

# Navigating a World in Transition: Agenda for ASEAN-India Cooperation



**RIS**  
Research and Information System  
for Developing Countries  
विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली

**AIC**  
ASEAN-India Centre at RIS

 **ASEAN  
Studies Centre**

**ISEAS** YUSOF ISHAK  
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Proceedings of Eighth Roundtable of  
ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks

7-8 November 2024

Singapore



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Zone IV B, 4th Floor, India Habitat Centre  
Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110 003, India  
Tel.: +91-11-24682177-80; Fax: +91-11-24682173-74  
E-mail: [aic@ris.org.in](mailto:aic@ris.org.in); [dgoffice@ris.org.in](mailto:dgoffice@ris.org.in)  
Website: [www.ris.org.in](http://www.ris.org.in); <http://aic.ris.org.in>

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# Foreword

## **Ambassador Sanjay Kumar Verma**

Chairman, RIS

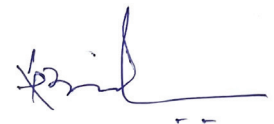
The ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS was established with the objective of promoting policy research, dialogue, and collaboration to strengthen ASEAN-India relations. As part of this mission, the ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT) Roundtable has emerged as a flagship platform for fostering high-level discussions on economic, strategic, and technological cooperation.

The Eighth AINTT Roundtable, held in Singapore on 7-8 November 2024, reaffirmed the growing importance of ASEAN-India relations in an era of complex global transitions. Bringing together eminent scholars, policymakers, and experts, the roundtable provided an invaluable forum to explore ways to deepen economic integration, strengthen strategic cooperation, and harness technological advancements for mutual growth.

ASEAN and India share a deep-rooted historical and cultural bond that has evolved into a dynamic partnership, shaped by shared aspirations for regional peace, stability, and prosperity. As the region navigates emerging geopolitical shifts, rapid digital transformation, and evolving trade dynamics, it is imperative to identify new avenues for collaboration. The deliberations at the roundtable highlighted key priorities, including resilient regional value chains, enhanced digital and physical connectivity, and sustainable development strategies to drive inclusive growth.

The AINTT remains a vital Track 1.5 mechanism, fostering dialogue among policymakers, thought leaders, and institutions. This report captures the key insights and actionable recommendations from the discussions, providing a strategic roadmap to advance ASEAN-India cooperation.

I am grateful to all participants, speakers, and organizers for their invaluable contributions. I am sure that this report will be an important reference for policymakers and stakeholders working toward a more integrated and prosperous ASEAN-India partnership.



**Sanjay Kumar Verma**



# Preface

## **Professor Sachin Chaturvedi**

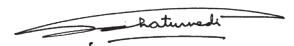
Director General, RIS

The ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS has been at the forefront of fostering research, dialogue, and cooperation between ASEAN and India. Established to promote policy-oriented studies and institutional engagement, AIC serves as a key platform for strengthening regional partnerships and advancing collaborative initiatives. One of its flagship initiatives, the ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT) Roundtable, has played a pivotal role in deepening intellectual and policy exchanges between scholars, experts, and policymakers from both regions.

The Eighth AINTT Roundtable, held in Singapore on 7-8 November 2024, provided a timely opportunity to deliberate on the evolving dynamics of ASEAN-India relations in an era of multiple transitions. Under the overarching theme of deepening regional cooperation, the roundtable facilitated discussions on critical areas such as trade and investment facilitation, maritime security, digital connectivity, and sustainable development. As ASEAN and India navigate a rapidly changing global landscape marked by economic transformations, geopolitical shifts, and technological advancements, the deliberations underscored the importance of enhanced policy coordination and innovation-driven partnerships to address emerging challenges and seize new opportunities.

The discussions also reaffirmed the significance of Track 1.5 diplomacy in shaping a forward-looking agenda for ASEAN-India collaboration. By fostering dialogue among think tanks, academic institutions, and policymakers, the AINTT Roundtable continues to serve as a vital mechanism for strengthening regional understanding and cooperation. This report captures the key insights, recommendations, and policy imperatives that emerged from the discussions, offering valuable guidance for advancing the ASEAN-India strategic partnership.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all the distinguished participants, speakers, and organizers for their contributions to the success of this roundtable. I also extend my gratitude to Dr Pankaj Vashisht, Coordinator of ASEAN-India Centre at RIS and his team for preparing this extensive report. I am confident that this report will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers and stakeholders committed to furthering ASEAN-India relations in the years ahead.



**Sachin Chaturvedi**



# Summary Report

## Context

The Eighth Roundtable of ASEAN India Network of Think-Tanks was held on 7-8 November 2024, at Singapore. Organised by the Ministry of External Affairs of India in conjunction with the ASEAN-India Centre at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), and the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, the roundtable brought together government officials, policy makers and scholars from across the region to discuss the agenda for navigating a world in transition. The roundtable agenda was structured into six key sessions: (I) connectivity and regional value chains, (II) cooperation for green energy transition, (III) digitalisation and MSME development, (IV) fintech and cross border digital payments, (V) Strengthening international Rule of Law using the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and (VI) Way Forward for India ASEAN Relations. The roundtable aimed to foster dialogue, share best practices, and develop actionable strategies for navigating the challenges ASEAN and India have been facing.

## Inaugural

The roundtable commenced with insightful opening remarks and a keynote address from distinguished figures. Professor Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General of RIS, welcomed participants and provided a comprehensive overview of AINTT's journey, emphasising its pivotal role in fostering ASEAN-India collaboration in trade, investment, technology, and finance over seven impactful editions. Introducing the theme of the current edition of the roundtable - 'Navigating a World in Transition' - Professor Chaturvedi highlighted the profound transformations underway globally. He pointed out that the dual transitions in energy and digital spheres, coupled with ongoing geostrategic shifts, have created an environment of uncertainty. These transitions, he noted, have far-reaching implications for both India and ASEAN, necessitating coordinated efforts to address emerging challenges and leverage new prospects. Professor Chaturvedi urged participants to explore actionable strategies to navigate these multifaceted transitions effectively. He stressed the importance of collaborative approaches in addressing the economic and strategic shifts shaping the region's future.

In his introductory remarks, Mr Choi Shing Kwok, Director and CEO of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, underscored the critical importance of ASEAN-India collaboration in navigating ongoing global transitions. Reflecting on the evolution of their partnership since 1992, Mr Choi highlighted the impressive growth in economic ties between ASEAN and India, with bilateral trade surpassing \$131 billion and investments exceeding \$173 billion. He commended the alignment of shared priorities, such as ASEAN's Indo-Pacific Outlook and India's Act East Policy, as key drivers of geopolitical and strategic synergy. While acknowledging challenges in regional

perceptions of India's global leadership in trade, climate action, and security, Mr Choi conveyed optimism about India's growing role as a trusted partner amid evolving global dynamics. He emphasised the significance of the roundtable in addressing crucial themes, including value chain connectivity, green energy transition, digital transformation, and cross-border fintech. Expressing hope, he envisioned the discussions as a catalyst for strengthening ASEAN-India cooperation, fostering resilience, and unlocking opportunities for sustainable economic growth and lasting peace in the regions and beyond.

H.E. Dr Shilpak Ambule, High Commissioner of India to Singapore, emphasised the enduring and evolving ties between India and ASEAN in his opening remarks. He highlighted the shared civilizational links and the steady progress in relations since the establishment of dialogue relations in 1992, culminating in the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Cooperation between India and ASEAN has expanded across diverse areas, including trade, investment, defence, education, science, technology, and people-to-people exchanges. Dr Ambule reaffirmed India's commitment to ASEAN centrality and unity, underscoring its importance in the Act East Policy and the Indo-Pacific vision. He highlighted recent high-level engagements, including visits by India's Prime Minister and President to ASEAN nations, and the foreign minister's engagements in Singapore. These demonstrate India's renewed focus on strengthening ties with ASEAN. He pointed to new avenues for collaboration, particularly in digital transformation and cyber policy, citing the inaugural India-ASEAN Cyber Policy Dialogue. Dr Ambule urged scholars to provide actionable recommendations to enhance India's perception and ranking as a preferred ASEAN partner. He expressed confidence that insights from the roundtable would help policymakers deepen collaboration and improve mutual perceptions, fostering a stronger partnership for the future.

In his keynote address, H.E. Dr Kao Kim Hourn, ASEAN Secretary-General, emphasised the importance of partnership between ASEAN and India at a time of profound global changes emanating from geopolitical rivalries, technological advancements like AI and digitalisation, and climate change. The Secretary-General noted that these challenges, while posing risks, also provide opportunities, particularly in areas like green and circular economies. He pointed out that India's engagement with ASEAN has grown significantly over the years, evolving from a sectoral dialogue partner in 1992 to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2022. This milestone marks a strengthened cooperation aimed at addressing global challenges, especially through initiatives like the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOP) and India's Act East policy. He highlighted the importance of deepening trade, investment, and socio-cultural ties, noting that India has become one of ASEAN's top foreign investors, with substantial growth in trade reaching \$131 billion in 2023. The Secretary-General stressed the importance of multilateralism and cooperation, particularly in enhancing maritime security, sustainable development, and energy security. He encouraged further collaboration in emerging fields like AI, blockchain, and digital payments, and urged the full utilisation of ASEAN's Free Trade Area and Connectivity Master Plans. He argued that the ASEAN-India partnership, through continued cooperation in these areas, is poised to shape a more stable and prosperous regional future. Secretary-General concluded by expressing confidence that ASEAN and India could navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape by fostering trust and respect, ensuring that both regions benefit from their deepening ties and shared goals.

## Session I: Connectivity and Regional Value Chains

Chaired by Dr Prabir De, Professor, RIS, session 1 of the roundtable focused on connectivity and regional value chains. Opening the session, Dr Prabir De underscored the pivotal role of connectivity and regional value chain integration in enhancing the economic partnership between ASEAN and India. He highlighted the significant progress both regions have achieved in strengthening physical and institutional connectivity, particularly through the implementation of trade facilitation measures and trilateral highways. Such advancements, he argued, reflect a shared commitment to fostering economic interdependence and creating an enabling environment for trade and investment. Dr De, however, pointed out that while the progress is commendable, challenges persist that could impede deeper integration. He stressed that improved digital connectivity, particularly through harmonised standards and the integration of national single windows, holds the potential to reduce transaction costs and further streamline cross-border trade. This step, he noted, could significantly enhance the efficiency of value chains, making them more resilient and competitive. He encouraged speakers and participants to explore innovative approaches and actionable strategies to strengthen ASEAN-India connectivity and enhance the integration of regional value chains.

