

39 APR
**ASIA-PACIFIC
ROUNDTABLE**
Accelerating agency and action

The logo features a large, stylized '39' in yellow and blue, with a circular emblem containing a blue and white swirl design. To the right of the '39' are two smaller circular logos: one for 'ISIS MALAYSIA' and another for 'ASEAN-ISIS'. The text 'APR' is in large blue letters, followed by 'ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE' in white, and the tagline 'Accelerating agency and action' in white below a thin green horizontal line.

30 June – 2 July 2026
Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur



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ASEAN-ISIS

The ASEAN-ISIS network is an association of think-tanks registered with ASEAN. Formed in 1988, its members are Brunei Darussalam Institute of Policy & Strategic Studies (BDIPSS); Cambodian Institute for Cooperation & Peace (CICP); Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia; Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) of Lao PDR; ISIS Malaysia; Myanmar Institute of Strategic & International Studies (MISIS); Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, Inc (APPPFI) of the Philippines; Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA); Institute of Security & International Studies (ISIS) Thailand; and Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV).

The network encourages cooperation among scholars and analysts to embark on policy-oriented studies and exchanges on issues affecting Southeast Asia's peace and security. It also serves as a platform for track-two diplomacy and enjoys a close relationship with ASEAN governments.

Asia-Pacific Roundtable

The Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR) is the signature international conference of the Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia. At its core, the APR is a Southeast Asian conference discussing key issues impacting on Asia-Pacific. It is one of the region's premier Track-Two gatherings, ranking among the world's top 20 strategic-security focused conferences.

Convened by ISIS Malaysia, on behalf of the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic & International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS), a network of leading Southeast Asian policy institutes and think-tanks, APR regularly attracts more than 300 thinkers who engage in lively, frank and constructive conversations on issues shaping the region's security, stability, sustainability and prosperity.

The APR brings together experts from across the region to explore the latest trends and developments. It aims to provide insights into how businesses and governments could navigate an increasingly complex strategic landscape.

Foreword by the Executive Chairman

For nearly four decades, the Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR) has provided a unique forum for examining the strategic currents shaping our region. What began as a modest gathering of scholars, policymakers and practitioners has evolved into one of the Asia-Pacific's most enduring and respected track two dialogues. Its founding premise, while simple, remains ambitious: to create a space where diverse perspectives could be exchanged candidly, constructively and in the spirit of mutual respect.

The roundtable's longevity reflects not only the continued relevance of that vision but also the generosity, intellectual curiosity and sustained commitment of the many individuals and institutions who have contributed to it over the years. It has coalesced into a forum where ideas are tested, assumptions challenged and occasionally, common ground discovered.

The theme of the 39APR, "Accelerating agency and action", builds upon conversations from the previous two themes, which explored the geopolitical interregnum and the need for strategic recalibration. As strategic competition intensifies and the ideal of an international order becomes more blurred, the challenge before regional states is no longer simply one of balancing principle and pragmatism. Rather, it is about preserving the capacity to exercise agency, not only to respond to external pressures but by shaping outcomes through deliberate choices, collective action and sustained strategic engagement.

This report captures the breadth of those discussions. With both our instigators and speakers, they examined the drivers behind the resurgence of great power unilateralism, the weakening of multilateral institutions and the erosion of established international norms. They also considered the evolving strategic relationship between China and India, and its implications for the Global South; the future relevance of ASEAN and its institutions amid

increasingly complex regional challenges; the re-emergence of nuclear proliferation and deterrence in strategic discourse; and the growing importance of critical minerals; resilient supply chains and economic security in an era of geopolitical contestation.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the many partners whose support made the 39APR possible. My thanks go to the Australian High Commission and the Boao Forum for Asia, as well as Delegation of the European Union to Malaysia, Embassy of the United States, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Embassy of Japan, Embassy of the Republic of Korea, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Above all, I extend my deepest gratitude to my colleagues at ISIS Malaysia, whose professionalism, dedication and unwavering commitment continue to uphold the high standards that have defined the roundtable.

Introduction



From 30 June to 2 July 2026, the Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, on behalf of the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS), convened the 39th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (39APR) at the Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur.

As ISIS Malaysia's flagship international conference, the APR provides a platform for policymakers, officials, academics, journalists, practitioners and students to exchange perspectives on the strategic, political, security and economic challenges shaping the Asia-Pacific. Through Southeast Asian lens, the conference seeks to promote open and forward-looking dialogue on regional and global developments. This year, 382 delegates from across 49 countries took part in the conference.

Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim returned to deliver his fourth keynote address. Despite mounting geopolitical challenges, he reaffirmed ASEAN's enduring importance as the cornerstone of Malaysia's foreign policy and as the key regional platform to advance peace, stability and shared prosperity. Given the growing erosion of respect for international law and norms, he

called upon the international community to continue upholding the rules-based order. He also underscored the importance of multilateralism and called on the Global South to play a more active role in strengthening and defending the international system.

In his dinner address, Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani focused on international economic diplomacy and its response to the changing relationship between economics and geopolitics. He observed that market access, technology and supply chains have increasingly become strategic assets, fundamentally reshaping international trade and investment. Against this backdrop, he argued that Malaysia should preserve economic openness where possible while strengthening resilience and maintaining strategic flexibility to navigate an evolving multilateral trade system.

The roundtable also featured addresses by distinguished international guests. Belgium's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Development Cooperation, HE Maxime Prévot, reaffirmed the strong partnership between Malaysia and Belgium, as well as the broader ASEAN-European Union relationship. He emphasised



the shared commitment to the rules-based international order, recognition of growing global interdependence and importance of multilateral cooperation in addressing common challenges.

ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn reflected on ASEAN's continued evolution and its ability to maintain regional agency amid

increasing uncertainty. Framing ASEAN's future around six interconnected pillars of peace, prosperity, planet, people, partnerships and possibilities, he emphasised that these principles collectively provide the foundation for a resilient, inclusive and forward-looking ASEAN community.



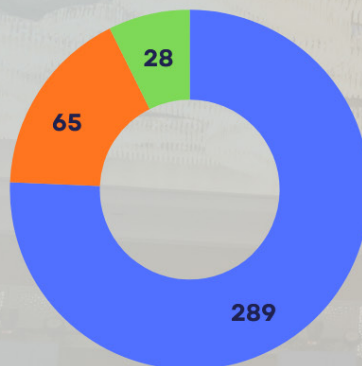
39APR *at a glance*

PARTICIPATION BREAKDOWN

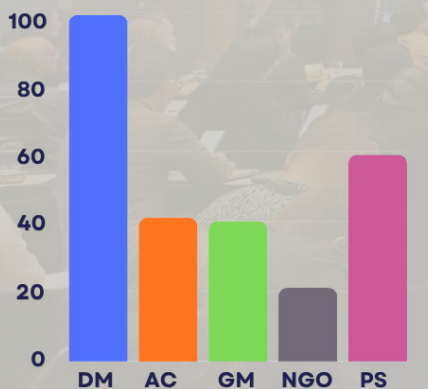
■ Delegates
289

■ Speakers
65

■ Media
28



DELEGATE BREAKDOWN



■ Diplomatic missions
99

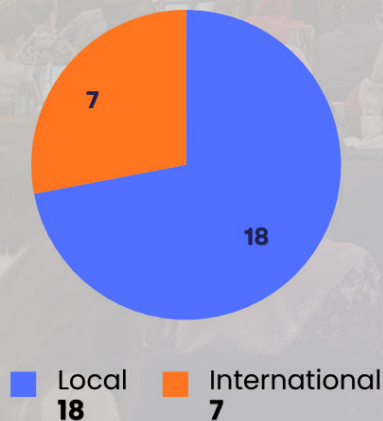
■ Academia/think-tanks
41

■ Government
40

■ NGOs/CSOs
21

■ Private sector
59

MEDIA OUTLETS



75

pieces of **media**
across radio, video
and text covering
the **39APR**



Keynote address by **Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim** **Prime Minister of Malaysia**

Professor Faiz, Chairman, ISIS Malaysia.

Professor Antoinette, Chair, ASEAN-ISIS Network for 2026.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to join you once again at this gathering of minds. The Asia-Pacific Roundtable has entered its 39th year and is still going strong as one of the foremost of regional strategic security conferences. Congratulations to ISIS Malaysia and ASEAN ISIS.

Malaysia's future is invariably linked to that of ASEAN. That is why I believe that ASEAN centrality, the misgivings notwithstanding, must remain the cornerstone of our foreign policy and a primary platform through which we advance not just our interests but also regional peace, prosperity, and stability. Some challenges came unexpectedly amid our tenure – a devastating earthquake in Myanmar, already in the throes of a civil war, the border clashes between Cambodia and Thailand, and the unilateral, unfair and fundamentally flawed tariffs imposed by the United States.

On Myanmar, when ASEAN leaders met recently in Cebu, we deliberated if our efforts could be bolder or more creative. Future engagements must not merely be more proactive and comprehensive but also more pragmatic. This is why ASEAN should continue to engage all sides in Myanmar – the authorities in Naypyidaw, opposition political parties, ethnic armed groups, and local NGOs.

It cannot be overstated that the eventual political settlement must be a Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led process, not one imposed externally. It will be a long process, and this where ASEAN centrality will be pivotal in fostering our collective determination to move forward.

