

Indo-Pacific Era Strategic Centre

Mapping the Geopolitics of the Next Indo-Pacific Century.

January 2024



Photo Credit: tawatchai07 on Flickr.com/Creative Commons

ASEAN Community 2025 and Beyond

In this first NTS Bulletin of 2024, we present a feature article on the way forward for ASEAN Community 2025, penned by Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, former Secretary General of ASEAN and currently RSIS Executive Deputy Chairman.

In 2015, ASEAN member states **adopted** the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, charting the roadmap for each of its three pillars, towards a resilient and peaceful community through greater integration, inclusivity and connectivity. Nearly a decade has since passed, and it is timely for a stocktake on ASEAN's progress. ASEAN will continue to face challenges navigating a fragmented world, with increasing geopolitical tensions between the US and China and competing claims in the South China Sea.

Looking Ahead

There are four key areas that ASEAN should focus on in the coming decades. Firstly, ASEAN countries should continue to work collectively to ameliorate the impacts of climate change on the region. In 2021, Southeast Asian countries faced high levels of **displacement** as a result of climate-induced disasters – more than 5 million people were affected in the Philippines, 749,000 in Indonesia and 780,000 in Vietnam. ASEAN can address these upheavals by building the blue economy, and minimising the effects of marine pollution and rise in sea levels. There are relevant guidelines and specific **climate goals** to achieve at the national and regional levels.

Secondly, ensuring food security in ASEAN since the major food producers such as Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand **cannot keep up** with producing crops three times per year. This would mean that more ASEAN states may need to import rice and other food grains, which until now the major food producers in the region have been self-reliant. The sustainability of food security is critical to feed the growing population in Southeast Asia.

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The third area of focus would be job creation and facilitation of the movement of labour in Southeast Asia. During the COVID-19 pandemic, [unemployment rates](#) spiked, reaching 10.4% in the Philippines, 7.1% in Indonesia, 4.5% in Malaysia and 3% in Singapore. There are areas for progress in terms of creating work for unemployed persons, and developing a system that allows for easier entry and exit of workers across ASEAN. However, further cooperation between governments and agencies in ASEAN is impeded by issues of nationality and competent skills of workers.

Fourthly, improving the education sector. Currently, there is a shortage of teachers in many countries. To address this, ASEAN should tap more into the educational expertise and resources of its member states, and work towards more recognition of relevant qualifications from certified agencies and schools in ASEAN. Furthermore, digitalisation must be deployed as a tool to help people communicate and overcome language barriers and technical competencies.

Reaching the Mass

More can be done in connecting with the people in the region. The [poll on ASEAN Awareness](#) in 2018 found that less than 1 in 5 respondents among businesses and Civil Society Organisations perceived that ASEAN's public communication is effective. The perception among those surveyed is that ASEAN communicates with select groups on the government-level, at large corporations, and among elites.

ASEAN tends to dwell on the big-picture and strategic aspects, such as calling for restraint on overlapping maritime claims in the South China Sea and engaging the major powers of the global stage. While these issues are important, attention cannot be diverted from socio-cultural development to build a resilient ASEAN which will deliver more 'public goods' such as greater connectivity, employment, and social security across the region.

Overcoming the National Ego

Ultimately, more needs to be done in ASEAN community building. Currently, there is still not enough readiness to accept the regional ego, over the national ego. With a strong ASEAN ego, ASEAN can better manage the unfavourable forces out there.

What is essential is the political will and leadership of ASEAN member states to implement the blueprint for the ASEAN Community based on the three pillars. If ASEAN is able to move constructively in this direction, ASEAN will build the foundation for an effective regional resilience to manage the challenges from wider geopolitical competition and rivalry.

SUGGESTED READINGS

ASEAN. (2019). Rep. Poll on ASEAN Awareness 2018. Jakarta, Indonesia: ASEAN Secretariat.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). "Internal Displacement Trends in Asia and the Pacific (2010-2021)." *Disaster displacement in Asia and the Pacific Website*. 2021, accessed 8 January 2024.

Ong, Keng Yong. (2017). "ASEAN into the future: Need for leadership." *RSIS Commentaries* CO17148, 7 August.