First speaker of the session, Professor S. K. Mohanty, RIS, highlighted critical issues in ASEAN-India trade relations and provided recommendations for enhancing bilateral cooperation. He began by emphasising ASEAN as India's natural partner, underlining the historical and cultural ties that have shaped this relationship. While trade between the two regions has grown steadily, he noted a slowdown in its pace. Dr Mohanty identified several challenges affecting ASEAN-India trade. These included a persistent trade deficit with many ASEAN countries, an imbalance in trade structure, and limited diversification. To address these challenges, Professor Mohanty recommended a thorough review of the ASEAN-India trade agreement to create more balanced and diversified trade. He emphasised expanding manufacturing capabilities, particularly in downstream and midstream sectors, to reduce deficits and boost economic collaboration. He also called for enhancing digital and physical connectivity, such as integrating single-window systems, to lower transaction costs and facilitate trade. Professor Mohanty concluded by advocating for broader engagement in agriculture, services, and investment to build a resilient and mutually beneficial partnership.

Dr Jayant Menon, Visiting Senior Fellow, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, discussed the unexploited potential in inter-regional trade and investment between ASEAN and India. He remarked that while ASEAN countries are active participants in GVCs, South Asian countries, including India, have been latecomers, largely due to historically high costs and significant trade barriers. Dr Menon attributed Southeast Asia's success to its early adoption of export promotion policies, which India and its neighbours adopted much later. However, he noted that India is catching up, partly due to increased investments driven by US-China tensions, which have boosted its strategic manufacturing sectors. He proposed strengthening regional institutions like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) to enhance connectivity and promote trade. He also emphasised the need for regionalism to drive trade and investment reforms, citing ASEAN's model of open regionalism as an example. While acknowledging the potential of free trade agreements (FTAs), he cautioned that they alone cannot address barriers such as non-tariff barriers (NTBs) or logistical challenges, which require complementary policy measures.

Dr Witada Anukoonwattaka, Economic Affairs Officer, UNESCAP, Bangkok, introduced the concept of “Value Chain 4.0,” highlighting the transition from traditional to digitally-driven value chains. She explained that ASEAN’s earlier success in global value chains was rooted in low labour costs and minimal trade barriers. However, the modern era emphasises data, digital services, and artificial intelligence (AI), which are transforming trade dynamics and competitive advantages. Advanced specialisations now requires robust digital infrastructure, ICT services, and data analytics. Dr Witada noted that India, with its young population, vast domestic market, and expertise in digital services, is well-positioned to complement ASEAN, which is grappling with rising costs and ageing demographics. This paradigm shift presents significant opportunities for deeper ASEAN-India integration. However, realising these opportunities hinges on addressing critical challenges. She emphasised the importance of removing digital trade barriers, improving infrastructure, and achieving regulatory interoperability. Harmonised rules for data flows, digital payments, and cybersecurity, according to her are crucial to reducing compliance costs, particularly for smaller firms. Drawing from the UNESCAP ‘Regional Digital Trade Integration Framework’, Dr Witada illustrated existing regulatory gaps between ASEAN and India. She argued that while ASEAN has made progress in aligning its digital regulations, India’s lower integration in the digital domain increases compliance costs and limits collaboration potential. To unlock complementarities, Dr Witada recommended harmonising standards, developing legal frameworks, and reducing compliance burdens. By addressing these challenges, ASEAN and India can strengthen their integration into digitally-driven value chains, enhancing their competitiveness and fostering deeper collaboration in the evolving global trade ecosystem.

Professor C. Veeramani, Director at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, addressed key issues surrounding rules of origin (RoO) requirements and trade deficits in the context of free trade agreements (FTAs) and global value chains (GVCs). He emphasised that unilateral or multilateral liberalisation—which eliminates RoO requirements—is the ideal scenario for fostering GVC integration. However, since this is not always feasible, FTAs emerge as the second-best alternative. India’s preference for stringent RoO requirements, according to him, stems from concerns over potential misuses, such as third-country’s imports bypassing tariffs via partner countries. Despite these concerns, Professor Veeramani noted that excessively rigid RoO could defeat the purpose of FTAs, particularly in sectors like electronics, where GVCs are critical. To address this, he proposed a differentiated approach to RoO: adopting relaxed requirements for products integral to GVCs and stricter rules for sensitive goods less connected to GVCs. He argued that this targeted approach would enable India to leverage the benefits of FTAs while addressing policy concerns about misuse. Regarding trade deficits, Prof. Veeramani clarified that bilateral trade imbalances, such as India’s deficit with ASEAN, are not inherently problematic. He explained that policymakers in India often overemphasise bilateral trade balances, despite the aggregate trade balance and a healthy balance of payments being more critical. He highlighted the potential to reduce deficits with ASEAN by addressing policy rigidities and fostering integration in network products, where trade imbalances are significant but not due to natural factors.

## **Session II: ASEAN-India Cooperation for Green Energy Transition**

The second session, chaired by Dr Mirza Sadaqat Huda, Lead Researcher, Climate Change in Southeast Asia Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, focused on ASEAN-India cooperation for achieving a green energy transition. Dr Huda opened the discussion by emphasising the critical

challenge of addressing climate change impacts while maintaining ambitious economic growth in both regions. He highlighted the urgent need to reduce dependence on coal and accelerate the transition to renewable energy, all while ensuring affordability, energy security, and a stable supply. Dr Huda argued that both India and ASEAN had made notable progress in renewable energy. Both regions have also been making efforts to improve transnational energy connectivity. However, he pointed out that several challenges also continue to exist. He invited panellist to prescribe policy measures required to ensure a just energy transition.

First speaker of the session, Dr Chandra Bhushan, President of iFOREST, New Delhi, delivered a powerful address on the need for a just energy transition, emphasising that the challenge goes beyond technological solutions and must be approached as a political-economic issue. He questioned the adequacy of Indonesia's \$20 billion Just Energy Transition Partnership with developed nations and argued that such deals may not be sufficient to ensure a fair and inclusive transition for coal-dependent regions. Dr Bhushan stressed that the energy transition must consider the social and economic costs borne by communities reliant on coal, with the necessary focus on the losers of this shift, not just the winners. To address these challenges, Dr Bhushan recommended a multi-pronged policy approach that includes restructuring economies in coal-dependent districts/regions, repurposing existing infrastructure, and reskilling workers to prepare them for jobs in green industries. He also highlighted the importance of diversifying local economies and substituting revenue lost from fossil fuel sectors. He called for responsible environmental and social practices to ensure the transition benefits communities equitably. Furthermore, he emphasised that the transition requires substantial public finance, given that private investment alone will not suffice. He also warned that while international finance would be important, it is unlikely to be sufficient or reliable in the future, urging countries to rely more on internal resources to drive change.

Dr Kannika Thampanishvong, Section Head at the Puey Ungphakorn Institute for Economic Research in Bangkok, addressed the challenges and opportunities facing ASEAN nations in their energy transition journey. She argued that although ASEAN countries are not the top global emitters of greenhouse gases, they are among the most vulnerable regions to the impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather events like flooding, droughts, and heatwaves. Dr Thampanishvong emphasised the urgency of tackling them through effective energy transition policies. She advocated decoupling economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions, with particular focus on reducing dependence on fossil fuels in energy production. She highlighted ASEAN's commitment to increasing renewable energy share to 23 per cent of the total primary energy supply by 2025. She argued that while the region has developed some strategies to increase renewable energy production, including expanding regional grids and promoting energy efficiency, significant barriers remain. These include fossil fuel subsidies, outdated grid infrastructure, restrictive power market regulations, and limited green financing. To overcome these barriers, Dr Thampanishvong recommended several policy actions. First, phasing out fossil fuel subsidies to eliminate market distortions and create a level playing field for renewable energy investments. Second, reforming power markets to enable peer-to-peer energy trading and better integration of renewable energy. Third, strengthening sustainable financing mechanisms and using green taxonomy to attract investments. She also suggested implementing carbon pricing mechanisms, such as carbon taxes and emission trading schemes, to incentivise renewable energy projects. Finally, Dr Thampanishvong called for establishing a Green Transition Fund, aimed at providing financial support for communities adversely affected by the energy transition, ensuring a just and inclusive shift to sustainable energy.

Dr Shantanu Dixit, Group Coordinator of Prayas Energy Group in Pune, delivered a comprehensive presentation on India's energy transition, addressing the country's unique challenges and the need for tailored strategies. He began by highlighting India's relatively low per capita energy consumption, emissions, and income, underscoring the urgent need to increase energy access while ensuring sustainability. Dr Dixit pointed out that the primary challenge lies in balancing the rising demand for energy to fuel social and economic development with the imperative of transitioning to a green energy future. He outlined India's international commitments, including achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, generating 50 per cent of its energy from non-fossil sources by 2030, and reducing emissions intensity by 45 per cent. Dr Dixit emphasised that meeting these targets would require accelerated integration of renewable energy into the grid and the development of advanced solutions for energy storage and distribution. He noted that India is already undertaking ambitious initiatives, such as solarising agriculture, mandating distribution companies to source a significant share of their electricity from renewable sources, and developing round-the-clock renewable energy solutions. Additionally, India is boosting its domestic manufacturing in solar energy equipment, electric vehicles, and green hydrogen. Dr Dixit highlighted several key areas where strengthening India-ASEAN collaboration can significantly support a just and equitable energy transition. First, both regions should deepen cooperation in technology transfer and knowledge sharing, particularly in offshore wind, green hydrogen, and grid integration. India's advanced grid system offers valuable insights, while ASEAN's offshore wind potential presents opportunities for shared innovation. Additionally, India and ASEAN should work together to diversify and secure supply chains for critical components like solar PV and batteries, ensuring a reliable flow of materials essential for the energy transition. Leveraging India's expertise in large-scale renewable energy tenders can help ASEAN countries reduce procurement costs and accelerate their energy transitions, streamlining processes and reducing barriers to renewable energy development. Lastly, both regions must address the social dimensions of the energy transition, focusing on workforce retraining, community support, and inclusive policies.

Dr Thang Nam Do, the Former Deputy Director General of International Cooperation at the Vietnam Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, began by highlighting the shared renewable energy potential between ASEAN and India, noting that both regions possess vast solar and wind resources. India's solar capacity is three times greater than its current installed power capacity, while ASEAN has a solar potential that is 100 times greater than that of its existing generation. Wind power potential is also significant, particularly in Vietnam, the Philippines, and India, all of which have favourable conditions for renewable energy generation. Dr Do emphasised the common challenges faced by both regions in their energy transitions, which he summarised in three key "Ds": demanding, doable, and dependable. He argued that the transition is "demanding" due to the regions' heavy reliance on fossil fuels, requiring substantial effort to shift away from them. However, he pointed out that it is also "doable," as demonstrated by India's rapid solar expansion and Vietnam's success in scaling up its solar capacity. Lastly, Dr Do highlighted that the transition must be "dependable," meaning it requires international cooperation, as countries cannot achieve a successful energy transition in isolation.