On the Thai-Cambodian situation, I am encouraged that my friends, Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and Prime Minister Hun Manet, remain committed towards a lasting peace. We must approach issues with clarity and conviction – head on where possible and discretely where necessary – always seeking to uphold a united front among ASEAN members, and to collaborate where possible with likeminded dialogue partners.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Malaysia welcomes the understanding reached between the United States and Iran towards ending months of hostilities, and commend the efforts of the Gulf countries, Türkiye, Pakistan and others to bring about the MoU.

Food and energy prices remain high as countries seek to secure supplies. Billions of dollars, which could have been used for social and economic development, have instead been diverted to procuring essential goods.



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Might now makes right, as does narrow national interests. Even at the expense of rubbishing the sanctity and legal obligations of an international contract.

Yet, as we have seen been and now over these last few days, peace is both fragile and susceptible to sabotage. Violations to the MoU are a real concern. Adhering to all terms of the ceasefire and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to international shipping must now be treated as a matter of the highest urgency.

These are not mere statistics on paper, they impact on livelihoods. Yet we all know that this conflict did not happen in a vacuum. Our attention should not be drawn away from the overall situation in West Asia: the relentless bloodletting of Palestinians, the genocide in Gaza and the incessant bombardment of Lebanon.

It bears repetition that the continued occupation, oppression and dispossession of the people of Palestine is part and parcel of the insidious campaign of settler colonialism pursued by the Zionists.

History reminds us of the years we had spent in waging war against colonisation, fighting tooth and nail against oppressors to reclaim our lands and independence. Today, can we in good conscience just sit idly by while this insidious form of colonisation continues to be perpetrated with impunity?

The latest findings of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry of the actions of Israeli security forces since 7 October 2023 reveal a story of untold and unparalleled horror, with the systematic, deliberate and targeted killing of more than



20,000 Palestinian children and the inflicting of grave injury on another 44,000.

To my mind, this has reached a point where even the term genocide doesn't fully capture the barbarity, depravity and sheer evil of these heinous crimes committed by these murderers.

This remains a festering wound on the collective conscience of the world. The failure to intervene, especially by countries with the power to influence the Zionist regime, has only empowered them to expand their wars in the region.

Meanwhile, in Europe, the Russo-Ukrainian war continues its grind of death with civilians and public infrastructure targeted, and huge loss of life on all sides. In Sudan, the civil war rages on, largely ignored by the global community, also with horrific atrocities documented against noncombatants, some targeted based on tribe or ethnicity.

Let us be clear: such violence and brutality – whether in Europe, West Asia or Africa – must come to an end, with a cessation of hostilities that prioritises the protection of civilians. It paints a bleak future when humankind could otherwise be celebrating tremendous advancement of economic and technological growth.

Most disturbingly, the signs point towards a greater and systematic devaluation of respect for international norms and laws. Might now makes right, as does narrow national interests. Even at the expense of rubbishing the sanctity and legal obligations of an international contract.

Malaysia learnt this lesson recently when the delivery of our naval strike missiles was unilaterally cancelled by the Norwegian supplier, despite almost full payment being made. Our position on this to both the company and to the Norwegian government is crystal clear.

While Malaysia will continue to seek diplomatic and legal remedies, and do so in good faith, this episode speaks to a larger problem and dangerous trend of double standards by those who claim to stand for the rule of law and the hypocrisy of those who are conveniently muted on such violations. Is it acceptable for some countries to ignore international laws and norms, while others are subjected to the strictest standard of compliance?

If this is how partners in the West are going to treat those in the Global South, if the principle of "one rule for me, and another for thee" is indeed the norm they want to put forward, then it does not bode well for our future as



equitable partners and friends. As the old Dutch saying goes, “trust arrives on foot and departs on horseback”.

Strategic autonomy and active non-alignment

Ladies and gentlemen,

Given these challenging geopolitical and geoeconomic fluctuations, how can Malaysia navigate itself in an increasingly uncertain, undependable and transactional world? How do we uphold our agency and advance our interests?

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We take principled stances and positions but not sides. These include our unwavering support for the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law.

First and foremost, Malaysia’s foreign policy will remain independent, and that is fiercely independent, proactive and non-aligned. This is not merely clinging to the past but a calculated and deliberate approach which considers who we are, where we came from, what served us well and how we need to adapt.

We will not hesitate to adopt positions, cultivate relationships and support initiatives that advance our values, beliefs and interests. Malaysia cannot remain neutral on matters that involve fundamental rights, such as the Palestinian struggle or in countering Islamophobia or on our core national interests, including territorial sovereignty, even when it comes to powerful partners like China and the United States.

We take principled stances and positions but not sides. These include our unwavering support for the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law. The use of force or coercion, military or economic, will only compound resentment and unintended consequences. Other norms like the freedom of navigation, respect for sovereignty and adherence to established legal frameworks are essential for regional and global stability.

Multilateralism and the Global South

On that score, Malaysia reiterates its commitment to multilateralism and collaborative, consultative approaches in the conduct among nations. We do not just

support such mechanisms and approaches, we endeavour to do what we can to defend it.

Global governance should reflect contemporary realities. Developing countries deserve greater representation in decision-making with the perspectives of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific carrying greater weight. Global rules should be shaped with, not merely for, developing nations.

The answer to ever greater uncertainty and weakening of global norms and institutions is not less multilateralism but more effective cooperation. No one country can effectively address the ramifications of climate change, pandemics, food security or cyber threats alone. The international community should strengthen, not weaken, multilateral institutions.

Given our rich heritage and diversity, I believe Malaysia is uniquely positioned to build understanding across regions, cultures, and civilisations. We will continue to engage actively with the Islamic world while strengthening partnerships across the wider Global South.

Revitalised, proactive trade policy

Ladies and gentlemen,

Malaysia's position, role and influence as a trading nation, straddling global trade routes and supply chains, is a trademark of our economic diplomacy. In real terms, however, foreign policy is not merely about diplomacy or international trade – it is about jobs, investment, technology, education and opportunities for Malaysians.

Over the years, we have worked to deepen economic ties with our traditional trading and investment partners. Utilising existing free trade agreements, such as the ASEAN FTA, the RCEP, and the CPTPP, Malaysia has been at the forefront to streamline tariffs, improve market access and facilitate more equitable investment flows.

Concurrently, we also sought to expand trade with newer, less leveraged markets in West Asia, Central Asia, Latin America and across the African continent.

This is where economic diplomacy rides on geopolitics yielding an ideal combination.



Global rules should be shaped with, not merely for, developing nations.

Our approach is on genuine collaboration in areas, such as halal industries, digital economy, agriculture and green tech.

Above all, energy is strategically pivotal. Just recently, in conjunction with my official visit to Turkmenistan, Petronas signed agreements with state entities to explore and develop two massive gas fields. This was coupled with the signing of a long-term framework on hydrocarbon development, including the role of human and technical capital, between Malaysia and Turkmenistan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our goal is to strengthen existing partnerships, build new ones and keep our economic ties broad-based, resilient and forward-looking. In a more uncertain global environment, diversification is not just an economic strategy, it is a national necessity.

What we have strived for over the years when it comes to Malaysia's foreign policy may be stated as the following – an approach that is principled, yet not constrained by rigidity; ambitious and bold without being reckless; fiercely independent, without forsaking the spirit of conviviality and collaboration.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is our approach to the world, and must continue to be so.



Dinner address by **Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani** **Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry**

Let me begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia for inviting me to address the 39th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR). It is truly a privilege to join such a distinguished group this evening.

For nearly four decades, the APR has served as an important platform for dialogue on the strategic, political and economic issues shaping Asia and beyond. This year's theme, "Accelerating agency and action", is particularly relevant as we navigate an international landscape that is becoming increasingly complex, fragmented and uncertain.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For many years, economic integration was generally viewed as a stabilising force in international relations. Expanding trade and investment were expected to deepen interdependence between nations, ultimately reinforcing prosperity, stability, and cooperation.

Today, that assumption is being fundamentally tested as economic decisions are being increasingly affected by geopolitical considerations. Market access, technology, supply chains, energy and critical minerals have become strategic assets in bilateral and multilateral negotiations.

Recent years have exposed vulnerabilities embedded within the global economy. Strategic competition among major powers has highlighted the risks of excessive concentration and overdependence. Conflicts in different parts of the world have demonstrated how disruptions in one region can rapidly affect food and energy security as well as the greater supply chain networks across continents.

Distinguished guests,

For a highly open economy like Malaysia, with a trade-to-GDP ratio of roughly 151%, this shift presents profound challenges. As countries pursue their individual economic security objectives, the openness, predictability and



Strategic competition among major powers has highlighted the risks of excessive concentration and overdependence.

stability upon which international commerce has long depended are gradually being eroded.

We have witnessed the growing use of unilateral tariffs, export restrictions, industrial subsidies and increasingly, protectionist measures disguised as environmental or regulatory standards. While many of these measures raise legitimate questions about fairness and consistency, the concerns driving them are themselves genuine. Governments everywhere are grappling with issues of technological dependence, strategic resilience and national preparedness.

This is precisely why a business-as-usual approach is no longer sufficient. Countries must possess the strategic agility to adapt to changing circumstances, diversify their partnerships and make decisions that best safeguard their long-term national interests.