Yeung, Wei-Jun Jean. (2022). "Education and Youth Unemployment in Southeast Asia." In *Demographic and Family Transition in Southeast Asia*, pp. 77-98. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Yuan, Shen, Alexander M. Stuart, Alice G. Laborte, Juan I. Rattalino Edreira, Achim Dobermann, Le Vu Ngoc Kien, Lưu Thị Thúy et al. (2022). "Southeast Asia must narrow down the yield gap to continue to be a major rice bowl." *Nature Food* 3, no. 3 : 217-226.

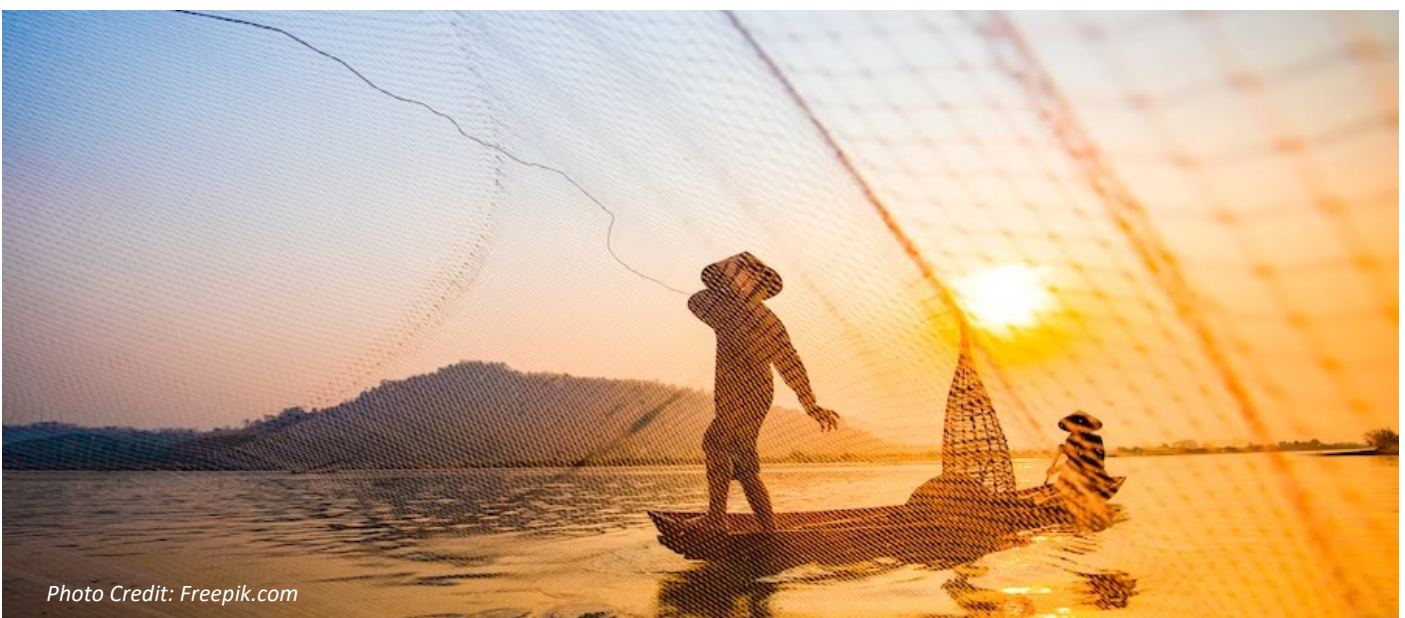


Photo Credit: Freepik.com

CLIMATE CHANGE



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Petrostate climate diplomacy at COP28

The United Arab Emirates' (UAE) COP28 presidency in 2023 was marked by a different approach in global climate discussions. Despite the many differences and controversies encountered, petrostate climate diplomacy continues to be relevant in a world that is far from ready to let go of fossil fuels.

Margareth Sembiring

RSIS Commentary | 12 December 2023

US-China climate relations brace for US election, envoy change

Whichever way the White House vote swings in the election this year, China is readying a new climate diplomacy effort and is expected to announce its climate envoy Xie Zhenhua's replacement. The 75-year-old Xie had guided China's international climate talks for 16 years.

Valerie Volcovici and David Stanway

Reuters | 22 December 2023

Ministry encourages green shipping to protect maritime environment

The Transportation Ministry supports the implementation of green shipping to protect the maritime environment by issuing several mitigation regulations.

Antara

12 January 2024

Can nature and biodiversity find justice in Asia's courts?

Globally, a movement to endow natural ecosystems with legal rights is growing. Observers say Asia's judges might be more culturally disposed to rule in favour of nature, but they need to be equipped with knowledge on the latest trends.