He underscored the importance of working together to overcome these challenges. Dr Do then outlined three main areas where India and ASEAN could cooperate. First, he suggested a greater focus on knowledge sharing and exchange in developing solar and wind energy, emphasising that India, Vietnam, and Thailand have made significant strides in integrating these renewable sources,

and other countries in the region could benefit from their experiences. Second, he highlighted the importance of grid interconnectivity. Dr Do pointed to India's initiative, "One Sun, One World, One Grid," and called for increased interconnection between India and ASEAN's electricity grids. Finally, Dr Do proposed collaboration on responding to international trade and climate policies such as the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). This policy imposes additional costs on industries in ASEAN and India that export high-carbon products like steel, aluminium, and fertilisers. He suggested that both regions work together to find solutions to these trade barriers and align their strategies on carbon pricing.

### **Session III: Digitalisation and MSME Development**

Session III focused on the challenges facing the digitalisation of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India and ASEAN member states. Dr Amit Kapoor, session chair, opened the discussion by highlighting the four pillars shaping the future of the world: investment, trade, finance, and technology. These pillars, he noted, are essential for enhancing the competitiveness of MSMEs. He emphasised that improving MSME performance in India and ASEAN requires not only access to technology but also the necessary skills and knowledge to leverage it effectively. Dr Kapoor argued that the ultimate goal is to make MSMEs more resilient and competitive, ensuring they can thrive in a rapidly evolving digital economy. He urged speakers to explore how digital tools, policies, and innovation could empower MSMEs to contribute more effectively to regional economic development.

First speaker of the session, Dr Somdeth Bodhisane, Acting Director, Institute for Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Vientiane, talked about the development of digital trade between Laos and Thailand post-Covid-19. He observed that while e-commerce in Laos is growing rapidly, it remains predominantly informal, relying on platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram for marketing and sales. These platforms, however, lack formal mechanisms for dispute resolution, creating challenges for both vendors and buyers. Dr Bohdhisane detailed the payment mechanisms used by Lao consumers to purchase goods from Thai merchants, ranging from direct bank transfers and money transfer services to purchases through pre-order services and official e-commerce platforms like Shopee and Lazada. Despite these developments, he highlighted several barriers, including high outbound logistics costs and the lack of Laos-based bank account integration with regional e-commerce systems. To address these challenges, Dr Bohdhisane proposed five key actions: improving internet connectivity and transportation infrastructure, developing robust e-commerce regulations, establishing a tax system for cross-border transactions, reducing logistics costs, and fostering regional cooperation to enable Laos-based bank accounts to integrate with Thai and ASEAN e-commerce platforms. He also emphasised the strategic importance of promoting ASEAN-India e-commerce connectivity, recommending enhancements in digital infrastructure, incentives for exports to India, and the creation of a tailored ASEAN-India e-commerce platform to cater to the unique needs of consumers in both regions.

Dr Hendri Saparini, founding director of the Center for Reform on Economics (CORE) in Jakarta, talked about the challenges and opportunities of digitalisation for MSMEs in Indonesia, emphasising the transformative role of e-commerce as the region's largest driver of the digital economy. She pointed out that in 2023, e-commerce accounted for 64 per cent of Southeast Asia's

digital economy gross merchandise value (GMV). Dr Sapparini highlighted the rapid rise of mobile wallets and innovations such as Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) payment systems, which have fueled the growth of digital transactions. However, she pointed out that only 18 per cent of Indonesian MSMEs have adopted digital platforms, limiting their potential to contribute to GDP growth. Dr Sapparini emphasised the significant benefits of digitalising MSMEs, including increased income, the creation of interconnected supply chains, and job generation. To accelerate this transformation, Dr Sapparini proposed several key strategies: enhancing digital literacy, introducing technologies to boost productivity and product development, expanding supply chains, and simplifying licensing processes. She also emphasised the importance of digitalising administrative functions and financial reporting, which would make it easier for MSMEs to access credit and improve financial transparency. Dr Sapparini further called for the establishment of digital learning centres, along with policy incentives to encourage IT companies to support MSMEs. She stressed the need for awareness campaigns to promote the critical importance of digital transformation, ensuring that MSMEs are equipped to thrive in an increasingly digital economy.

Ms Buteau, executive director, LEAD, Krea University, Bengaluru, talked about the role of digitalisation in enhancing the efficiency and competitiveness of MSMEs in India. She emphasised that while India is a global digital leader, challenges persist, including limited awareness among MSMEs about available schemes, restricted access to finance, and the lack of a unified platform for MSME services. According to her, only 30-32 per cent of Indian MSMEs have adopted digital technologies, with 12 per cent engaging in e-commerce and 45 per cent using social media for marketing. Ms Buteau presented a case study illustrating how the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has been instrumental in promoting financial inclusion and providing cost-effective solutions for MSMEs to access markets and finance. She highlighted the significant growth potential of mobile wallet payments in India, which is projected to reach \$6.4 trillion by 2028. To enhance digitalisation, she recommended offering tailored digital solutions, improving outreach for digital training programs, and revitalising collective models to better support vulnerable groups.

Dr Tanu Goyal, senior fellow, ICRIER, New Delhi, provided an in-depth analysis of the impact of digital platforms on MSMEs in India based on a primary survey of 2,007 firms. She pointed out that MSMEs integrated with digital platforms reported higher profitability, increased sales and greater access to finance compared to non-integrated firms. She noted that digitalisation is positively correlated with export orientation and encourages investment and innovation. Despite these advantages, barriers such as lack of digital literacy and limited knowledge of digital tools hinder MSMEs' digital adoption, especially for micro-enterprises. Dr Goyal highlighted the transformative potential of digital public infrastructure, citing India's Account Aggregator framework and Unified Lending Interface as effective tools for sharing alternative financial data, enabling better credit access for MSMEs. To strengthen ASEAN-India cooperation, Dr Goyal proposed supporting MSME digital transformation through joint public-private initiatives and enhanced business-to-business interactions. She recommended developing new credit assessment models tailored to MSMEs, incorporating alternative data points like cash flow and utility payments. Additionally, she suggested scaling cross-border digital ecosystems, such as APIs for trade and finance facilitation, and improving market information exchange to integrate MSMEs into global value chains. These measures, she argued, could bridge digital and financial inclusion gaps, driving mutual growth and regional integration.

## Session IV: Fintech and Cross-Border Digital Payments

The fourth session of the roundtable focused on the critical theme of fintech and cross-border digital payment systems. Ms Kristina Fong, Lead Researcher, ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, opened the discussion by highlighting the two key objectives of the session: exploring the opportunities that digital tools offer in enhancing cross-border financial transactions for individuals and businesses, and addressing the challenges in achieving these objectives. She emphasised the relevance of the topic in the context of growing digital connectivity and economic integration. Ms Fong then introduced the esteemed panel of experts, who brought valuable perspectives from both Southeast Asia and India, ensuring a rich and insightful discussion.

First speaker of the session, Dr Gloria O. Pasadilla, Partner and Business Director, Leadership Design Pte Ltd, Philippines, provided an in-depth analysis of payment systems, categorising them into retail and wholesale types and detailing their key participants, including banks, non-banks, and various service providers. Retail payments, according to her, cater to everyday transactions such as remittances and e-commerce, while wholesale payments involve large-scale financial transfers like interbank settlements and securities trading. A core focus of her presentation was on clearing and settlement processes, where innovations such as real-time gross settlement systems (RTGS) have addressed liquidity risks and improved efficiency. Additionally, net settlement and hybrid models further streamline operations and enhance system resilience. She argued that technological advancements have significantly transformed the retail payment sector, driven by consumer demand for simplicity, security, and speed. Innovations like mobile apps, contactless payments, and digital wallets (e.g., Apple Pay, PayPal) have enhanced user experiences. On the back end, developments such as fast payment systems, improved interoperability - enabled by global standards like ISO 2022 - and the inclusion of non-banks in clearing systems have strengthened the infrastructure.

Dr Pasadilla highlighted the evolution of cross-border payment models, with innovations addressing inefficiencies in traditional correspondent banking. ASEAN countries are actively working to integrate payment systems, fostering seamless transactions across borders. Initiatives like Project Nexus and the adoption of central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) aim to enhance efficiency and regional connectivity, despite regulatory and logistical challenges. She emphasised the macroeconomic implications of these advancements, including impacts on foreign exchange management, the balance of payments, and systemic risks like a fraud. To ensure financial stability, she recommended prioritising central bank collaboration, regulatory harmonisation, and infrastructure investment, alongside robust risk management frameworks.

Dr Srinivas Yanamandra, Senior Vice President at Paytm, India, discussed the evolving cross-border payment landscape and the pivotal role of fintech firms in addressing inefficiencies. He started his presentation by highlighting the G20 roadmap for enhancing cross-border payments, which emphasise the need for faster, cheaper, more transparent, and inclusive payment systems. He pointed out that Fintechs have disrupted legacy systems like SWIFT and Visa, spurring innovation in messaging standards (e.g. ISO 2022) and distributed ledger technology (DLT). They have also explored central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) as a scalable alternative, though challenges remain in achieving full implementation. To bridge gaps, fintechs are leveraging hybrid solutions like stablecoins (e.g. PayPal's USD stablecoin) and strategic partnerships, such as Paytm's QR code technology expansion in Japan and PhonePe's UPI introduction in Nepal.

He argued that standardisation and interoperability are crucial for advancing cross-border payments. Initiatives like Project Nexus and Project Mandala aim to simplify regulatory compliance and enable pre-validation of transactions to minimise uncertainties. However, global adoption faces hurdles, including geopolitical tensions and diverse approaches to CBDCs, as illustrated by regional initiatives like BRICS Pay and Asian Connect. Dr Yanamandra advocated for policy refinements to support fintech scalability and profitability. He emphasised the need for regulatory harmonisation, collaborative innovation, and investments in digital public infrastructure. He concluded by saying that achieving the G20's vision for frictionless payments requires sustained global commitment, regulatory clarity, and a supportive environment for fintech innovations. While progress is evident, continued global cooperation remains essential to fully realise these objectives.