Malaysia does not believe the answer lies in defending an outdated model of globalisation. Nor do we accept economic fragmentation as an inevitable future. Rather, our objective is to preserve openness wherever possible, strengthen resilience where necessary and retain the strategic flexibility required to navigate an increasingly complex world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These developments inevitably raise important questions about the future of the multilateral trading system. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) emerged during a period where the prevailing belief was that lowering trade barriers and expanding market access would generate not only economic prosperity but also greater international stability.

Policymakers today operate in a very different environment. Economic policy is increasingly influenced by considerations of resilience, technological leadership, strategic autonomy, and supply chain security. In many respects, the debate has shifted from opening markets to how strategic capabilities should be protected.

Unless it evolves, there is a genuine risk that the WTO gradually loses relevance. Yet at a time of intensifying strategic competition, the need for credible multilateral rules has arguably never been greater. We need institutions capable of reducing uncertainty, managing disputes and preventing economic tensions from escalating into broader geopolitical conflict.

The WTO must be able to adapt to the realities of today's international economy. It must continue to serve the needs of every member country and be able to address discriminatory trade practices wherever they arise.

While Malaysia reaffirms our support for the multilateral trading system, we maintain that the system itself must evolve to remain fit for purpose in a rapidly changing world.

Distinguished guests,

Traditionally, economic diplomacy has been associated with trade negotiations, market access and investment promotion. Frameworks, such as ASEAN, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), among others, continue to provide valuable avenues to advance regional economic integration.

Within the context of the challenges that we face today, economic diplomacy can no longer be pursued in isolation but must be viewed through a broader lens. Similarly, foreign policy can no longer be viewed solely as a mechanism for managing political relationships.

It must also serve as a platform for securing economic opportunities, strengthening resilience, supporting technological upgrading, facilitating investment and expanding national strategic options.



We need institutions capable of reducing uncertainty, managing disputes and preventing economic tensions from escalating into broader geopolitical conflict.

The growing prominence of platforms, such as BRICS, reflects this broader evolution. BRICS was never conceived as a free trade agreement. Nevertheless, its growing appeal illustrates that countries are actively seeking complementary avenues to pursue economic cooperation, strengthen resilience, diversify partnerships and coordinate responses to shared challenges.

The prime minister's recent official visit to Central Asia reflects this new approach. Discussions extended well beyond conventional trade and investment, en-

compassing energy cooperation, logistics, digital connectivity and technology collaboration.

They underscore the reality that economic advancement increasingly depends upon partnerships that transcend traditional trade agreements.

This does not represent a departure from regional economic integration. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that economic diplomacy has become more diverse, more flexible, and considerably more multidimensional than in previous decades.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For middle powers, such as Malaysia, agency has become one of our most valuable strategic assets. Agency is not about choosing sides. It is about preserving the capacity to make sovereign choices.

It is the ability to diversify partnerships, strengthen resilience, cultivate new capabilities and maintain the strategic space to pursue our national interests.

One of the defining challenges of our time lies at the intersection of economics and geopolitics. Consequently, our challenge is to ensure that this intersection produces resilience without fragmentation, security without exclusion and prosperity without division.



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For middle powers, such as Malaysia, agency has become one of our most valuable strategic assets.

Malaysia will continue to support efforts to strengthen international institutions where they remain relevant and effective. At the same time, we must recognise that institutions, like economies, must evolve. We must, therefore, remain open to new ideas, new platforms and new forms of cooperation that complement existing institutions and help address emerging challenges.

Malaysia will continue to pursue pragmatic and inclusive economic diplomacy, one that expands opportunities, strengthens resilience and preserves the strategic flexibility required to navigate an increasingly uncertain world.

On that note, I wish all participants a productive and insightful roundtable.

Thank you.





Ministerial address by **Maxime Prévot** **Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs,** **Belgium**

It is a privilege to address you today at a moment where dialogue, cooperation and shared responsibility matter more than ever. Our gathering reflects the strength of the relationship between Malaysia and Belgium and more globally between the European Union and ASEAN.

There is a growing engagement between our regions, as shown, for example, by the intensification of high-level contacts: let me mention President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Prime Minister Anwar's visits to Brussels last year; or the state visit by their majesties the King and the Queen of Belgium to Vietnam. As well as my presence with you today, which aims at demonstrating a commitment to deepening our relationship.

At EU level, I could also mention the visits by the High Representative Kaja Kallas and the President of the European Council, Antonio Costa. As well as the 25th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting in Bandar Seri Begawan.

These frequent interactions are not merely symbolic: they reflect a growing recognition that our futures are interconnected.

At the heart of our partnership, lies a set of shared values: cooperation on the basis of mutual respect, the central role of diplomacy and a firm commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Together, we strive towards a common objective: ensuring prosperity, dignity and opportunity for every region, every nation, and every individual.

We can be ambitious in building stronger relationships, since their foundations are deeply rooted in history. To give you just one example: Filippino engineers graduated from the Belgian University of Ghent already in 1895.

Today, I would like to focus on three key dimensions of this evolving partnership: first, the importance of an international rules-based order; second, the reality of interdependence in a changing world; and third, the future of multilateralism, as our collective response.

The international rules-based order is a foundation that is under pressure. But in an era marked by intensifying geopolitical competition, the importance of maintaining



It is up to us to reinvent our relationship. And to capitalise on these changing times – to strengthen ties between Southeast Asia and the European Union, even further.

a rules-based international order cannot be overstated.

As geopolitical competition intensifies, the risk of returning to a system governed by power alone becomes more pronounced. A “might-makes-right” approach would undermine decades of progress and create instability that would affect us all.

The international legal order provides an essential framework that governs relations between states. It ensures predictability, facilitates economic cooperation and protects fundamental principles, such as sovereignty and territorial integrity. For medium-sized countries like Belgium, this framework is not abstract – it is essential.

This is why Belgium supports the work of the International Criminal Court. Accountability is a pillar of the international legal order.

This also why Belgium is committed towards a peaceful solution respecting the rights of both people in Israel and Palestine. Belgium does not practise double standards neither in Palestine, nor in Sudan, in DRC or in Ukraine. Our positions are based on international law.

For decades, the United Nations Security Council has been the guardian of compliance with international law. Its permanent members, more than anyone else, are supposed to embody a world order based on rules – that are not only known, but above all, observed.

Today, some hardly act as watchdogs anymore. This shakes all the balances and creates space for unchecked behaviour into which some countries are now rushing.

For too long, many parts of the world, including Europe, have been increasing their dependencies: militarily on the US; commercially on China; and in terms of energy on Russia.

Time has come to wake up. Time has come to strengthen our strategic alliances. Not by seeking to oppose anyone, but for the sake of principle: for the common good, rather than national isolationism.

“America great again” for example, is not “America alone”. Of course, the US remains a major ally of Europe, and probably of the ASEAN too.

It is up to us to reinvent our relationship. And to capitalise on these changing times – to strengthen ties between Southeast Asia and the European Union, even further. Between two reliable and two trustworthy partners. Representing together more than one billion people.

It is precisely this stability, this security and this predictability that forge the trust which policymakers and investors so desperately need in these turbulent times on the international stage.

In the Asia-Pacific, where maritime routes are vital to global trade and economic security, the importance of international law is even more pronounced.

Like most of the ASEAN countries, Belgium is a maritime nation with a very open economy. And as we approach the 10th anniversary of the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award, I reaffirmed two days ago, from Manila, our commitment to the UN Charter and to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). These instruments remain essential pillars of stability.

Of course, our partnerships are not limited to trade. They also encompass other dimensions, like security.

In March, we were happy to welcome coast guard experts from ASEAN member countries



In times of competition, rules are not a constraint: they are a necessity. They are the anchors that keep the international system stable, even amid turbulence.

to the port of Zeebrugge, for a study visit organised with the European External Action Service. It was an opportunity for exchanges with Belgian experts on the organisation of maritime safety in Belgium; and the coordinated Operation “Blue Intruder” led by the Belgian Coast Guard, where an oil tanker suspected of being part of the Russia’s shadow fleet was seized.

At a time when international norms are under increasing pressure, the EU, ASEAN, the Kingdom of Belgium and Malaysia share a responsibility to uphold international law and to strengthen multilateral institutions. If this framework weakens, uncertainty grows. If uncertainty grows, instability follows.

In times of competition, rules are not a constraint: they are a necessity. They are the anchors that keep the international system stable, even amid turbulence.

The 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) will be commemorated on 24 July 2026. This landmark agreement has served as a foundation for peaceful interstate relations in the region. As Belgium truly adheres to its values, I am happy to share that my government has decided to ratify it.

The second reality we must acknowledge is that of interdependence.

Europe and the Asia-Pacific may be geographically distant but in practical terms, we are closely connected. Our economies,

our security, and our societies are linked in ways that are both complex and profound.

The challenges we face today – climate change, economic disruptions, geopolitical tensions – do not respect borders. They spread across regions and affect us all.

This interconnectedness means that no country can act alone. What happens in one part of the world has consequences elsewhere. We have seen this through disruptions to global supply chains during Covid, through the economic downturn because of the conflict in the Strait of Hormuz, and through the shared impact of climate-related events.

But interdependence is not only a source of vulnerability – it is also a source of opportunity.

Our regions are home to some of the world’s most strategic ports and maritime routes. The Port of Antwerp-Bruges is the second largest port in Europe. By strengthening connectivity and cooperation, we can transform these links into drivers of shared prosperity.

Initiatives such as the collaboration between the Port of Antwerp-Bruges and Lumut Maritime Industrial City in Perak, illustrate this potential. By sharing expertise and strengthening connectivity, we move beyond competition towards genuine partnership.