Ng Wai Mun

Eco-Business | 16 January 2023

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Urban water demand management

This guidebook documents urban WDM policies, measures, and practices that have demonstrated effective implementation outcomes across various contexts and which are expected to be relevant for cities in ASEAN.

Corrine Ong, Ojasvee Arora, and Cecilia Tortajada

Springer | 2023

SEA circular: Solving plastic pollution at source in South-East Asia

This resource deck contains a range of knowledge products and solutions for addressing plastic pollution in South-East Asia that have been generated as part of the SEA circular project – Reducing Marine Litter by Addressing the Management of the Plastic Value Chain in South-East Asia. It contains 18 research and assessment reports; 23 inspiring case studies; 21 practical tools and manuals; 6 project country profiles; and 14 videos.

COBSEA, UNEP

2023

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Where's the Water: Mekong Dry Season 2024

In recent years, water releases from upstream dams have tripled the amount of water in the Mekong during certain dry season months. Is this helpful or harmful? How will dam releases impact dry season flow along the course of the Mekong from Thailand to Cambodia this year? Join the Mekong Dam Monitor team for its forecast for the 2024 dry season and review of major findings of the 2023 wet season including El Nino impacts and the quality of the Tonle Sap Expansion.

Webinar

26 January 2024

ENERGY SECURITY



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

The COP28 pledge to accelerate nuclear power capacity

The inclusion of nuclear energy in the Global Stocktake of COP28 and the pledge of several countries to triple nuclear power capacity by 2050 signify growing support for its deployment. But as countries consider whether to use nuclear energy in their transition to clean energy, expanding nuclear capacity is an uphill task as there are major hurdles to overcome. .

Julius Cesar Trajano

RSIS Commentary | 19 December 2023

Japan lifts operational ban on Fukushima Nuclear Plant Owners

The operator will be allowed to resume preparations for restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant after more than 10 years.

Agence France-Presse

VOA | 27 December 2023

Geopolitics cloud high hopes for clean energy in Southeast Asia

Several commitments have been made in 2023 to boost clean energy in the region, and observers are now looking for signs of real action. Meanwhile, solar manufacturers could be in for a bumpy ride.

Liang Lei

Eco-Business | 9 January 2024

Indonesia to abandon 23% renewable energy target by 2025

Indonesia is planning to slash the targeted share of renewables in the national energy mix, a move seen by experts as a step back in the country's ambition toward clean energy.

Divya Karyza

The Jakarta Post | 17 January 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

2023 Recap - Mid-Year energy insight on electric vehicle and energy efficiency

This article highlights the pathways of ASEAN electric mobility and energy-saving efforts towards a sustainable future.

ASEAN Centre for Energy

2023

Computer security in the nuclear world

Advanced nuclear reactor designs, such as small modular reactors (SMRs) and microreactors, already include plans to use AI and machine learning (ML) to enable innovative features such as automation, remote supervisory control and maintenance, and shared control rooms.

IAEA Bulletin, Vol. 64, No. 2

2023

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

6th International Energy Workshop (IEW) 2024

The IEW is a leading conference for the international energy modeling community

Bonn, Germany

26-28 June 2024

FOOD SECURITY



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Trade disruptions in Red Sea cast shadows on global grain trade and food security

Recent Houthi attacks in the Red Sea have heightened concerns about their impact on global grain trade, given the Red Sea's pivotal role in one-fifth of the global wheat trade. These could lead to "domino effects" leading to increased shipping costs and delays, including a 250% increase in costs of insuring such commodities. *Miller Magazine* | 27 December 2023

Agriculture and food at COP28: Not just more money

The recent COP28 Climate Summit has finally given due recognition to food and agriculture given the close links between climate change and food production. While the summit saw a big push to operationalise the newly established Loss and Damage Fund, limited attention was given to agriculture in discussions on the said fund. Rather than focusing on drawing from the new fund to promote sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural practices, greater attention is needed instead to mobilising existing funds.

Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros and Paul S. Teng

RSIS Commentary | 2 January 2024

Time for ASEAN to step up to biotechnology in food production

China is reportedly planning to double the land it is using for the production of genetically-modified corn amidst the global rise in food-related supply chain tensions. Such move by an agriculture giant towards the use of biotech crops to produce high-yielding seeds, behooves ASEAN to do so as well to assure itself of sufficient feed and food, and to achieve the goals set out in several recent ASEAN declarations pertaining to sustainable agriculture, climate resilience and food security.