Dr Rachel Gong, Deputy Director, Khazanah Research Institute, Kuala Lumpur, discussed the evolution of digital payments in Malaysia, highlighting its rapid growth and associated challenges. Highlighting Malaysia's digital payments journey, she pointed to significant milestones, such as Bank Negara's 2018 interoperable credit transfer framework and the issuance of five digital banking licenses in 2022. These initiatives aim to enhance financial inclusion and provide alternative financing models for MSMEs. However, the speaker noted that MSMEs face challenges like limited awareness and access to these resources, necessitating public education and outreach. The speaker outlined the significant growth of mobile banking, QR payments, and cross-border digital payment opportunities. She pointed out that Malaysia has forged bilateral agreements within ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific region, including a notable agreement with India and participation in Project Nexus, which aims to connect several countries' payment systems. While these developments hold great promise for regional financial integration, they are not without hurdles that must be addressed to realise their full potential. The speaker raised concerns about the risks accompanying digital payment systems. She highlighted the potential exclusion of underserved population, such as the unbanked and rural communities, if targeted policy interventions are not implemented. Additionally, the rise in cybercrime, including scams and fraud, poses a significant threat to the system's integrity. The unregulated nature of decentralised finance and cryptocurrencies presents both opportunities and challenges, necessitating thoughtful regulation. Finally, the geopolitical implications of cross-border agreements, particularly regarding de-dollarisation and alternative currency models, require careful consideration. She concluded by stressing the need for cross-border research collaborations and policy dialogue to leverage digital payments' potential while mitigating risks and ensuring inclusivity.

Dr Priyadarshi Dash, Associate Professor, RIS, highlighted the transformative potential of fintech in cross-border payment systems and its growing importance in addressing the market segment underserved by traditional banking. He emphasised the shift in consumer preferences toward digital finance, with fintech enabling access to micro-loans for underserved segments such as informal businesses, street vendors etc. This capability has driven rapid adoption, especially during the pandemic, which entrenched habits of digital transactions. Discussing cross-border payments, he outlined the complexities of existing systems, which involve high costs, multiple intermediaries, and regulatory disparities across countries. He posed a critical question: can fintech reduce these frictions, harmonise systems, and lower transaction costs? Dr Dash noted that while fintech offers promise, it also introduces risks like cybersecurity vulnerabilities and systemic failures in interconnected systems. He referenced G20 efforts to standardise cross-border payments, including targets to lower transaction costs and enhance speed. However, he

noted uneven progress, with retail payments for low-value transactions remaining expensive. He stressed the importance of generating evidence-based research to evaluate the impact of fintech and CBDC (Central Bank Digital Currency) models on these issues. Dr Dash advocated for greater collaboration between regions like ASEAN and India, pointing to existing initiatives such as UPI-based systems and political commitments from the ASEAN-India Summit of launching the ASEAN-India Fintech Dialogue. He called for sustained research and dialogue to guide policy and ensure a balanced approach to fintech adoption.

## Ministerial Session

The roundtable also featured a high-level ministerial session, bringing together the Foreign Minister of Singapore and the External Affairs Minister of India. This session underscored the importance of bilateral and regional cooperation in the evolving global landscape. The ministers shared insights on pressing international issues, highlighted the deepening partnership between India and ASEAN, and engaged directly with the audience through a thought-provoking Q&A session.

Singapore Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, opened his remarks by highlighting the “longstanding” relationship India shares with Southeast Asia and China. He noted that for much of the past 2,000 years, India and China accounted for the largest share of the global economy during periods of peace. Despite their long histories and occasional tensions, he underscored the absence of sustained “strategic conflicts” between India and China, with armed disputes largely confined to “border skirmishes.” Dr Balakrishnan also remarked on the profound cultural, trade, and religious influences that both nations have left on the region, which is reflected in referring to mainland Southeast Asia as the “Indochina” sub-region.

Dr Balakrishnan highlighted India’s current position as the fifth-largest economy globally, trailing China, the United States, Germany, and Japan. However, he expressed confidence that India is on track to become the third-largest economy by 2027. ASEAN, as a region, was also emphasised as a comparable economic force, with a population size and combined GDP that rival India’s. Turning to trade dynamics, he noted that India’s two largest trading partners are China and the United States, though the nature of these relationships differs significantly. India runs a substantial trade deficit with China but enjoys a trade surplus with the U.S. In comparison, ASEAN-India trade is “in the same ballpark” as India’s trade with its two largest trading partners, with ASEAN maintaining a trade surplus, albeit on a smaller scale than China.

Reflecting on the historical milestones in India-Southeast Asia relations, Dr Balakrishnan pointed to India’s economic liberalisation in 1991 as the “most significant” turning point. This shift was followed by the launch of India’s “Look East” policy in 1992, which was later upgraded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 to the “Act East” policy. He underscored Singapore’s role as ASEAN Coordinator for ASEAN-India relations and highlighted the elevation of the partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in October 2024. Dr Balakrishnan noted the significance of ASEAN as a “cornerstone” of India’s foreign policy, highlighting the growth of ASEAN-India trade, which surpassed USD 100 billion in 2023. He also stressed the shared demographic advantages of both regions, emphasising the joint need and opportunity to “harvest the demographic dividend.”

Looking ahead, Dr Balakrishnan outlined several avenues to deepen ASEAN-India relations. First, he noted ASEAN's goal of concluding negotiations for the Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) by 2025, positioning India as a potential partner in advancing ASEAN's digital integration. He cited India's 2022 establishment of a "Real-Time Retail Payment link" with Singapore and participation in ASEAN's Project Nexus as examples of progress.

Second, he called for greater security and geostrategic cooperation, pointing to India's historical leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). He argued that NAM's principles – economic development, multilateralism, and agency – remain relevant today and suggested that India could lead a "NAM 2.0." He also noted the importance of maritime security, referencing joint exercises like the ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME) and the shared commitment to upholding UNCLOS. Third, Dr Balakrishnan emphasised strengthening historical and cultural ties, such as through the ASEAN-India Network of Universities, which fosters exchanges between youths from both regions. In closing, he stressed that the current era of global transition represents a "time of great opportunity" for ASEAN and India to enhance economic relations, deepen cooperation, and collectively advocate for a rules-based international order.

India's Minister of External Affairs, Dr S. Jaishankar underlined that the world is "always in transition," with nations continually navigating shifts in global dynamics. He argued that what distinguishes the present era is not the existence of change itself, but the accelerated pace at which it occurs. Reflecting on the past quarter-century, Dr Jaishankar identified three key inflection points: China's entry into the WTO in 2001, which profoundly reshaped globalisation; the 2008 financial crisis, which redefined the balance between great powers; and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which exposed socio-economic vulnerabilities and capacity constraints.

In addition to these events, Dr S. Jaishankar noted significant changes in global affairs, including the destabilising impact of conflicts in Europe and the Middle East and the recurring challenges to international law in Asia. He highlighted the emergence of the "Indo-Pacific" concept and the "maturing" of the Quad as notable developments in Asia's response to these challenges. While acknowledging the prosperity created by globalisation and connectivity, Dr S. Jaishankar warned of its "double-edged" nature, as market dependencies have been weaponised, and data privacy and cybersecurity have become paramount concerns. He described the COVID-19 pandemic as a "moment of truth" that spurred efforts to build more resilient supply chains and diversify production bases.

Dr S. Jaishankar argued that the world is moving toward "re-globalisation" rather than de-globalisation and suggested that ASEAN and India's ability to navigate this transition will determine the quality of their partnership. He highlighted global manufacturing transitions, especially in critical and digital technologies, as potential areas for ASEAN-India collaboration. India's domestic initiatives, such as the establishment of 12 new industrial parks, infrastructure development, and skill-building programs, were presented as opportunities to align with ASEAN's economic priorities. Beyond manufacturing, Dr S. Jaishankar emphasised the importance of exploring new domains like green technology and artificial intelligence while addressing the uneven global distribution of talent and skills.

Connectivity was another key focus, with Dr S. Jaishankar pointing to projects like the Trilateral Highway to the East, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and the International North-South Transport Corridor as examples of India's efforts to enhance its infrastructure development. He advocated for collaborative approaches to connectivity, emphasising that "collaborative connectivity will always be better regarded than unilateral ventures."

Dr S. Jaishankar concluded by highlighting the synergies between ASEAN and India, noting their shared demographic and economic potential. By promoting trade, tourism, mobility and education, he argued that the two regions could transcend their immediate challenges and address global issues such as climate change, food security, and maritime safety. He also emphasised the deep cultural and civilisational ties between ASEAN and India. As their partnership enters its fourth decade, Dr S. Jaishankar expressed optimism about the “immense possibilities” for collaboration. He reiterated India’s support for ASEAN centrality and cohesion and emphasised the shared commitment to respecting international law and norms. In closing, he noted that the growing “convergences” between ASEAN and India provide a strong foundation for aspiring to greater ambitions.

The session concluded with questions from the audience, covering topics such as the potential impact of U.S. elections on the region, developments in the Myanmar conflict, the South China Sea dispute, and avenues for ASEAN-India collaboration on climate change.

## **SESSION V: Strengthening International Rule of Law Using the TAC**

The fifth technical session, *Strengthening International Rule of Law using the TAC*, was chaired by Ms. Joanne Lin, Senior Fellow and ASC Co-coordinator at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore. The session explored the enduring relevance of the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) as a cornerstone for promoting peace, stability, and the rule of law in the region. The session examined how the TAC could extend its reach beyond Southeast Asia to foster global stability and resilience through strengthened multilateralism and collaborative governance.

The first speaker of the session, Dr Iqbal Singh Seeva, Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, framed the discussion within the context of ongoing global shifts, including the implications of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Elections, persistent geopolitical tensions and a growing crisis of multilateralism. He stressed the urgency of coordinated standard-setting to address advancements in digitisation, artificial intelligence, and space technology. He noted that these developments have intertwined standard-setting processes with geopolitical and geoeconomic contestation, raising fundamental questions about whether a universally accepted rule of law can exist. He provided an overview of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), ASEAN’s foundational framework established in 1976, which is grounded in principles such as sovereignty, non-interference, peaceful dispute resolution and renunciation of force. While the TAC lacks regulatory competencies, its norms, enshrined in ASEAN declarations, have been central to fostering regional stability. Dr Seeva highlighted that the TAC’s reliance on state sovereignty and consensus decision-making has enabled ASEAN to develop rules-based order, distinct from the supranational approach of the European Union. However, he argued that the TAC’s primary strength lies in its normative value, as its institutional mechanisms – such as the High Council – have never been formally activated. Dr Seeva proposed that the TAC’s emphasis on sovereignty could offer an alternative to the liberal rule-based order. Its adaptability to address multidimensional security challenges – including traditional and non-traditional threats – positions it as a potential model for strengthening the international rule of law. Its neutrality, he argued, also makes it attractive to external partners seeking engagement with ASEAN without aligning with either the US or China.

In his presentation, Dr Chintamani Mahapatra, Director, Kalinga Institute, New Delhi, underscored the enduring relevance of the TAC, citing its expansion to 55 signatories as a testament to its success. He reflected on its origin during the Cold War, a period marked by regional uncertainty, and credited the TAC with preventing major conflicts in Southeast Asia. However, he noted the absence of a global governance mechanism capable of enforcing international law effectively, allowing countries to disregard or violate agreed-upon norms with impunity. Dr Mahapatra suggested reforms to enhance compliance and consensus on international law. First, he called for the reform of the United Nations, including the expansion of the Security Council and increased representation of Global South countries in financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, which he noted are outdated frameworks. Second, he argued for greater agency from middle powers and small states. Citing India's growing recognition as a global player, he encouraged smaller states to adopt a "non-aligned strategy" akin to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and collectively work to strengthen the rule of law. Finally, Dr Mahapatra emphasised the need to "change the narrative of international relations" by fostering new norms and narratives.

