questions, policy gaps and collaboration opportunities.

For many years now, ISIS Malaysia has hosted the AANZ dialogue. The 17th iteration was held from 16-19 September. The dialogue traditionally kicks off with [NextGen](#), a dynamic





workshop and roundtable introducing emerging leaders to Track 2 diplomacy.

The session welcomed up-and-coming talent from across the region for free-and-frank exchanges on security and foreign policy issues.

Faiz, Hon Dame **Fran Wilde** and **Martine Letts** provided [opening remarks](#) followed by a keynote address from Dato' **Zanariah Zainal Abidin**, Director-General of the ASEAN Malaysia National Secretariat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who shared insights into Malaysia's ASEAN chairmanship. The day continued with engaging sessions on multilateralism and inter-regionalism, cultural diplomacy and regional governance of AI.

Day 2 featured a keynote by HE **Joanna Anderson**, Ambassador of New Zealand to ASEAN, reflecting on [50 years of ASEAN-New Zealand relations](#). The day's sessions explored challenges in the region, including strategies to tackle transnational crime in Southeast Asia and role-building in the Indo-Pacific landscape.

On 22-23 September, Farlina facilitated a cybersecurity tabletop exercise on cyber crisis with Malaysia's security sector ahead of a [workshop](#), titled 'Untangling the algorithm: cross-border collaboration and security issues with AI'.

One of our more popular products is the series on Budget Day. Farhan, Calvin, Fahad, **Ganesha Pillai**, Hanson, Jaideep, Heang-Lee, Qarrem and Zayana shared their perspectives and key considerations of the fourth Madani



budget tabled on 10 October. They looked at fiscal policy; investment, trade and industry; education, social protection and jobs; climate change and sustainability; and transportation and housing.

Izzah later [published a piece](#) on Budget 2026 and funding for the Ministry of Defence, arguing that years of underfunding have led to a crippling capability gap.

TECH AND REGIONAL FOCUS

In October, we teamed up with the India Foundation to co-organise the first India-ASEAN strategic dialogue, marking a significant milestone in regional cooperation. The inaugural dialogue complemented formal Track 1 diplomatic engagements by incorporating diverse perspectives from academia, think-tanks, policymakers, industry leaders and civil society.

Faiz and Dr **Ram Madhav** delivered the welcoming address while HE **Prashant Agrawal** presented the keynote address. Deputy Minister Chin Tong and Indian High Commissioner HE **BN Reddy** shared the special address.

Publications continued with Samantha's research note on [sovereign AI cloud](#) or a secure, government-controlled digital infrastructure that ensures national data and computing power remain within Malaysia's borders. This was followed by a [focus on the Global South's climate agenda](#), released ahead of COP30.



The special edition featured contributions from policy experts, civil society voices and climate advocates. Topics explored included energy transition, adaptation and resilience, nature-positive development, indigenous people’s rights and technology transfer.

We continued our roundtables in November, partnering with Tech for Good Institute (TFGI) to bring together key thought leaders and stakeholders to explore the question of what [“good” looks like in Malaysia’s digital economy](#) by 2026. The programme explored the challenges, opportunities and strategic priorities shaping Malaysia’s digital future.

As one of the premier think-tanks focusing on foreign policy, we co-organised the [ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific Forum 2025](#) with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its theme, ‘Towards an inclusive and sustainable Indo-Pacific’, built upon AOIP’s aim to bridge geostrategic dialogue with sustainable development.

Dato’ Seri **Amran Mohamed Zin**, MOFA Secretary-General, reaffirmed that AOIP reflected ASEAN’s commitment to upholding a region that is open, inclusive and anchored in cooperation.

The two-day event featured more than 20 panellists discussing among others, the intersection of geopolitics and geoeconomics in the Indo-Pacific; linking AOIP with the ASEAN Community Vision 2045; and confidence-building measures in the maritime domain. Adopted in June 2019, AOIP underscores ASEAN centrality as the foundation for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

On 2 December, we launched *Investing in Malaysia’s care future*. The book was the product from a series of roundtables on the care economy. Curated by Datuk Prof Dr **Denision Jayasooria**, the book positioned the [care economy](#) as a powerful engine for economic growth and

social wellbeing. A week later, we hosted delegates from the [Network of ASEAN-China Think-Tanks](#). The visit featured the annual conference and the country coordinators’ meeting, where discussions centred on inclusivity and sustainability as guiding principles for ASEAN-China relations.

The next day, on 9 December, we hosted the [Japan-ASEAN roundtable](#) on aligning priorities in a shifting Indo-Pacific. The roundtable explored how Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific and ASEAN’s AOIP could align to address emerging risks and reinforce shared priorities.

At year-end, Qarrem co-authored with Zayana and Fahad the policy brief [‘From mine to magnet’](#), on REE. Its [launch on 10 December](#) was accompanied by a roundtable, exploring how Malaysia can harness its rare earth potential while ensuring the sector served both as a driver of growth and a pillar of sustainability.

ISIS Malaysia has played a pivotal role as coordinator of the Malaysia Scholars on Korea (MASK) network. On 11 December, we convened a half-day [MASK programme](#) on the significance of Malaysia and South Korea helming ASEAN and APEC respectively.

As the year wound down, we held our annual dinner on 12 December, themed ‘Tales and characters come to life’, with staff members dressed as a character they loved. Highlights of the evening included Sohana dressed as Maleficent; lucky draw with the top prize of an e-scooter going to **Faizal Malik**; and karaoke sessions.

In the third last week of the month, colleagues from across departments came together in Cyberjaya for a [strategic planning retreat](#). The goal was to align priorities, strengthen collaboration and chart a clear path for the year ahead and beyond.



Activity report | 2025



Discover more