The ASEAN Power Grid is another flagship project which could further strengthen the region’s connectivity. Through the Global Gateway strategy, the EU and its member states plan to mobilise €10 billion. The EU is supporting the ASEAN Power Grid and regional energy integration. This is a commitment to investing in long-term, sustainable and locally beneficial development.

By aligning strategies, Europe and ASEAN partners can create sustainable growth while reinforcing resilience.

At the same time, we must ensure that openness is balanced with robustness. Economic interdependence must go hand in hand with that of resilience: resilience in supply chains, in infrastructure and in policy frameworks.

Moreover, the concept of security itself must evolve. Today, security is no longer defined



solely in military terms. It encompasses economic stability, environmental sustainability and the capacity to respond collectively to crises.

In this context, interdependence calls for responsible cooperation. It is not a sign of weakness – it is an invitation to act together more effectively.

As we say in Belgium: strength lies in unity. Or in Bahasa: “Bersekutu bertambah mutu”.

Thirdly and finally, let me focus on the future of multilateralism. If interdependence defines our reality, then multilateralism must define our response.

Multilateralism is an essential part of Belgium’s and Europe’s DNA.

Multilateral institutions enable for dialogue, foster cooperation and provide mechanisms for coordinated action. They are essential to maintaining peace, stability and prosperity.

However, the multilateral system is under strain. Therefore, it must adapt to remain credible and effective in a changing world.

This means making it more representative, more responsive and more capable of delivering tangible results.

In this regard, the partnership between the European Union and ASEAN offers a model of effective multilateral cooperation.

Both regions prioritise dialogue and diplomacy. Both are committed to building trust and maintaining long-term, reliable and predictable partnerships. And both recognise that cooperation – not confrontation – is the path forward.

Our relationship is strengthened through concrete initiatives: ongoing discussions on free trade agreements, enhanced maritime cooperation and joint efforts in areas, such as digital governance, green transition and sustainable development.

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By aligning strategies, Europe and ASEAN partners can create sustainable growth while reinforcing resilience.

The EU is only the third trade partner of the ASEAN, after China and the US. We can do much better and sky is the limit.



Today, Belgian companies invest about half a billion a year in the Philippines but major players in software development for example, like Odoo, recently opened an office in Manila, creating jobs locally.

Here in Malaysia, Materialise is the largest 3D-printing company. And the main Belgian chips company Melexis installed its largest wafer-testing site in the world in Kuchan, investing millions of euros.

As we approach 50 years of ASEAN-EU dialogue relations in 2027, we are reminded of the importance of this partnership, in all its diversity. It is not only a reflection of past achievements, it is a foundation for future progress.

We must also recognise a simple truth: those who set standards shape the future.



Closing address by **HE Dr Kao Kim Hourn** **Secretary-General of ASEAN**

Closing the 39th iteration of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable is no small charge. What began, almost four decades ago, as a gathering of academics, policy analysts, think-tanks and thought leaders has become a respected fixture in the region's intellectual and policy life. Few forums endure for nearly four decades. Fewer still remain relevant throughout that time. The Asia-Pacific Roundtable, or APR as we all know it, has done both and done them so well. It has helped deepen understanding of the many issues shaping our region and informed the thinking of those, especially the decision-makers, tasked with addressing them.

This year's roundtable takes place at an unprecedented time of considerable uncertainty. Familiar challenges remain with us but they now present themselves in new forms and sometimes with great complexity. Major power relations and power politics have become more strained. Economic and technological competition is accelerating. Artificial intelligence is beginning to transform economies, societies and communities

rapidly, though many of its long-term implications remain unclear.

Times such as these place a premium on careful and critical analysis as well as sound judgment. The greatest risk is not simply that we make the wrong, hard choices. It is that we misunderstand the nature of the challenges before us. That is why gatherings such as this remain critically important. They provide an opportunity to question assumptions, test ideas, and think out of the box and examine developments with the benefit of perspective rather than urgency and expediency.

Reflecting on the discussions here, and on ASEAN's own experience over nearly six decades, I am persuaded of one central point. ASEAN's capacity to exercise genuine agency rests, in the end, on what I would call the power of ASEAN conviction: a conviction grounded in cooperation, solidarity and mutual respect. These principles have enabled ASEAN to navigate uncertainty complexity and volatility for nearly six decades and continue to shape the region's future through six dimensions

that I will set out here as peace, prosperity, planet, people, partnerships and possibilities.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The first P is peace. History offers a clear and valuable lesson: peace cannot be commissioned from outside. It can neither be imported nor outsourced; the responsibility for it is ours, and so, then, is the work of guarding it.

ASEAN's understanding of peace has never been confined to the absence of war and conflict. It is something built, constantly and continuously, through regular and consistent engagement. Preventive diplomacy sits at the centre of that effort, carried out through the regional mechanisms ASEAN has constructed over the decades among its members and with its external partners through what has become known as ASEAN-led mechanisms.

That framework depends, in turn, on exchange at every level of society: among the young and among political leaders, across business communities, scholars, journalists, and civil society alike. Each dialogue deepens understanding. Each partnership builds trust. Each exchange narrows the space in which misunderstanding and eventually conflict, might otherwise take root.

ASEAN member states have extended this commitment beyond the region through their contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations, for example. It is a reminder that peace is not a regional responsibility alone but a global public good, whose dividends accrue to all who help sustain it. And because economic interdependence reinforces the very foundations on which peace stands, the case for deepening trade, investment, tourism, connectivity and cooperation across every sector remains as strong as ever.

The second of these convictions follows naturally from the first: prosperity, like peace, has to be of our own making. ASEAN's future cannot rest on serving merely as a waystation or intermediary for the ambitions of others. The wealth the region seeks must be generated from within, by unlocking the potential ASEAN already holds. That is the logic behind the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement, which we expect to conclude this year; behind the bilateral free trade agreements ASEAN maintains



ASEAN's capacity to exercise genuine agency rests, in the end, on what I would call the power of ASEAN conviction

and continues to upgrade; and behind the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

Our economies, our resources, and above all, our people amount to what one might call "an acre of diamonds" – opportunity already beneath our feet, waiting only to be developed through cooperation and innovation.

What remains is to keep building towards the truly integrated single market and production base envisaged and called for in the ASEAN Charter, harnessing the collective weight of ASEAN as an economic bloc. Together, the region holds the scale, the diversity, the relevance, and the resilience to compete globally while still extending growth to all its people.

What matters most is that prosperity lift people out of poverty and prepare them for what comes next. That means continuously upgrading and expanding the skills of ASEAN's citizens to meet the digital revolution, artificial intelligence and the technologies still emerging. Technology, in this telling time, serves humanity and extends what people can do. It does not, and should not, stand in for them.

The third conviction concerns people, who remain ASEAN's greatest asset; more so than its geography, more so than its economy. ASEAN exists, fundamentally, for the people of ASEAN.

Our responsibility is to ensure they live in peace rather than conflict, in security rather than fear, in hope rather than uncertainty. And to strive for societies where people live longer, healthier, stronger, and happier lives, with the



attention to mental health and overall well-being that this requires.

The lessons of Covid-19, though already fading from public memory, remain instructive, and we owe it to ourselves to act on them by bringing the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases to full operational readiness without further delay, so that the region is genuinely prepared for whatever pandemic comes next.

Our people also need better education, stronger skills, and wider and more opportunities. Upskilling and reskilling are now simply the cost of staying competitive. And they need, equally, to see one another not as strangers but as members of a single ASEAN community bound by shared aspiration and mutual respect. Cultivating that ASEAN identity and the sense of belonging it carries, means holding on to the value of regional solidarity and to what cooperation has already achieved, rather than letting short memory erode it.

Our fourth conviction concerns the planet that hosts all these activities. ASEAN is endowed with extraordinary natural wealth: abundant water resources, fertile agricultural land, rich fisheries and a biodiversity matched by few regions on the planet.

That endowment gives ASEAN real capacity, not only to secure food for our own population

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The region holds the scale, the diversity, the relevance, and the resilience to compete globally while still extending growth to all its people.

but to contribute meaningfully to feeding the world. It also comes with an obligation that falls on us, and to no one else: an obligation to the generations who will inherit what we leave of this region's environment, its forests, its oceans and its biodiversity.

Our commitment to the Paris Agreement is only as good as the action that follows it. The task now is to move from declaration and negotiation to implementation that visibly reverses environmental damage. Leadership on climate is no longer a matter of choice, it is a condition for preserving the common

home we share. ASEAN's network of centres of excellence has a role to play here too, in advancing sustainability and protecting the region's biodiversity and the environment.

The fifth conviction is partnership. Not the kind assembled for short-term convenience but the kind cultivated and strengthened over time. This is, in many ways, the essence of what ASEAN has built over the decades, whether through its bilateral relations under the plus one modality or through the broader web of ASEAN-led mechanisms.

To keep those Plus One relationships dynamic and mutually beneficial, ASEAN has continued to elevate them. Hence, the comprehensive strategic partnerships now in place with several dialogue partners, even as a number of key development partners have signalled their own interest in moving towards sectoral dialogue partnership status.

Genuine partnership rests on trust, understanding, mutual respect and a willingness to look after one another through cooperation that means something. It is also why, despite calls from outside observers for ASEAN to take sides, the bloc has held to the inclusive logic of the ASEAN Way.