Mr Him Raksmeay, Executive Director, Cambodian Centre for Regional Studies, Phnom Penh, described the TAC as a "hallmark achievement" of ASEAN, praising its role as a legally binding framework for fostering regional cooperation and maintaining peace. He highlighted the treaty's longevity and its expansion to 55 signatories as evidence of its continued relevance. However, he identified three critical challenges. First, the TAC lacks effective enforcement mechanisms, as evidenced by the High Council's inaction and reliance on voluntary goodwill in disputes like the South China Sea and the Preah Vihear Temple case. Second, according to him, its Cold War-era framework struggles to address contemporary issues, including the Myanmar crisis. Third, its principles have not been effectively applied to global conflicts, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To enhance the TAC's effectiveness, Mr Raksmeay proposed strengthening enforcement mechanisms, activating the High Council, and expanding the treaty's scope to address evolving regional challenges. He suggested ASEAN and India collaborate to create a favourable regional security environment and exert collective influence on major powers like the US and China. He also highlighted India's potential role in resolving the Myanmar crisis and promoting a South China Sea Code of Conduct.

Dr Zaw Oo, Executive Director, Centre for Economic and Social Development, Yangon, highlighted the urgency of resolving Myanmar's humanitarian crisis, which he described as one of the most violent conflicts globally. He noted that the fragmented nature of the conflict has led to its intensity, which has also hindered engagement by ASEAN Special Envoys. He also pointed to underlying issues like the booming illicit drug economy and the massive displacement of the population, with 18 million internally displaced persons and significant refugee flows to neighbouring countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Thailand. Dr Zaw emphasised the need for ASEAN and India to act swiftly to address the crisis, particularly through expanded humanitarian efforts. He highlighted the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) as a mechanism with significant potential, though constrained by limited funding. He commended Thailand's efforts to support Myanmar students through scholarships and urged Malaysia, Singapore, China, and India to contribute more actively to conflict resolution.

Dr Joeje Santarita, Professor, Asian Center, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, observed that the TAC is often regarded more as a symbol than as an effective instrument, raising questions about its practical impact. He proposed several measures to transform the TAC

into a more effective tool for justice, the rule of law, and resilience. He argued that updating the legal framework to strengthen commitments to international norms, such as the UN Charter, UNCLOS, and International Court of Justice (ICJ) rulings, could bolster its credibility. Building enforcement mechanisms, including a TAC Compliance Committee and an independent advisory body, would enhance its capacity to uphold justice and rule-of-law principles. He also emphasised the importance of conflict prevention and resolution by developing early warning systems, institutionalising consultations among signatories, and empowering regional arbitration bodies. Furthermore, he advocated for integrating human rights monitoring into the TAC framework to promote compliance with international norms.

The session concluded with a call for strengthened ASEAN-India collaboration to reinforce the TAC and the international rule of law. Speakers emphasised India's role as a trusted partner and key player in addressing challenges such as the South China Sea dispute and the Myanmar crisis. They argued that ASEAN-India cooperation could reshape global norms and promote regional stability. While the TAC's enforcement mechanisms remain limited, its normative value and adaptability to multidimensional challenges make it an essential framework for advancing rules-based governance. Strengthening the TAC through legal updates, enhanced enforcement, and closer partnerships with countries like India will be critical to addressing contemporary challenges and reinforcing ASEAN's leadership in the region.

## **Session VI: Way Forward for ASEAN-India Relations**

The last session of the roundtable, chaired by Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS, hosted a panel discussion among the prominent scholars from the region to reflect on ASEAN-India relations and synthesise the key takeaways from the preceding discussions. It aimed to identify concrete, actionable steps to enhance ASEAN-India relations, taking into account the shifting global and regional landscape. Central to the conversation was the convergence of India's "Act East" policy and ASEAN's outward-looking approach, including the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). Panelists reflected on opportunities to strengthen bilateral cooperation in economic, security, and multilateral forums, with an emphasis on addressing global challenges such as trade protectionism, digital governance, and climate change.

Participating in the discussion, Ambassador Preeti Saran, former Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, started her intervention by highlighting the significant strides made in India-ASEAN relations, particularly under India's Act East Policy. She emphasised the personal commitment of leaders, particularly India's Prime Minister, in energising this partnership over the past decade. However, she raised concerns about the effectiveness and sustainability of numerous initiatives, urging a performance audit to assess their success and efficiency. Ambassador Saran stressed the need for coherence in the vast network of bilateral and multilateral platforms and encouraged focusing on actionable ideas, such as the blue economy, digital regulation, and maritime security. She pointed to challenges such as bureaucratic delays, implementation gaps in agreements, and trade underperformance, calling for greater participation from business communities to unlock potential. Ambassador Saran also proposed that ASEAN and India should focus on strategic sectors like tourism and connectivity to enhance people-to-people ties. Lastly, she suggested addressing the perception of India's commitment to regional trade and urged greater introspection to build a more dynamic and result-oriented partnership.

Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Distinguished Senior Advisor, Cambodian Center for Regional Studies, Phnom Penh, stressed the importance of India supporting ASEAN's community-building efforts, particularly under the ASEAN Vision 2025, which will reach its target next year. While progress has been made in regional integration, he urged for more streamlined, results-oriented actions and stronger institutional coordination to meet the vision's goals. Ambassador Sothirak also highlighted ASEAN's upcoming 'ASEAN Community Vision 2045', which aims for a resilient, people-centred community by 2045. He suggested India could help revitalise this vision by injecting viability and assisting ASEAN in addressing contemporary challenges like digital transformation and environmental sustainability. He further addressed the current global shift toward multipolarity, triggered by the rivalry between the US and China, and the challenges it poses to the rule-based international order. He proposed that ASEAN and India should collaborate to uphold rule-based order and prevent destabilisation in the Indo-Pacific. Amb. Sothirak emphasised the need to strengthen multilateralism, ensure equitable decision-making, and discourage military confrontation. He also called for joint efforts to promote regional peace, security, and prosperity, advocating for a multilateral framework that fosters collective problem-solving and shared sovereignty.

Ambassador Jayant N. Khobragade, Indian Ambassador to ASEAN, talked about the key principles that define India's approach toward its partnership with ASEAN, notably ASEAN centrality, unity, and the understanding of the "ASEAN way." He underlined that India's policies are always aligned with ASEAN's interests and priorities. For India, this commitment is not just theoretical but reflected in active, practical support, such as during the Myanmar crisis, where India has consistently backed ASEAN's initiatives like the five-point consensus. He argued that India's commitment to ASEAN has been evident in its active participation across various multilateral forums such as the East Asia Summit, ARF, ADMM-Plus, and Quad, with the latter being recognised for complementing ASEAN's goals. Amb. Khobragade noted that ASEAN centrality and unity are core to India's efforts in all subregional engagements and initiatives, including the ASEAN-India framework and the Act East Policy.

Ambassador Khobragade pointed out that India's contributions extend beyond politics and diplomacy. He highlighted India's role in sectors like traditional medicine, yoga, green hydrogen, and disaster relief, where India is keen to share its expertise with ASEAN. He also noted the importance of strengthening cultural ties, with projects like the ASEAN Cultural Heritage List and youth initiatives, including Youth Summits and arts camps, which foster a deeper connection between the regions. The Ambassador stressed the need for shifting from one-off projects to more sustainable, result-oriented initiatives, using public-private partnerships as a model. He pointed out that India has institutionalised many of its collaborations with ASEAN through dialogues in sectors such as energy, cyber policy, and disaster management. This approach ensures that engagements continue beyond singular events and are institutionalised for long-term success. Ambassador Khobragade expressed confidence that the solid foundation of cooperation between India and ASEAN positions both regions to address the aspirations of the younger generation and elevate their partnership to new heights in the second decade of India's Act East Policy.

Dr C. Raja Mohan, Non-Resident Distinguished Fellow, ASPI, New Delhi in his remarks, reflected on the challenges of think tanks' contributions to India's relationship with ASEAN. He began by noting the lack of mutual awareness between India and ASEAN, suggesting that think tanks should focus more on the micro-level details, such as specific regional dynamics, rather

than relying solely on broad government-to-government frameworks. He emphasised the importance of recognising ASEAN's economic significance and pointed out that ASEAN's prospects are growing, particularly due to demographic advantages. Dr Raja Mohan highlighted the need for more area studies and deeper expertise on Southeast Asia within India. He stressed that Indian think tanks must enhance their understanding of ASEAN's complexities, such as the region's leadership and local politics, which is currently insufficient.

In the realm of economic cooperation, he advocated for a shift from formal multilateral agreements like the ASEAN framework to more pragmatic bilateral engagements with individual ASEAN nations. He pointed out that ASEAN countries such as Indonesia are poised to become major economic players, suggesting that India should deepen its bilateral economic ties, particularly in sectors like technology and green energy. Regarding defence cooperation, Dr Raja Mohan argued for moving beyond formal multilateral frameworks, such as ADMM-Plus, and engaging with each ASEAN country individually to understand their specific security concerns. He also discussed the growing role of India's private sector in defence, pointing to companies like Tata, Mahindra, and Larsen & Toubro, which are developing military technologies and engaging with ASEAN countries in arms sales and military cooperation.

Dr Yose Rizal Damuri, Executive Director of CSIS, Jakarta, highlighted key opportunities and challenges in enhancing ASEAN-India economic relations. He began by acknowledging the need for greater cooperation to address global challenges, emphasising the untapped potential of ASEAN and India's partnership across multiple fronts, such as trade, supply chains, climate change, and energy transitions. Dr Damuri pointed out that while ASEAN and India share foundational principles like those in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), these frameworks often operate on a hub-and-spoke model rather than fostering true multilateral engagement. He underscored the potential of ASEAN-led mechanisms, including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), in facilitating regional production networks and sustainable supply chains. He emphasised that RCEP's strong developmental elements could promote trade and support the creation of regional supply chains.

However, Dr Damuri noted that the private sector plays a central role in economic activities, with governments primarily providing an enabling environment. He highlighted the importance of harmonising regulations, removing behind-the-border restrictions, and encouraging businesses to view trade as part of regional supply chain creation rather than isolated bilateral exchanges. To advance ASEAN-India cooperation, Dr Damuri proposed several "quick wins," starting with the Digital Economic Framework Agreement, which could align with ASEAN's broader digital economy initiatives. He also emphasised the blue economy as a promising area for collaboration, particularly in sustainable maritime connectivity and maritime security. These initiatives align with the growing regional demand for greener and more sustainable solutions. Finally, Dr Damuri echoed the need to elevate the ASEAN-India Trade Agreement to cover emerging areas and recent developments. He concluded by reiterating the potential for ASEAN-India cooperation to deliver significant contributions through targeted initiatives and collaborative frameworks.