Paul S. Teng and Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros

RSIS Commentary | 11 January 2024

EU's eastern members demand import duties on Ukraine grains

Ironically, eastern member states of the European Union which have seen an increase in grain trade from Ukraine, have called for import duties on such grains as their domestic farmers are losing out in market competition. In fact, there have also been calls for a review of food standards of Ukraine's grains.

Reuters

The Business Times | 15 January 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Understanding the farmers' choices and adoption of adaptation strategies, and plans to climate change impact in Africa: A systematic review

The study used a systemic review process to identify 66 articles on farmers' adaptation practices in Africa. While it lauds the dominant practices (crop diversification, planting drought-tolerant varieties, changing planting dates, and planting early maturing crops) as being reliable in the long-run, a gap lies in responding to more extreme climate changes in the coming decades. This calls for more transformative changes involving irrigation infrastructures, crop insurance, further improved varieties, and livelihood diversification, among others.

Bahati Magesa et al.

Climate Services | 2023

Digital technology adoption and potential in South-east Asian agriculture

While the rural agriculture sector has traditionally been seen as backward relative to the urban industrial and services sectors, it is a potential "low-hanging fruit" ripe for a much-needed digital transformation for agricultural development. Digital technologies are important in adapting the agriculture sector to climate change and rising demand for it to serve as a key sector for food security, income, trade, and employment in the region.

Jose Ma Luis Montesclaros and Paul S. Teng

Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development 20(2): 7-30 | 2023

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

From relief to climate-resilient development: Reducing humanitarian needs, protecting people and planet by scaling up integrated resilience actions in the face of climate change

This COP28 Plenary brought together actors such as the economic lead of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization along with Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce, among others, to discuss the roles of businesses in building resilience in agriculture as a key point of climate vulnerability among developing countries.

Recorded Webcast from COP28 (Dubai, United Arab Emirates)

3 December 2023



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

NUS research centre to lead South-east Asia's efforts in heat health and productivity

The Heat Resilience and Performance Centre NUS will be tasked to be the Southeast Asian node for the Global Heat Health Information Network. The Centre will work with regional and international partners to identify heat-related health risks and explore potential interventions.

Cheryl Tan

Straits Times | 5 January 2024

Climate and health: How to build on COP28 progress?

Health became a focus at the COP28 UN climate change conference in Dubai last year and countries participating in the conference signed the Declaration on Climate and Health. Issues highlighted in the declaration included the adaptation of the health sector to climate change, financing, the incorporation of health into national climate action plans and emission reduction.

Xia Zhijian and Cui Qiwen

China Dialogue | 11 January 2024

Human bodies are responding differently to Covid-19 and testing must catch up, immunologist says

As human bodies respond to the COVID-19 virus differently, existing tests do not seem to work. Immunologist warns that testing should catch up with the changes.

Straits Times | 13 January 2024

WHO appeals for \$1.5 bln to address crises from Gaza to Afghanistan

The World Health Organization is appealing for \$1.5 billion in funding to address the health needs of people caught up in a number of humanitarian emergencies in the world. In addition to the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, COVID-19 and the situation in Afghanistan will be major agenda in the work of the WHO this year.

Reuters | 15 January 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Climate change and population health in Singapore: a systematic review

This study provides a systemic review on the health impacts of various climate change effects on the population in Singapore, such as absolute humidity, rainfall, extreme heat, and pollution of nitrogen dioxide and ozone.

Joel Aik et al.

The Lancet Regional Health West Pacific, Vol. 44 | 2023

Health Emergency Risk Management in World Health Organization – South-East Asia Region during 2014–2023: synthesis of experiences

This article provides a synthesis of the WHO's work in Southeast Asia between 2014 and 2023 to manage health emergencies and enhance the region's resilience.

Edwin Ceniza Salvador et al.

The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia, Vol. 18 | 2023

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Global Health Security Conferences 2024

The Global Health Security conference brings together leaders, researchers, policy-makers, and representatives from government, international organisations, civil society, and private industry from around the world to engage with each other, review the latest research and policy innovations, and agree solutions for making the world safer and healthier.

Sydney, Australia

18-21 June 2024

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF



Photo Credit: EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid on Flickr.com/Creative Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief: New Frontier for China-India Contestation?