Major powers may compete with one another, to ASEAN, they remain partners to be engaged, all of them, on an inclusive basis. Partnership, in the end, is what allows peace, prosperity, people and planet to advance together to benefit collectively.

The final P is possibilities. Looking ahead, the possibilities before ASEAN are not modest. Every member state and every ASEAN citizen has something to contribute to the community being built.

What's needed is to keep testing the limits of what we believe is possible. We must keep asking, in our thinking and in our policy, what more ASEAN can do together to preserve the best of what humanity has achieved, and how it might contribute still further to the international community. ASEAN, after all, is not merely an organisation of Southeast Asia, it is an important stakeholder in the global community and more importantly, a community in its own right.

This is exactly the essence of the ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future, which is ASEAN's long-



Despite calls from outside observers for ASEAN to take sides, the bloc has held to the inclusive logic of the ASEAN Way.

term roadmap for the next 20 years – a very important step it has undertaken to chart its direction over the long term.

The strategic plans of the three ASEAN community pillars and ASEAN connectivity are meant to ensure that ASEAN achieves what is envisioned as a resilient, innovative, dynamic and people-centred ASEAN. Meanwhile, ASEAN needs to plan ahead to further narrowing the development gaps between ASEAN member states and within each ASEAN member state, and advancing ASEAN community-building, as well as strengthening ASEAN institutions.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me draw these threads together. The six convictions I have outlined are not separate and isolated ambitions of ASEAN. They form a single vision for ASEAN's future. Peace underpins prosperity. Prosperity strengthens people. People safeguard the planet. Partnerships expand possibilities. Each depends on the others as part of the ASEAN ecosystem.

The central question is whether ASEAN can continue to exercise agency in a more uncertain world. I strongly believe that it can. ASEAN's success has never rested on power alone. It has rested on the conviction that differences need not prevent cooperation, and that cooperation remains the surest foundation for regional peace, stability and progress.

To do so, ASEAN cannot take the present solidarity and unity for granted. ASEAN both collectively and individually must guard them and consistently strengthen them. ASEAN's role is not to become an arena for rivalry. Its



role is to remain a platform for dialogue and cooperation. Its relevance lies not in choosing sides but in bringing them together. That has been ASEAN's significant contribution for decades. It remains no less important today. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

ASEAN cannot rest at this important juncture. The responsibility now is to continue that work with more clarity, more courage and greater unity and leadership. The years ahead will require clear thinking and sound judgment. ASEAN will continue to depend on rigorous analysis and on the ability to translate ideas into policy and action. The region's future will depend not only on the decisions of governments alone but also on the power and quality of ideas that inform them.

I, therefore, wish to commend the track-two community, and in particular the leadership of the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies – the ASEAN-ISIS network – for the remarkable achievement

of establishing, sustaining and expanding this platform over nearly four decades. Also taking this opportunity, I wish to recognise the leadership and the outstanding role of ISIS Malaysia, especially under the leadership of Datuk Prof Dr Faiz Abdullah, for the exemplary contribution of the APR to our region and the world at large.

I trust that the Asia-Pacific Roundtable will continue to serve as one of the region's foremost laboratories of ideas: a place where intellectual rigour meets policy relevance, where difficult questions are confronted honestly and where ASEAN's strategic imagination continues to be expanded and valued.

For in strengthening the quality of regional thinking, you strengthen the quality of regional cooperation itself – and in doing so, you contribute not only to ASEAN's future, but also to a more peaceful, stable and prosperous world at large.



Welcoming remarks by **Datuk Prof Dr Mohd Faiz Abdullah** **Executive Chairman, ISIS Malaysia**

On behalf of ISIS Malaysia and the ASEAN-ISIS network, it gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to the 39th Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

For 39 years, the Asia-Pacific Roundtable has occupied a unique place in our region's strategic landscape. It has been a platform for reflection, debate, disagreement and even consensus but usually followed again by further disagreement.

It began as a modest gathering of scholars, policymakers and practitioners seeking to better understand the forces shaping the Asia-Pacific. Today, it has become one of the region's most dynamic and consistent track-two platforms.

That longevity is not accidental. It is the product of the commitment, generosity of time and intellectual courage of many individuals and institutions, many of whom are with us today. To all of them, we owe a debt of gratitude.

Friends,

This year's theme, "Accelerating agency and action," builds naturally on the conversations we have had over the past two years.

In a world where the international order remains uncertain, the challenge of regional actors is not simply to balance principles and pragmatism but to preserve and exercise agency.

Agency here is demonstrated not by reacting to external pressures but by shaping outcomes through deliberate choices, collective action and strategic engagement. For ASEAN and the wider region, this begins with strengthening internal capacities and resilience at both the national and regional levels, ensuring the consistent delivery of public goods regardless of global shocks or geopolitical uncertainty.

While complex interdependent linkages may require an artful balance between principles and pragmatism, greater resilience will give states the confidence and capability to engage increasingly from a position of strength founded on fundamentals. Ultimately, the aspiration for us should not be merely to adapt to a changing order, but to possess the agency, the heft, and ultimately, the conviction to help define it.

For the past several years, our conversations at the Asia-Pacific Roundtable have been animated by a common question: how should



Agency is often spoken of as though it is a privilege afforded to great powers. But for many countries, particularly those in our region, agency is not an entitlement.

the region respond to a world that appears increasingly fragmented and unpredictable?

We have studied and analysed a period marked by strategic flux, where what used to be time-honoured assumptions about order, stability and power no longer seemed valid.

We have engaged in vibrant discourse about the adjustments and flexibilities needed to navigate an increasingly dynamic geopolitical landscape. Yet, there comes a point when adaptation alone doesn't quite cut it.

The challenge before us today is not simply how to respond to change but how to shape it. This is why the question of agency has become so pivotal. Agency is often spoken of as though it is a privilege afforded to great powers. But for many countries, particularly those in our region, agency is not an entitlement.

It is a necessity. It is found in the ability to expand strategic options, to preserve autonomy amid competing pressures and to act with purpose even when circumstances are less than ideal.

States, in that sense, are not merely passive subjects of history, they are also its authors. Where once our narratives were written by the victors and geopolitical powers that be, today we have to take it upon ourselves to chronicle our own paths and destinies.

Nevertheless, the extent to which we exercise influence, individually and collectively, depends ultimately on our willingness and capacity to act. It's carpe diem: we must take the current when it serves or lose our ventures.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the coming days, we will examine where such agency can be exercised and how it might be translated into meaningful action. Our discussions will traverse the complex relationship between power, principles and pragmatism.

We will examine the evolving roles of China and India in shaping Global South aspirations; the future of ASEAN's numerous institutions; the re-emergence of nuclear considerations in strategic thinking; and the growing significance of critical minerals, economic resilience and secure supply chains.

These are not merely issues to be observed. They are arenas in which choices will be made, interests pursued and futures shaped. And it is in those choices that agency ultimately resides.

Distinguished guests,

We are fortunate this year to be joined by both the prime minister and the minister of investment, trade and industry. We heard from minister Johari Ghani's evening address and his take on the emerging landscape of international economic diplomacy. Indeed, we eagerly await Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's keynote address tomorrow morning, of course to be followed by a fireside chat. We thank the honourable prime minister for his unwavering support and firm endorsement of the APR process.

I would also like to express my appreciation to all our speakers and instigators. Many have travelled considerable distances to join us, bringing with them diverse perspectives and experiences.

Equally, I thank all delegates for your participation. I would like to acknowledge our partners and sponsors, whose support has been indispensable in making this gathering possible.

I would like to thank the Australian High Commission and the BOAO Forum for Asia for their invaluable support.

I also extend my sincere gratitude to the Delegation of the European Union to Malaysia, Embassy of the United States, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Embassy of Japan, Embassy of the Republic of Korea, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, allow me to restate why the Asia-Pacific Roundtable not only matters, but matters significantly. We do not convene annually out of habit or as it were, out of intellectual muscle memory.



The Asia-Pacific Roundtable is not intended to be an echo chamber nor is it an academic exercise detached from reality.

Track-two diplomacy has value precisely because it occupies a space that official



We do not gather merely to perform the rituals of banal policy discourse, reading from predictable scripts and averse to rocking the boat.

We gather because formidable challenges demand profound and robust conversations. The Asia-Pacific Roundtable is not intended to be an echo chamber nor is it an academic exercise detached from reality.

Our aspiration is that every participant leaves with a deeper understanding of the strategic pulse of Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific region. That remains the distinctive contribution of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable process. But understanding alone is not enough.

diplomacy often cannot. We understand official positions but we are not constrained by them. We ask difficult questions in order to get inconvenient answers.

We test assumptions and challenge orthodoxies. We propose ideas that may appear politically sensitive today but they are never frivolous and may well become policy necessities tomorrow.

Indeed, if our discussions over the next two days merely reproduce official talking points, inundated with pious platitudes in politically correct language, then we will have accomplished very little.



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We propose ideas that may appear politically sensitive today but they are never frivolous and may well become policy necessities tomorrow.

I therefore look forward to our speakers and participants engaging openly, challenging prevailing wisdom where necessary and contributing ideas that move the conversation positively forward.

Now, that was the spirit in which this roundtable was founded some 40 years ago. In as much as “What’s past is prologue” or that “Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future” that is the spirit that has sustained this roundtable. And indeed, that is the spirit that must continue to guide it.