Dr Prabir De, Professor, CMEC, RIS New Delhi, talked about the need for resilience and adaptation to supply chain disruptions stemming from regional conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war and attacks on vessels in the Red Sea. These disruptions, though external, significantly impact both ASEAN and India, necessitating joint action. Dr De underscored the importance of targeted capacity building initiatives, particularly in Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, which face greater challenges in resilience. Talking about economic integration, he pointed out the barriers within ASEAN, such as the lack of a customs union and inefficiencies in cross-border movement. He contrasted this with India's seamless internal trade system. He urged ASEAN to open up to Indian goods, skilled labour, and talent, particularly in high-tech, engineering, and IT sectors. Dr De recommended implementing visa-free

travel for Indian professionals to ASEAN countries. On enhancing trade relations, Dr De supported multilateral frameworks over bilateral agreements. He highlighted the importance of connectivity, noting improvements such as direct flights between India and all ASEAN capitals, including recent connections with Brunei. This progress supports the potential of the ASEAN-India Tourism Year and future economic milestones like ASEAN 2045 and India's vision for a \$30 trillion economy by 2047. Dr De concluded with actionable recommendations, including establishing an ASEAN-India Digital Dashboard to track FDI flows and trade data in real time. This transparency, he argued, would better inform policymaking and private sector strategies.

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# Recommendations

## Session I: Connectivity and Regional Value Chains

- **Eliminate Tariffs on Intermediate Goods:** Remove tariffs on intermediate goods to facilitate smoother integration into Global Value Chains (GVCs), reduce production costs, and enhance overall manufacturing efficiency.
- **Harmonise Standards and Improve Trade Logistics:** Standardize product regulations, reduce export controls, and streamline cross-border logistics and transportation to minimise trade friction and enhance the flow of goods between India and ASEAN.
- **Review and Reform FTAs:** Expedite the review of existing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and relax stringent rules of origin to reduce complexities and support greater GVC participation, enabling easier trade within the region.
- **Strengthen Connectivity Infrastructure:** Invest in and improve transport links under frameworks like BIMSTEC and SASEC, while simultaneously enhancing digital infrastructure to ensure seamless data flows, effective e-commerce, and a robust regional digital economy.
- **Align Digital Trade Policies:** Harmonise digital trade regulations across ASEAN and India, ensuring interoperability for data exchanges and digital services, which will drive efficiency and deeper regional integration.
- **Address Digital Governance Issues:** Focus on regulating online content, establishing secure digital payment systems, and enhancing cybersecurity protocols to safeguard cross-border digital transactions and promote trust in the digital economy.

## Session II: ASEAN-India Cooperation for Green Energy Transition

- **Knowledge Sharing and Exchange:** Foster collaboration between India and ASEAN countries to share best practices and expertise in solar, wind, and green hydrogen technologies, accelerating each other's energy transition efforts.
- **Grid Interconnectivity:** Enhance the "One Sun, One World, One Grid" initiative by linking India's grid with ASEAN's power grid.
- **Collaborating on International Trade and Climate Policy:** Work together to navigate global climate policies like the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), addressing the impact on industries and finding joint solutions to trade barriers.

- **Cooperation on Clean Energy Manufacturing and Supply Chains:** Strengthen regional supply chain security for solar and battery production, ensuring a steady and diverse supply of clean energy technologies.
- **Joint Research and Development of New Technologies:** Collaborate on advancing new technologies like offshore wind, geothermal, and energy storage systems, promoting joint R&D efforts between India and ASEAN to improve energy transition solutions.
- **Regional Cooperation on Renewable Energy Tendering:** Leverage India's experience in large-scale renewable energy procurement and tendering processes to help ASEAN countries adopt similar strategies, driving down costs and accelerating renewable energy adoption.
- **Joint Development of Green Hydrogen:** Work together to advance the development of green hydrogen, with India's National Green Hydrogen Mission serving as a model for ASEAN cooperation in hydrogen production and utilisation.

### Session III: Digitalisation and MSME Development

- **Promote Digital Literacy and Training Programmes:** Launch government-backed digital literacy programs across ASEAN and India, specifically targeting MSME owners, with a focus on micro-enterprises and those in rural or underserved areas.
- **Facilitate Cross-Border Trade through Digital Platforms:** Enhance cross-border trade by leveraging digital technologies, creating dedicated ASEAN-India e-commerce platforms for MSMEs to showcase products.
- **Improve Access to Finance for MSMEs:** Work collaboratively to develop innovative credit assessment models that utilise alternative data sources (e.g., e-commerce transaction data, utility bills) to enhance MSMEs' access to finance across both regions.
- **Build Trust in Digital Systems Across Borders:** Strengthen digital security and transparency to build trust in e-commerce and financial platforms, ensuring MSMEs in both India and ASEAN can confidently engage in digital transactions. Encourage the use of digital payment systems (e.g., UPI) to simplify cross-border financial transactions, providing MSMEs access to seamless financial services.
- **Streamline Administrative Processes for Cross-Border Operations:** Simplify cross-border business registration, licensing, and financial reporting processes to support MSMEs in India and ASEAN in accessing formal financial services and entering regional markets.

### Session IV: Fintech and Cross-Border Digital Payments

- **Enhance Central Bank Collaboration and Harmonise Regulatory Frameworks:** India and ASEAN central banks should collaborate to ensure liquidity, financial stability, and harmonised regulations across jurisdictions. This will foster seamless cross-border payments, enhance system resilience, and address challenges such as cybercrime and financial inclusion.

- **Develop Fast Payment Systems and Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs):** India and ASEAN should prioritise fast payment systems for near-real-time settlement, addressing retail customer demands. Simultaneously, they should explore and develop CBDCs to improve cross-border payment efficiency, security, and transparency.
- **Strengthen Risk Management and Cybersecurity Measures:** With the rapid expansion of digital payments, India and ASEAN should develop robust risk management frameworks that address both macroeconomic and cybersecurity risks. This includes managing foreign exchange volatility, fraud, and scams associated with cross-border transactions.
- **Promote Collaborative Research and Public-Private Partnerships:** Encourage cross-border research collaborations to understand the macroeconomic impacts of fintech and digital currencies. It will drive technological innovation and address challenges in enhancing cross-border payment efficiency.

## Session V: Strengthening International Rule of Law Using the TAC

- **Reinforce Justice and Rule of Law through Legal Frameworks:** Promote adherence to international norms, including the UN Charter, International Court of Justice rulings, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Update TAC provisions to include binding mechanisms for peaceful dispute resolution, such as arbitration and mediation, ensuring accountability for violations.
- **Strengthen Conflict Prevention Mechanisms:** Develop a regional early warning system to monitor conflict-prone areas, such as the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Institutionalise regular consultations between TAC signatories to address emerging threats, with participation from diplomatic, civil society, and academic representatives.
- **Enhance Mediation and Arbitration Capacity:** Empower ASEAN mediation bodies and create regional mechanisms for arbitration to resolve disputes effectively. Foster collaboration between ASEAN and external partners, including India, to support neutral third-party mediation.
- **Enhance India-ASEAN Collaboration under TAC:** Leverage India's expertise in peacekeeping, disaster response, and legal frameworks to strengthen ASEAN's conflict prevention and resolution capabilities. Foster India-ASEAN partnerships in capacity building, knowledge exchange, and regional stability initiatives.

## Session VI: Way Forward for ASEAN-India Relations

- **Strengthen Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation:** Reinforce bilateral ties with ASEAN nations through expanded trade, investment, and tourism, while implementing joint initiatives such as tourism year programmes to foster deeper people-to-people connections. Actively engage in ASEAN's multilateral frameworks like the ARF, East Asia Summit, and ADMM-Plus to further regional integration and enhance India's strategic role.

- **Drive Digital and Technological Collaboration:** Facilitate the creation of a Digital Economic Framework Agreement to foster deeper cooperation in digital economy, fintech, and cybersecurity, aligning India and ASEAN's digital aspirations. Invest in digital infrastructure and strengthen collaboration on cross-border payments, driving innovation and creating new economic opportunities.
- **Launch a Think Tank Visiting Fellowship Programme** to bridge the gap in mutual understanding between India and ASEAN.
- **Enhance Defense Cooperation and Regional Security:** Deepen defense cooperation beyond formal multilateral frameworks by forging stronger bilateral ties in defense production, joint training, and strategic collaboration.
- **Boost Connectivity and Infrastructure Development:** Invest significantly in both physical and digital infrastructure to enhance connectivity, facilitating seamless movement of goods, services, and people across the ASEAN-India region. Prioritise initiatives that strengthen transport, communication, and logistical networks, positioning India as a critical player in ASEAN's connectivity agenda.
- **Foster Capacity Building and Long-Term Strategic Vision:** Focus on building capacity in ASEAN's most vulnerable economies, such as Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, to help them adapt to regional economic challenges and opportunities. Establish a long-term strategic vision for ASEAN-India relations, with a clear roadmap for the next 25 years, focusing on economic, trade, and infrastructure development to secure mutual prosperity.

# Agenda

## Day I: 7 November 2024

*Venue: Claymore Ballroom, (Level 18), Pan Pacific Orchard*

08.30 - 09:30 Registration / Welcome by Organizers

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### 09.30 – 10.30 INAUGURAL

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- Remarks by **Professor Sachin Chaturvedi**, Director General, RIS, New Delhi
- Remarks by **Mr Choi Shing Kwok**, Director and CEO, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore
- Remarks by **H.E. Dr Shilpak Ambule**, High Commissioner of India to Singapore
- Special Video Address by **H.E. Dr Kao Kim Hourn**, Secretary-General of ASEAN

10.30 – 11.00 Tea Break and Photo

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### 11.00 – 12.30 SESSION I: CONNECTIVITY AND REGIONAL VALUE CHAINS

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Owing to several interrelated factors such as new industrial innovations, growing economic nationalism and intensifying geopolitical contestations, the existing international production system is witnessing considerable downsizing leading to a decline in GVC trade. While the COVID-19 pandemic has further pronounced this trend, evidence also suggests that value chains are becoming shorter, less fragmented and regionally more concentrated. These developments are bound to have serious ramifications for developing countries, including India and ASEAN. In the face of global trade in transition, it has become pertinent for ASEAN and India to focus more on the strengthening of regional value chains for diversifying potential risk and reducing vulnerability. Connectivity is an important factor which determines the fate of cross-border value chains. Inefficient cross-border transport and institutional connectivity create complexities for businesses and limit the growth of regional value chains. This session will deliberate on the connectivity and regional value chains between India and ASEAN to identify constraints and suggest possible ways forward.