As India looks to counter Chinese influence in their “natural backyard”, HADR seems to be a potential frontier of contestation. However, there is first a need for the Indian government to focus on building capacity internally.

Anuttama Banerji

The Diplomat | 19 December 2023

Japan sharing reconstruction lessons with Ukraine

As part of a memorandum of understanding between Japan and Ukraine, Japan has presented Ukraine with a collection of lessons learnt from the aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami. Considering the devastation of the war, Ukraine is expected to grapple with similar infrastructural challenges.

Jiji

The Japan Times | 2 January 2024

What's shaping aid policy in 2024

The six policy trends that are likely to shape aid in the next year are the likely decrease in humanitarian aid funding, the rise of right-wing politics, Israel's siege of Gaza, the need for climate resilience, the growing assertiveness of the Global South and waning trust in a multilateral system.

Irwin Loy and Will Worley

The New Humanitarian | 4 January 2024

War gave us the Red Cross. Now climate disaster means we need a Green Cross too

Could an international civil protection force with rapid-reaction capacities and clear operational expertise guaranteed by regular joint training and funding be the solution for the ongoing climate crisis? Such a global initiative might be a useful – if limited – place to start.

Lorenzo Marsili

The Guardian | 9 January 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Good Practices, lessons learned, and the unique challenges affecting security risk management in urban humanitarian responses

This article provides an overview of key operational challenges that humanitarians have encountered in urban settings, and examines its security risk management considerations.

Global Interagency Security Forum
2023

Closing the Gender Gap in Humanitarian Action in Ukraine

The ongoing war in Ukraine differentially affects individuals, in particular most-at-risk women, with the complexity of gender discrimination heightening their vulnerability. This report provides an analysis of these issues, and assesses the gaps as well as the advancements that have been identified since 2022.

CARE and UNWomen
2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Environmental Casteism and Climate Disaster

This webinar will focus on the question of climate justice. Specifically, it will examine how the climate crisis is reinforcing the vulnerabilities of oppressed communities and highlight the need for an anti-caste framework for research and practice.

Webinar
26 January 2024

MIGRATION



Photo Credit: UN Women on Flickr.com/Creative Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

The heat is on: how climate change and migration trends do – and do not – overlap
With millions of people projected to be displaced by climate-induced disasters, other factors such as poverty and the frequency of disasters would impact migration patterns. The mobility of affected persons hinges on their access to resources such as social networks, legal protection, and transportation.

Ana P. Santos

Info Migrants | 5 January 2024

The local and international dimensions of Aceh's Rohingya crisis

In Aceh, a surge of xenophobic sentiments, fuelled by right-wing politics, has erupted against Rohingya refugees seeking refuge there. Alongside humanitarian aid, hate speech and misinformation toward vulnerable groups should be counteracted.

Virdika Rizky Utama

The Diplomat | 5 January 2024

MSF survey sheds new light on scale and intensity of ethnic violence in Sudan

The war in Sudan has triggered a humanitarian crisis, with millions of refugees fleeing from the conflict. The survey, which gathered responses from Sudanese refugees in Chad, found that the mortality rate in Sudan had increased 20-fold since April 2023.

Medecins Sans Frontieres | 9 January 2024

Asia's Troubled Foreign Domestic Workers Often Return Home to Fresh Challenges

Returning domestic workers, particularly those who suffered mistreatment, face financial, livelihood and emotional struggles. While there are government-led reintegration programs, they often fall short in upskilling, providing sufficient safety nets and support.

Koh Ewe

TIME | 21 December 2023

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Inner Journeys: Mental Health and Psychosocial Perspectives on the Migration, Return and Reintegration Experiences of Ethiopian, Somali and Sudanese Migrants in Vulnerable Situations

The study examines the impact of migration and reintegration on the mental health and well-being of returning migrants travelling through various transit countries along the Horn of Africa.

International Organization for Migration
2024

Migration and Health in ASEAN: Regional Case Studies

Through comprehensive data outlining the recent initiatives and developments on migration and health in each ASEAN member state, the publication highlights the challenges in implementation and includes recommendations to improve migrant workers' access to health services.

ASEAN
2023

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Virtual Spaces of Migration Mediation: The Case of Vietnamese Migration to Australia

Digital spaces and connectivity have shaped migration aspirations and practices. Focusing on the lived experience of migrants from Vietnam to Australia, the lecture will cover the evolving relationships between the state, migrants, and the market in the digital age.

Hybrid Event
31 January 2024