The ball is in our court – or since this is World Cup season, I should say the ball is in our half. So, let’s put our best foot forward and get the ball rolling.



Welcoming remarks by
Prof Antoinette Raquiza
President
Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, Inc
2026 Chair of the ASEAN-ISIS network

It is a great honour to welcome you, on behalf of the Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, Inc Philippines and the ASEAN ISIS network and its secretariat, the Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, to the 39th Asia-Pacific Roundtable, convened here in Kuala Lumpur, a city long associated with the region's efforts to manage diversity, bridge differences, and sustain dialogue in times of regional and global change.

It is a fitting setting for our discussions at a moment when the region is confronted with one existential crisis after another, and a contested global order that is undergoing structural realignment due to strategic geopolitical and economic pressures as well as the growing uncertainty over the norms and rules that had underpinned cooperation.

For the countries of Southeast Asia, these global tensions manifest in concrete ways: through economic disruptions, a crippling energy crisis, environmental stress and the growing risk of escalation of conflict within

and between countries – all of which narrow the policy space and complicate national choices. Maintaining regional unity and resilience has therefore become as much a strategic imperative as it is a developmental one.

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For the region to emerge stronger, it is imperative to surface and promote Southeast Asian perspectives and experiences.



The willingness to examine ASEAN's own mechanisms – honestly and without complacency – is not a sign of institutional fragility but of maturity.

Against this backdrop, the role of ASEAN becomes both more demanding and more consequential. As a collective platform, ASEAN is expected not only to preserve cohesion amid diversity but also to sustain strategic relevance in a regional and global environment where power politics is intensifying and multilateralism is under strain.

The conversations planned for this roundtable and this year's focus on accelerating agency and action speak to a shared recognition of the need for the ASEAN community to arrive

at a common and informed understanding of international pressure points and the vulnerabilities of regionalism and to use this shared analysis to enrich and deepen the bases of ASEAN unity of purpose.

For the region to emerge stronger, it is imperative to surface and promote Southeast Asian perspectives and experiences towards developing our region's distinct contributions to the evolving global order.

It is, therefore, appropriate that several of our discussions turn inward as well as outward. The willingness to examine ASEAN's own mechanisms – honestly and without complacency – is not a sign of institutional fragility but of maturity. It reflects an awareness that, in a period of heightened global tension, institutional relevance cannot be assumed, it must be continually earned.

Over the next two days, our exchanges will engage issues where the stakes are unmistakably high: strategic competition, economic resilience, escalation of risks, and the narrowing space between principle and pragmatism. I invite you to approach these discussions with candour, humility, and imagination – recognising that while clear solutions may be elusive, the quality of our collective reflection remains a strategic asset. It is in that spirit that I warmly welcome you.

**Plenary 1**

Wednesday, 1 July 2026

0930–1100

Rogue world order: power, principles and pragmatism

The world order is no longer simply contested – it is fragmented, interest-led and driven by power rather than rules. Multilateral frameworks are strained as major powers assert influence through pressure, alignment and selective norm breaking. In this evolving landscape, influence is exercised not only by those with overwhelming power but also by small and middle powers that can navigate ambiguity, build coalitions and shape outcomes at the margins. Is multilateralism adapting or being sidelined in today's geopolitical environment? What is the future of multilateralism in this complex geopolitical landscape and who has the capacity to influence its direction? How can agency be exercised balancing principles and pragmatism when rules are weakened and predictability erodes?

Instigator

Peter Varghese
Chancellor
University of Queensland
Australia

Speakers

Dr Ken Jimbo
Professor of International Relations
Keio University
Japan



Dr Dawisson Belém-Lopes
Professor of International and
Comparative Politics
Federal University of Minas
Gerais (UFMG)
Brazil



Dr Chong Ja Ian
Associate Professor of Political
Science
National University of Singapore



Angeline Tan
Analyst
ISIS Malaysia

The plenary session, instigated by **Peter Varghese**, sought to understand the current rogue world order, one that is characterised by the rise of blatant great-power unilateralism, weakening multilateral institutions, and abandonment of established norms and values. It also addressed questions, such as the driving factors behind the current situation, the promises and challenges of middle power cooperation, and the need to incorporate norms and principles to secure a stable and predictable world order.

Dr Ken Jimbo noted several trends over the past decades that have shaped the current world order. Among them are the changing balance of power exemplified by the rise of China and other emerging economies, the backlash against globalisation that led to the securitisation of economies, and the growing mismatch between the demand and supply of security provisions with the US as the main supplier.

Dr Dawisson Belém Lopes raised a distinction between the emerging middle powers and established middle powers. The latter has long defended the rules-based international order established after World War II while the former, consisting largely of Global South countries, has urged fundamental reforms of the post-WWII institutions. Emerging middle powers should not conflate their interests with their more established peers. With the resources and capacity that the emerging middle powers now possess, he argued that they should collectively advance their interests to seek a more representative international system.

Agreeing on the notion that middle powers have varying interests, **Dr Chong Ja Ian** pointed to the problem of achieving coordination and collective action among them. Despite the growing call for middle powers to exercise their agency, he argued that their efforts to undertake serious reforms



He also observed that the US no longer treats global engagement and the provision of public goods as crucially linked to their prosperity and security. With these forces at play, countries are adapting to ensure that their national security and interests are protected. Japan, for instance, continues to engage with the US while expanding collaboration with regional partners to safeguard its interests in an increasingly severe security environment.

of multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations and ASEAN, are still lacking. To achieve coordination and collective action, middle and small powers can start exploring arrangements at a smaller scale, such as at the regional level or focusing on a specific issue.

Angeline Tan argued that the search for alternative structures to the post-WWII institutions is inevitable due to its flawed



arrangements that do not reflect the emerging realities. The search, however, is not an indication that the world order is unravelling. Instead, it reflects the agency of states in shaping an international system that advances their interests. She also warned that the abandonment of norms and principles will disrupt peace and stability.

Regrettably, such behaviour is not only confined to the major powers but also adopted by smaller and middle powers.

The recent border conflict waged between Thailand and Cambodia served as an example where states pursued their narrow self-interests at the expense of the collective good and regional stability. In navigating the turbulent world ahead, she stressed the importance of values, such as honesty and accountability among leaders, and habits of consultation among states in maintaining peace and stability.



Plenary 2

Wednesday, 1 July 2026

1130-1300

Sino-Indian tectonics in the Global South

The rise of China and India has reshaped Asia's strategic and economic landscape, with the nature of their strategic competition a central factor in regional stability and development. The re-emergence of Global South discourse has seen distinct efforts laid down by both Beijing and New Delhi to mobilise regional partners towards tackling shared challenges and the delivery of public goods. China's approach to Global South mobilisation has been a bid to address Western disillusionment by pitching itself as an "alternative to the West" while India's approach has been to cooperate with the Global North, leveraging on its potential as a "bridge to the West". What are the factors shaping evolving China-India dynamics and how do they impact on how both actors perceive the Indo-Pacific and beyond? How would these in turn affect and influence Southeast Asia's agency, strategic choices and engagement with both?

Instigator



Akhil Ramesh

Chief Research and Development Officer
Pacific Forum
International
United States

Speakers



Dr Lan Jianxue

Director of Department of
Asia-Pacific Studies
China Institute of
International Studies (CIIS)



Dr Jabin Jacob

Director of Centre of Excellence
for Himalayan Studies
Shiv Nadar University
India



Dr Bhagya Senaratne

Independent Scholar
Sri Lanka



Dr Gong Xue

Assistant Professor
S Rajaratnam School of
International Studies
Nanyang Technological University
Singapore



Assoc Prof Dr Nguyen Thi Lan Anh

Vice-President
Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam
(DAV)

This plenary session discussed the factors shaping the evolving China-India dynamics and how both actors perceive engagement in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Instigator **Akhil Ramesh** set the scene by highlighting the starkly different approaches China and India have to engaging with established middle powers like Singapore, emerging middle powers like Vietnam and small island states like Sri Lanka. He also acknowledged the re-emergence of Global South discourse at a time when the region is fast losing trust in the West.

as China expands its global ambitions, India faces pressure to strengthen its own domestic institutions and engage more actively in regional trade agreements rather than remaining on the sidelines. At the same time, debates persist over China's role within the Global South, with differing definitions of membership and leadership.

While some question whether China's growing power places it outside the traditional conception of the Global South, others argue that sustained engagement may



Dr Lan Jianxue underlined that China presents itself as an integral member of the Global South, emphasising shared development. From Beijing's perspective, the Global South is not a geopolitical entity or strategic arena for great power competition, nor does China see itself as a Western alternative. Lan further shared that China believes that its relationship with India should evolve organically through peaceful coexistence and mutual success rather than be viewed through a zero sum or tectonic lens of competition. Greater cooperation between China, India and ASEAN (C-I-A), alongside broader Asia-Pacific economic integration, could strengthen ASEAN mechanisms and reduce the scope for Cold War mentality or divide-and-rule dynamics.

In the context of India's view of its relations with China, **Dr Jabin Jacob** opined that

increase transparency and accountability, making its intentions evident through actions rather than rhetoric. He further highlighted that institutional capacity and different civilisational outlooks influence India's relations with China. India must also build internal capacity more thoughtfully to engage the region better.