**Chair: Dr Prabir De**, Professor, RIS, New Delhi

**Speakers:**

- **Dr S. K. Mohanty**, Professor, RIS, New Delhi
- **Dr Jayant Menon**, Visiting Senior Fellow, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore
- **Dr Witada Anukoonwattaka**, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP, Bangkok
- **Professor C. Veeramani**, Director, Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum

**Q&A**

**12.30 – 14.00 Lunch Break**

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**14.00 – 15.30 SESSION II: ASEAN-INDIA COOPERATION FOR GREEN ENERGY TRANSITION**

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The ASEAN region and India are extremely vulnerable to the potential negative implications of climate change such as rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and changing rainfall patterns. Therefore, addressing climate change and transitioning towards sustainable green energy sources is critical for both regions. Realising the urgency, India and ASEAN member states have announced ambitious targets for reaching carbon neutrality and curbing reliance on coal-fired power. However, achieving these ambitious targets is a herculean task. It requires massive investment in infrastructure as well as large-scale innovations which most of the regional countries are not in a position to undertake individually. Therefore, cross-country knowledge sharing, capacity building, technical assistance, collaborative R&D projects and undertaking joint renewable energy projects are critical for ensuring smooth energy transition. This session will look into India and ASEAN countries' current status and strategies for green energy transition and suggest avenues for strengthening cooperation in the green energy sector.

**Chair: Dr Mirza Sadaqat Huda**, Lead Researcher, Climate Change in Southeast Asia Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

**Speakers:**

- **Dr Chandra Bhushan**, President, iFOREST, New Delhi
- **Dr Kannika Thampanishvong**, Section Head, Puey Ungphakorn Institute for Economic Research, Bangkok
- **Dr Shantanu Dixit**, Group Coordinator, Prayas Energy Group, Pune
- **Dr Thang Nam Do**, Former Deputy Director General of International Cooperation, Vietnam Ministry of Natural Resources, Vietnam

**Q&A**

**15.30 – 16.00 Tea Break**

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**16.00 – 17.30 SESSION III: DIGITALISATION AND MSME DEVELOPMENT**

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The growing digitalisation is offering unprecedented opportunities for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME). It is providing innovative solutions for several traditional constraints that MSMEs have been facing for a long time. For example, E-commerce platforms are allowing MSMEs to access a wider customer base and export markets without spending huge amounts on logistics. The next-generation technologies also have the potential to facilitate MSME integration in Global Value Chains by simplifying cumbersome custom procedures. However, gains for MSMEs from the ongoing wave of digitalisation are not automatic. In fact, given the prevailing digital divide, financial constraints and lack of capacity, MSMEs are often most disadvantaged and vulnerable to shocks emanating from digital transition. It has been recognised that if left to the market alone, MSMEs may lose their competitiveness due to the rapid digitalisation of society. As MSMEs are at the forefront of employment generation in India and ASEAN, the lack of digitisation among MSMEs threatens to accentuate the economic inequalities, making the digital transformation socially more painful. Against this backdrop, this session will explore the

challenges facing MSMEs in India and in the ASEAN regions, and suggest areas of collaboration to promote MSME development and digitalisation.

**Chair: Dr Amit Kapoor**, Chair, Institute for Competitiveness and lecturer, Stanford University

**Speakers:**

- **Dr Somdeth Bodhisane**, Acting Director, Institute for Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Vientiane
- **Dr Hendri Saparini**, Founder, Center of Reform on Economics (CORE), Jakarta
- **Ms Sharon Buteau**, Executive Director, LEAD, Krea University, Bengaluru
- **Dr Tanu Goyal**, Senior Fellow, ICRIER, New Delhi

**Q&A**

**18.30 – 20.30 Dinner for all Participants [Venue: Mosella Restaurant Level 2]**

## **Day II: 8 November 2024**

*Venue: Claymore Ballroom, (Level 18), Pan Pacific Orchard*

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### **09.00 – 10.30 SESSION IV: FINTECH AND CROSS BORDER DIGITAL PAYMENTS**

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Emergence of Fintech has been changing the way payments are made and financial services are availed or delivered. ASEAN and India are also not isolated from the ongoing fintech revolution. Fintech sectors in both regions have grown tremendously. Apart from improving ease, efficiency and security, fintech holds great potential to reduce transaction cost. Since a large sum of money is transacted between India and the ASEAN region annually, it makes sense for both regions to explore ways to cooperate in the fintech sector and ensure cross-border digital payment connectivity. India and Singapore have already made significant progress in this direction. Both countries have signed “FinTech Co-operation Agreement” to facilitate regulatory collaboration and partnership and have also linked their digital payment systems for cross-border digital payments. Similar arrangements between India and other ASEAN countries are worth exploring. This session will explore policy and regulatory challenges the fintech sector faces and suggest a roadmap for cooperation to unleash cross-border fintech innovations and digital payments.

**Chair: Ms Kristina Fong**, Lead Researcher, ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

**Speakers:**

- **Dr Gloria O. Pasadilla**, Partner and Business Director, Leadership Design Pte Ltd, Philippines
- **Dr Srinivas Yanamandra**, Senior Vice President and Group Head Regulatory Affairs and Policy, Paytm, Gurugram
- **Dr Rachel Gong**, Deputy Director, Khazanah Research Institute, Kuala Lumpur
- **Dr Priyadarshi Dash**, Associate Professor, RIS, New Delhi

**Q&A**

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**10.30 – 11.30 MINISTERIAL SESSION**

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- Welcome by **Mr Choi Shing Kwok**, Director and CEO, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute
- Special Address by **H.E. Dr Vivian Balakrishnan**, Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Singapore
- Keynote Address by **H.E. Dr S. Jaishankar**, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister, Government of India

***Moderated Q&A***

- Vote of Thanks by **Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi**, Director General, RIS, New Delhi

**11.30 – 12.00 Tea Break & Group Photo**

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**12.00 - 13:30 SESSION V: STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL RULE OF LAW USING THE TAC**

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In recent years, escalating geopolitical rivalries have heightened global fragmentation and increased competition. Neither ASEAN nor India is immune to these geopolitical changes. However, ASEAN demonstrated remarkable foresight in addressing such geostrategic changes as early as 1976 through the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). Rooted in the belief in the rule of law, the TAC enshrines core principles of global peace, security and stability, including the peaceful settlement of disputes in the region. As the global focus shifts toward the Indo-Pacific, the geostrategic transition provides an opportunity for ASEAN to strengthen international law through the TAC. The TAC serves as a conduit through which ASEAN can advocate for regional peace, stability, and security. Given the history of balanced diplomacy and strategic autonomy, India stands poised to play a pivotal role in this endeavor. Against this backdrop, this session will examine the relevance of TAC and propose strategies for making it more effective. Specifically, the session will explore how the TAC can stimulate regional partnerships, facilitate conflict resolution, foster people-to-people connections, harness technological progress, empower multilateral institutions, and encourage responsible governance.

**Chair:** **Ms Joanne Lin**, Senior Fellow and ASC Co-coordinator, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

**Speakers:**

- **Professor Chintamani Mahapatra**, Director, Kalinga Institute, New Delhi
- **Dr Him Raksmei**, Executive Director, Cambodian Center for Regional Studies, Phnom Penh
- **Dr Zaw Oo**, Executive Director, Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) Yangon
- **Dr Joeje B. Santarita**, Professor, Asian Center, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City
- **Dr Iqbal Singh Sevea**, Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, Singapore

**Q&A****13:30 - 14:30 Lunch Break**

This session will host a panel discussion aimed at synthesising key insights from the five preceding technical sessions, with the goal of identifying concrete and actionable steps to enhance ASEAN-India relations in the context of global and regional shifts. Panellists will also reflect on the evolving dynamics of this partnership and offer recommendations for a strategic roadmap that can further strengthen the ASEAN-India partnership, as well as chart the future course for the AINTT. The session can also explore how India's "Act East" policy and ASEAN's outward-looking approach, particularly through the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), can converge to create a more resilient and multifaceted economic and security partnership. This convergence is essential not only for deepening bilateral cooperation but also for shaping the future Indo-Pacific order – one that is open, inclusive, rules-based, and stable amid shifting power dynamics in the region. Additionally, the panel may assess opportunities for closer collaboration between ASEAN and India on global platforms such as the G20, United Nations, and other multilateral forums. The focus will be on how both sides can jointly tackle pressing challenges, including rising trade protectionism, the need for more effective digital governance frameworks, and the urgency of addressing climate change. By working together on these issues, ASEAN and India can bolster their collective influence on the global stage and promote sustainable, equitable growth in line with shared strategic interests.

**Chairs:** Professor Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS, New Delhi

**Speakers:**

- **Amb Preeti Saran**, Former Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India
- **Amb Pou Sothirak**, Distinguished Senior Advisor, Cambodian Center for Regional Studies, Phnom Penh
- **Amb Jayant N. Khobragade**, Ambassador of India to ASEAN
- **Dr C. Raja Mohan**, Non-Resident Distinguished Fellow, ASPI, New Delhi
- **Dr Yose Rizal Damuri**, Executive Director, CSIS, Jakarta
- **Dr Prabir De**, Professor, RIS, New Delhi

**Q&A**

- Special Remarks: **Professor Chan Heng Chee**, Chairman, Board of Trustees, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore
- Valedictory Address: **Mr Siddhartha Nath**, Joint Secretary (Indo-Pacific), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India
- Remarks: **Ms Sharon Seah**, Senior Fellow and Coordinator, ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore
- Vote of Thanks: **Dr Pankaj Vashisht**, Coordinator, ASEAN-India Center, RIS, New Delhi



# Concept Note

Though relations between India and Southeast Asia goes back to ancient times, the ASEAN-India ties are relatively new. The formal engagement between India and ASEAN started with a “Sectoral Dialogue Partnership” in 1992 which was upgraded to a Dialogue Partnership in 1995. Following the inaugural ASEAN-India summit partnership in 2002, which has since been held annually, and India’s accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 2003, ASEAN-India relations have gone from strength to strength. The gamut of cooperation has progressively expanded and several track 1 and track 2 mechanisms have been established to take the relations forward. These initiatives have not only cemented economic ties but have also established India and ASEAN as trusted development partners. The growth in economic ties can be gauged from the fact that with bilateral trade of US\$131 billion, ASEAN has become India’s second biggest trading partner while cumulative bilateral investment has exceeded US\$175 billion. Similarly, an all-encompassing development cooperation has expanded to several sectors including education, energy, connectivity, digital economy, maritime security, maritime connectivity, science & technology, health, and tourism to name a few. However, the changing geopolitics and geoeconomics, coupled with the growing threat of climate change and ongoing digital transformation have been posing several challenges for India and the ASEAN region, which require steadfast collaboration and cooperation. The ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT) has been a valuable platform for the policy makers and scholars from India and the ASEAN region to discuss and deliberate on the common economic, geopolitical and geostrategic challenges. Since its inception in 2012, AINTT has played a significant role in fostering ASEAN-India relations by facilitating the flow of ideas and policy advocacy. Keeping up with the tradition, the eighth round of AINTT will be organised in Singapore and it will bring together scholars from the think tank community, academia and policy makers to deliberate on the challenges India and ASEAN are facing. The roundtable will focus on following themes.