Dr Bhagya Senaratne brought a South Asian perspective in interpreting Sino-Indian dynamics. In Sri Lanka's view, China-India relations are often understood through the lens of strategic hedging rather than binary alignment. Given its close geographic proximity and deep historical, cultural and economic ties with India, Sri Lanka recognises that a degree of dependence on India is unavoidable, particularly in matters of economics, security and regional stability.



Sri Lanka's approach is one of "shelter seeking", whereby maintaining stable relations with India serves as a hedge against regional uncertainty. In this context, there is a possibility of India "debt leveraging", which is a challenge for Colombo. She highlighted that there is little difference between India's "debt leveraging" and China's so-called "debt-trap diplomacy".

Bringing a Southeast Asian perspective, **Dr Gong Xue** stressed for these states, engagement with both powers is guided by pragmatism rather than alignment. China's initiatives, including the Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI) and Global Governance Initiative (GGI), have attracted varying degrees of interest across the region. However, ASEAN member states, including Singapore, have generally adopted a selective and cautious approach, cooperating where

tangible economic or developmental benefits exist while remaining mindful of strategic implications. At the same time, India is increasingly viewed as an important partner for economic diversification, particularly through bilateral trade, investment and technology cooperation.

Dr Nguyen Thi Lan Anh highlighted that as two major civilisational centres and rising powers, the way China and India manage cooperation and competition will shape not only the regional order but also broader patterns of global economic development and security. She also stressed that the future of Sino-Indian relations is expected to be characterised by a mixture of cooperation and competition, with ASEAN seeking to preserve a stable regional environment that enables constructive engagement with both powers while avoiding zero-sum strategic rivalry.

**Plenary 3**

Wednesday, 1 July 2026
1430–1600

Hard truths: probing into ASEAN's mechanisms

The formation of ASEAN and its subsequent expansion have been central to peace and stability in Southeast Asia while providing an inclusive platform for major powers to engage with the region. Today, intensifying geopolitical competition and mounting pressures on ASEAN-led processes are testing whether its existing mechanisms remain fit for purpose. Which ASEAN mechanisms still deliver strategic value and which have become ritualistic exercises? Which are most in need of an honest review or recalibration and is ASEAN politically prepared to confront its own institutional inertia? Has the expanding web of ASEAN-led mechanisms strengthened coordination or diluted focus and capacity?

Instigator

Dr Evan Laksmana
Shangri-La Dialogue
Senior Fellow
International Institute for
Strategic Studies (IIS)
Singapore

Speakers

**Dr Charmaine
Misalucha-Willoughby**
Professor of International Studies
De La Salle University
The Philippines



Dr Jittipat Poonkham
Associate Professor of
International Relations
Thammasat University
Thailand



Andrew Mantong
Researcher
Centre for Strategic and
International Studies (CSIS)
Indonesia



Dr Alfred Gerstl
President
Central European Institute of Asian
Studies (CEIAS)
Slovakia

Instigator **Dr Evan Laksmana** opened the session by illustrating the growing pressures on ASEAN to act as a regional organisation that can address the region's increasingly complex challenges. The session then discussed several aspects of ASEAN, including its strengths and limitations, the role of norms and practices, need for institutional reform and the way forward.

In analysing the strengths of ASEAN, **Dr Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby** argued that the principle of non-interference has benefitted member states by fostering stable relations and forging unity. However, it has also prevented them from undertaking

approach can be buttressed by support from the ASEAN Secretariat to publicise the preventive diplomacy efforts. He cited the recent Thailand-Cambodia border conflict where ASEAN has done a considerable part in managing the conflict but its role did not register in the public perception and was eclipsed by the conflict management efforts from the US and China.

On the question of whether certain ASEAN mechanisms are ineffective, **Andrew Mantong** opined that ASEAN's value, in fact, lies in its rituals and numerous meetings. Through these meetings, ASEAN can still undertake face-to-face diplomacy and act



proactive actions in dealing with issues with regional implications, such as humanitarian crises and interstate military conflicts. For ASEAN to improve on this front, she suggested that it can explore norms that emphasise communal unity and altruism rooted in the region.

Dr Jittipat Poonkham agreed that non-interference and sovereignty have encouraged reactivity in addressing traditional security issues compared to its non-traditional counterparts. Among the proposed solutions were to understand domestic political considerations and bilateral dynamics, while playing a more active role in convening and facilitating dialogue among conflicting parties. This

as an inclusive platform where various powers can sit together. ASEAN also retains its value through the consistent pursuit of economic integration and institutional readiness in disaster management.

Notwithstanding these strengths, ASEAN still faces the problem of non-utilisation of its mechanisms when dealing with regional crises and conflicts. With reference to criticism over the ASEAN Regional Forum's (ARF) lack of productivity, he urged for a clearer institutional division of labour between other mechanisms, such as the East Asia Summit. Other crucial issues highlighted were the need for ASEAN to address bureaucratic sluggishness, review the ASEAN Charter, empower the secretary-general post and the



importance of political will from all leaders to undertake reform.

Dr Alfred Gerstl observed that while ASEAN succeeded in deepening and expanding its cooperation to the wider Asia-Pacific after the Cold War, the current changing global and regional conditions necessitate the reassessment of its mechanisms. Other than

relying solely on the principle of consensus, Gerstl proposed a "Team ASEAN approach". It follows the example of the "Team Europe approach", where a coalition of willing states band together their resources and strengths to address issues involving sovereignty that require conflict resolution.

**Plenary 4**

Thursday, 2 July 2026

1100–1230

Nuclear arsenals in the Asia-Pacific cauldron

Ongoing modernisation and expansion of nuclear arsenals by nuclear-weapon states (NWS) are placing immense strain on an already fragile regime of safeguards and control measures. The possible resumption of nuclear-weapon testing adds challenges. What is driving these developments and what are their impact on Asia-Pacific? Is nuclear deterrence a credible strategy for preventing conflict between nuclear-armed states or does it increase the risk of nuclear escalation and weapon use? How can non-NWS navigate these tensions, shape conversations on escalation management and regional cooperation, without undermining broader global non-proliferation norms?

Instigator**Karla Mae Pabeliña**

Director
Centre for International
Relations and Strategic Studies
The Philippines

Speakers**Dr Manpreet Sethi**

Distinguished Fellow
Centre for Aerospace Power and
Strategic Studies
India

**Dr Julia Macdonald**

Director of Research and
Engagement
Asia New Zealand Foundation

**Dr Jeon Kyung-Joo**

Chief
Korean Peninsula Security
Research Division
Korea Institute for Defence Analyses

**Prof Christian Rieck**

Associate Professor of War Studies
Universität Potsdam
Germany

The plenary examined the motivations and mechanics behind the ongoing modernisation and expansion of nuclear arsenals. Instigated by **Karla Mae Pabeliña**, the discussion explored how these trends are reshaping regional balances of power, the continued relevance of the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime, and

Julia Macdonald argued that nuclear weapons continue to shape regional security dynamics. While deterrence raises the costs of conflict and may discourage major war, it does not necessarily produce regional stability. Drawing on the South Pacific perspective, she warned that the erosion of political trust, weakening arms control



their implications for regional and global security. Speakers were also invited to share their views on the role non-nuclear weapon states can play in mitigating strategic tensions and likely use scenarios in the Asia-Pacific region.

Manpreet Sethi opened the session by expressing concern towards the increasingly complex nuclear landscape in the Asia-Pacific. She highlighted the dynamics between China, India and Pakistan, which raise concerns as these three states are not only geographically contiguous nuclear arsenals but also face unresolved territorial disputes.

Although China and India continue to uphold broadly declaratory no-first-use doctrines, China's rapid capability expansion may alter strategic calculations even without overt changes to its stated policy. She also pointed to concerns over crisis stability between India and Pakistan, as well as the evolving strategic competition between China and India. While the likelihood of nuclear use in South Asia remains low, the risks associated with instability are increasing.

guardrails, renewed nuclear testing and ongoing arsenal modernisation contribute to a potential "nuclear cascade".

She also underscored the humanitarian legacy of more than 300 nuclear tests conducted in the Marshall Islands and French Polynesia. Although proliferation risks are growing, she assessed that the most plausible scenario for nuclear use would arise from a Taiwan Strait contingency.

Dr Jeon Kyung Joo presented the South Korean perspective, reiterating the official position that they avoid actions or rhetoric that could heighten escalation risks, recognising that miscalculation could undermine deterrence against North Korea. She noted that North Korea increasingly portrays its nuclear arsenal as a stabilising force while expanding its doctrine, command and control systems and nuclear warfighting capabilities.

However, with the absence of effective arms control mechanisms, including the nuclear ambitions of Russia, China and North Korea, has compelled South Korea to strengthen



its conventional deterrence capabilities. She also cautioned that a Taiwan Strait crisis could create an opportunity for North Korea to initiate hostilities, both conventional and nuclear, on the Korean Peninsula.

Dr Christian Rieck discussed the European perspective, identifying Russia's invasion of Ukraine and growing uncertainty over the longevity of the Americans' security commitments as the principal drivers of renewed nuclear debates. They have prompted discussions on developing a more autonomous European deterrent, which includes facilitating greater German

conventional rearmament to enable the United Kingdom and France to sustain credible nuclear forces.

He also suggested that the European Union could play a larger role in coordinating and supporting member states' defence efforts. In his conclusion, he emphasised that nuclear buildups are ultimately symptomatic of a weakened arms control regime and declining strategic trust, where effective regimes and confidence are absent, nuclear arsenals are likely to expand.

**Plenary 5**

Thursday, 2 July 2026

1500–1630

Critical minerals and supply chain upheavals

Global critical mineral supply chains are being increasingly shaped by geopolitics, industrial policy and national security, moving away from market-led globalisation towards strategic realignment. Do emerging export controls, strategic stockpiling and friend-shoring signal an imminent bifurcation into parallel supply ecosystems? What geoeconomic consequences will this shift create for producers and importers? How will this tilt the balance of power in global markets? Which domestic, regional and international policy tools can strengthen resilience while preserving competitiveness and value creation?

Instigator**Dr Kai Ostwald**

Director of the Institute of Asian Research
University of British Columbia
Canada

Speakers**Hayley Channer**

Director of the Economic Security Programme
United States Studies Centre
University of Sydney
Australia

**Marc Mealy**

Executive Vice-President of Research
US-ASEAN Business Council
United States

**Dato' Sia Hok Kiang**

Chief Executive Officer
Malaco Mining Sdn Bhd
Malaysia

This plenary examined how global critical mineral supply chains are increasingly shaped by geopolitics, industrial policy and national security, in place of market-led globalisation. It considered whether export controls, strategic stockpiling and friend-shoring signal a bifurcation into parallel supply ecosystems, and its implications for producers, importers, the global balance of power, and policy tools that could strengthen resilience while preserving competitiveness. Instigator **Dr Kai Ostwald** noted that identifying solutions is considerably easier than delivering them and observed that global discourse on supply chains centres on China, the EU and the US, overlooking Southeast Asian stakes.

Hayley Channer divided the critical minerals challenge into four components: supply, enabling factors, such as energy and financing, workforce and governance, and technology,

a dynamic traced back to China's 2010 restrictions on Japan. She argued that government support alone falls short of resolving the market failure and warned that delay would allow China's monopoly to persist. Channer concluded that Malaysia and Indonesia should strengthen their own competitiveness and build public support for mining projects.

Marc Mealy traced the intensity of demand-side pressure to the foundational role critical minerals play in chips and data centres, calling national and regional efforts to manage this at the early stages. Clean energy, information technology, and defence and security were identified as strategic industries whose global value chains now depend on critical minerals.

He observed that the commercial landscape is shifting beyond traditional buyers in



where China holds a commanding share of intellectual property. She noted that criticality is a matter of national judgment, with the US designating around 50 minerals as critical and Australia roughly 30. Using gallium as an example, she noted that China's dominance stems from sustained investment in mines and processing technology, built up while other countries relied on free markets and the initiatives of other.

Coordination differs to defence-style pacts because it creates winners and losers,

northern Europe to include more advanced players across the Indo-Pacific. Bilateral deals and national roadmaps across Southeast Asia offer early evidence of governments trying to de-risk the capital these industries need. On export controls, he cautioned that crediting Indonesia's nickel export ban alone for its competitive EV industry overstates its role, since it was the entry of foreign players that drove much of that outcome. Such restrictions can be a tool but attracting the partners needed to move up the value chain still requires negotiation.



Dato' Sia Hok Kiang explained the strategic importance of heavy rare earth elements, including for defence, high-speed applications, and increasingly for AI and robotics. Southeast Asia is well endowed with critical minerals and economically viable heavy rare earth deposits concentrate in tropical regions, giving China's dominance as much to do with geological advantage as with strategy. Drawing on Malaysia's history as the world's largest tin producer, he observed that its existing infrastructure gives it a natural advantage, though little effort was made to build domestic mining knowledge after the tin market collapsed in the 1980s, leaving foreign investors to take both deposits and expertise.

Malaysia now has the agency to capitalise on its resources and move up the value chain. Reflecting on four decades in gold mining, he described a pattern of complacency in which countries import raw materials cheaply until geopolitical tension forces a reassessment. Sia argued that Southeast Asia is well placed to help build a parallel supply chain, one that could see nations like Brazil capture the bulk of the critical rare earth market by 2035. He warned against banning exports before midstream capacity is ready, since these risks losing the investment needed to build it, arguing that cooperation between nations should be left to commercial actors as loose, business-led associations instead of government mandates.

Fireside chat

Wednesday, 1 July 2026

1400-1430

Building middle-power agency

Partnerships among middle powers are becoming an increasingly important source of stability, influence and resilience in a more contested geopolitical environment. As rivalry among major powers intensifies and multilateral institutions face greater pressure, middle powers can help shape regional and global outcomes by combining their diplomatic, economic, technological and security capabilities. Where can they work together more effectively and how can they turn cooperation into collective action? What levers can they use to strengthen strategic autonomy, support multilateralism and promote a more balanced, inclusive and predictable international order?

Moderator

Thomas Daniel

Director
Foreign Policy and Security Studies
ISIS Malaysia

Speaker

HE Danielle Heinecke

High Commissioner of Australia to Malaysia



Heinecke is a senior career officer with Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and was appointed high commissioner-designate of the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur in December 2023. She is a former first assistant secretary, Pacific Melanesia Division, and served in Timor-Leste, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.



Against a backdrop of intensifying geopolitical competition and increasing pressure on the rules-based international order, the discussion explored how middle powers can strengthen their agency within an increasingly constrained strategic environment. **High Commissioner Danielle Heinecke** argued that middle powers should not be defined by labels or fixed geopolitical blocs, but by their ability to work with like-minded partners to advance shared interests. Rather than being forced into binary choices between major powers, middle powers can exercise influence by building flexible, issue-based coalitions and contributing to practical regional solutions.

Economic resilience emerged as a key theme throughout the discussion. High Commissioner Heinecke highlighted the importance of maintaining trusted and diversified supply chains through honouring trade commitments, avoiding unnecessary export controls and strengthening reliable partnerships. Australia and Malaysia's cooperation in areas such as food security, critical minerals and rare earth processing illustrates how middle powers can contribute to regional resilience while preserving strategic choice in emerging technologies and strategic industries.

On the question of regional governance, she emphasised the continued importance of investing in existing multilateral and regional institutions despite their imperfections. She

argued that mechanisms such as ASEAN, the WTO, the UN and the FPDA remain essential platforms through which countries can amplify their collective voice and manage strategic competition.

Acknowledging challenges such as free riders and domestic political constraints, she nevertheless stressed that effective middle power leadership requires sustained political commitment, burden-sharing and tangible contributions. Ultimately, she argued that middle power agency is built not through rhetoric, but through trusted partnerships, practical cooperation and continued investment in the institutions that underpin regional stability.

Fireside chat

Thursday, 2 July 2026

1230-1300

Navigating Asia's economic future

The idea of an “Asian century” once reflected confidence in the region’s economic promise, driven by deepening interdependence, open markets and sustained economic dynamism. Today, that confidence is increasingly under pressure as supply chain disruptions, technological fragmentation and the growing securitisation of trade reshape the region’s economic architecture. The geo-economic repercussions of the Iran conflict, for instance, exposed how external shocks can reverberate across Asian economies with speed and consequence. Against the backdrop of mounting strain on global governance, how resilient are existing regional frameworks in managing economic volatility? Can Asia sustain integration amid growing pressures of fragmentation and strategic decoupling? What forms of collective coordination are needed to safeguard stability, growth and confidence in an uncertain global environment?

Moderator

Arividya Arimuthu

Senior Fellow
ISIS Malaysia

Speaker

HE Zhang Jun

Secretary-General
Boao Forum for Asia



Zhang was appointed to the present post in April 2024. He has worked in the Department of International Organisations and Conferences; and General Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, serving as deputy director, director, counsellor and deputy director-general. In 2008, he was appointed as ambassador of China to the Netherlands and permanent representative of China to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. He was the first director-general of the Department of International Economic Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and has also served as assistant foreign minister. Between 2019 and 2024, he served as the Permanent Representative of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations. He has headed the Chinese delegation to numerous UN, G20, BRICS, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and World Economic Forum meetings.



The growing tendency towards unilateralism in recent years has posed one of the most serious threat to today's international order. It has fuelled conflict and contestation, intensifying concerns over the resilience of the international order and the effectiveness of multilateral institutions.

Meanwhile, supply chains are becoming more insecure as we start to see the localisation, regionalisation and diversification of global value chains. In light of this pessimism, **Secretary-General Zhang Jun** reminded that it is equally important to recall the positive forces driving global transformation. One such example is the rise of the Global South, which has seen the shift towards a more multipolar world. This development has brought new opportunities, dynamics and hopes for the future of international cooperation.

Asia lies at the heart of this transformation. The region accounts for almost half of the global economy and contributes approximately 60% of global economic growth. Despite strong global headwinds, economic integration across Asia continues to make progress, as seen through the recently upgraded ASEAN-China free trade agreement 3.0, the ongoing success of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Moreover, the region is also leading in the global effort towards green transition. As such, Secretary-General Zhang therefore expressed confidence in the region's

economic prospects, sharing the sentiment that we are living in an 'Asian Century'. He underscored the importance of setting the right goals and strategic foresight to guide our efforts in global governance, in order to multilateralism and free trade.

On the topic of global governance, Secretary-General Zhang highlighted the importance of building mutual trust, which he described as key to maintaining the region's strategic autonomy. He further commended the solidarity that continues to underpin regional cooperation, noting that diversity is a deeply rooted cultural value in Asia.

Photo gallery