## Connectivity and Regional Value Chains

Phenomenal growth in global trade has been the hallmark of the last four decades. Starting from the late 1970s, growth in global trade consistently outperformed the global GDP growth, leading to a massive increase in trade intensity. This surge in global trade was primarily driven by production outsourcing. Armed with better means of communication, multinational firms started reorganizing their production process by placing production of different components in different countries to exploit the benefits associated with specialization and economies of scale. It led to the formation of complex Global Value Chains (GVCs) which helped several developing countries, including ASEAN and India, to grow faster and reduce poverty. However, since 2010, GVCs have been undergoing drastic transformation. Owing to several interrelated factors such as new industrial innovations (for example advanced robotics, 3D printing etc.) growing economic nationalism and intensifying geopolitical contestations, the existing international production system is witnessing considerable downsizing leading to a decline in GVC trade. The Covid pandemic has further pronounced this trend. The available evidence suggests that value chains are becoming shorter, less fragmented and regionally more concentrated. These developments have serious ramifications for developing countries including India and ASEAN. In the face of global

trade in transition, it has become pertinent for ASEAN and India to focus more on strengthening regional value chains for diversifying potential risk and reducing vulnerability. Connectivity is an important factor which determines the fate of cross-border value chains. Inefficient cross-border transport and institutional connectivity create complexities for businesses and therefore limit the growth of regional value chains. This session will deliberate on the connectivity and regional value chains between India and ASEAN to identify constraints and suggest possible ways forward.

## **ASEAN-India Cooperation for Green Energy Transition**

The planet is sitting at the cusp of existential threat. The unfettered economic development based on fossil fuels, since the first industrial revolution, has resulted in environmental degradation and atmospheric Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) build-up leading to rapid increase in global temperature. Scientific evidence indicates the grim consequences if radical measures, at the global level, are not taken urgently to mitigate climate change. Given the geographical location, both India and ASEAN are extremely vulnerable to the potential negative implications of climate change such as rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and changing rainfall patterns. Therefore, addressing climate change and transitioning towards sustainable green energy sources is critical for both regions. Realizing the urgency, India and ASEAN member states have announced ambitious targets for reaching carbon neutrality and curbing reliance on coal-fired power. However, achieving these ambitious targets is a herculean task. It requires massive investment in infrastructure as well as large-scale innovations which most of the countries are not in a position to undertake individually. Therefore, cross-country knowledge sharing, capacity building, technical assistance, collaborative R&D projects and undertaking joint renewable energy projects are critical for ensuring smooth energy transition. This session will look into India and ASEAN countries' current status and strategies for green energy transition and suggest avenues for strengthening cooperation in the green energy sector.

## **Digitalization and MSME Development**

The world has been going through a remarkable phase of technological transition. The phenomenal growth in computing power, over the last two decades, has led to several technological breakthroughs. Innovations such as e-commerce platforms, digital payment systems, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, internet of things (IoT), 3D printing, quantum computing etc. have taken the world by storm. These technologies have unleashed a massive social and economic restructuring which is dismantling the old business models rapidly. The ongoing digital transition is fundamental enough to transform the way goods and services are produced, ordered and delivered to the customers. The growing digitalization is offering unprecedented opportunities to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME). It is providing innovative solutions for several traditional constraints MSMEs have been facing for a long time. For example, e-commerce platforms are allowing MSMEs to access a wider customer base and export markets without spending huge amounts on logistics. The next-generation technologies also have the potential to facilitate MSME integration in Global Value Chains by simplifying the cumbersome custom procedures. However, gains for MSMEs from the ongoing wave of digitalization are not automatic. In fact, given the prevailing digital divide, financial constraints and lack of capacity, MSMEs are often most disadvantaged and vulnerable to shocks emanating from digital transition. It has been recognized that if left to the market alone, MSMEs may lose their competitiveness due to the rapid digitalization of society. Since MSMEs are at the forefront of employment generation in India and ASEAN, the lack of digitization among MSMEs threatens to accentuate the economic inequalities, making the digital transformation socially more painful. Against this backdrop, this session will explore the challenges MSMEs are facing in India and ASEAN and suggest areas of collaboration to promote MSME development and digitalization.

## **Fintech and Cross Border Digital Payments**

Technological innovations have been reshaping the financial sector across the globe. Existing players as well as new entrants in the financial sector have been effectively blending finance with advanced digital technologies to provide seamless and innovative financial services to the banked and the non-banked population. Over the years, this confluence of finance and technology, known as fintech, has grown phenomenally in size leading to fundamental changes in the way payments are made and financial services are availed /delivered. ASEAN and India are also not isolated from the ongoing fintech revolution. Fintech sectors in both regions have grown tremendously. Apart from improving ease, efficiency and security, fintech holds great potential to reduce transaction cost. Since a large sum of money is transacted between India and ASEAN annually, it makes sense for both the regions to explore ways to cooperate in the fintech sector and ensure cross-border digital payment connectivity. India and Singapore have already made significant progress in this direction. Both countries have signed 'FinTech Co-operation Agreement' to facilitate regulatory collaboration and partnership and have also linked their digital payment systems for cross-border digital payments. Similar arrangements between India and other ASEAN are worth exploring. This session will explore policy and regulatory challenges the fintech sector is facing and will suggest a desired roadmap for cooperation to unleash cross-border fintech innovations and digital payments.

## **Strengthening International Rule of Law using the TAC**

The course of world history is punctuated by transformative shifts. The bipolar geopolitical landscape was altered to unipolar world order in the early 1990s. Subsequently, the world ushered in the unwavering age of globalization, liberalization, and a multipolar world order. Nonetheless, the focus on geopolitics in recent years has led to greater fragmentation and increased competitions. Neither ASEAN nor India has been immune to these geopolitical changes. This geostrategic reality has been admirably foresighted and addressed by the ASEAN countries in the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). Believing in the importance of the rule of law, the TAC has enshrined the norms and principles of global peace, security and stability including the peaceful settlement of disputes in the region. Additionally, the TAC also supports the concept of ASEAN Centrality and therefore, preserves a special role for ASEAN in the regional affairs in Southeast Asia. The ongoing geostrategic transition toward the Indo-Pacific region provides an opportunity for ASEAN to strengthen international law using the TAC. This can be achieved by extending its reach to countries beyond Southeast Asia. The TAC serves as a conduit through which ASEAN can advocate for worldwide peace, stability, and security. Given the history of balanced diplomacy and strategic autonomy, India stands poised to play a pivotal role in this endeavor. Against this backdrop, this session will examine the relevance of TAC and propose strategies for making it more effective to build an environment in which abiding respect for justice, rule of law and resilience becomes a cornerstone of friendly relations within and beyond the Indo-Pacific. Specifically, the session will explore how the TAC can stimulate regional partnerships, facilitate conflict resolution, foster people-to-people connections, harness technological progress, empower multilateral institutions, and encourage responsible governance.

## **Way Forward for ASEAN-India Relations**

This session will host a panel discussion aimed at synthesising key insights from the five preceding technical sessions, with the goal of identifying concrete and actionable steps to enhance ASEAN-India relations in the context of global and regional shifts. Panellists will also reflect on the evolving dynamics of this partnership and offer recommendations for a strategic roadmap that

can further strengthen the ASEAN-India partnership, as well as chart the future course for the AINTT. The session can also explore how India's "Act East" policy and ASEAN's outward-looking approach, particularly through the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), can converge to create a more resilient and multifaceted economic and security partnership. This convergence is essential not only for deepening bilateral cooperation but also for shaping the future Indo-Pacific order – one that is open, inclusive, rules-based, and stable amid shifting power dynamics in the region. Additionally, the panel may assess opportunities for closer collaboration between ASEAN and India on global platforms such as the G20, United Nations, and other multilateral forums. The focus will be on how both sides can jointly tackle pressing challenges, including rising trade protectionism, the need for more effective digital governance frameworks, and the urgency of addressing climate change. By working together on these issues, ASEAN and India can bolster their collective influence on the global stage and promote sustainable, equitable growth in line with shared strategic interests.

# Profile of Speakers

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## Ministerial Session

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### **Dr S. Jaishankar**

**Hon'ble External Affairs Minister, Government of India**

Dr S. Jaishankar is India's External Affairs Minister since May 30th, 2019. He is a Member of the Upper House (Rajya Sabha) of India's Parliament from the state of Gujarat. He was Foreign Secretary from 2015-18, Ambassador to United States (2013-15), China (2009-2013) and Czech Republic (2000-2004). He was High Commissioner to Singapore (2007-2009). He has also served in other diplomatic assignments in Embassies in Moscow, Colombo, Budapest and Tokyo, as well in the Ministry of External Affairs and the President's Secretariat. He was also President – Global Corporate Affairs at Tata Sons Private Limited from May 2018. He is a graduate of St. Stephen's College at the University of Delhi. He has a Masters in Political Science and an M. Phil and Ph.D in International Relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. He is a recipient of the Padma Shri award in 2019 and has written widely acclaimed best-selling books: The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World, which was published in 2020 and Why Bharat Matters, which was published in 2024.



### **Dr Vivian Balakrishnan**

**Foreign Minister of Singapore**

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan is the Minister for Foreign Affairs. He previously served as Minister-in-charge of the Smart Nation Initiative; Minister for the Environment and Water Resources; Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports; Second Minister for Trade and Industry; Minister-in-charge of Entrepreneurship; Second Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts and Minister of State for National Development. He has been a Member of Parliament since 2001. He studied Medicine at the National University of Singapore after being awarded the President's Scholarship in 1980. Following post-graduate specialist training in Ophthalmology, he was admitted as a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1991. He was appointed Medical Director of Singapore National Eye Centre in 1999 and Chief Executive Officer of Singapore General Hospital in 2000. Concurrently, he was Commanding Officer of the 2nd Combat Support Hospital of the Singapore Armed Forces from 1999 to 2002. He has

helmed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) since October 2015. He was the Minister-in-charge of the Smart Nation Initiative from 2014 to 2021. He led the conceptualisation and implementation of key initiatives such as the National Digital Identity (Singpass), integrated digital services (LifeSG and MyInfo) and digital finance (PayNow and SGQR). He drove the adoption of new approaches within the Singapore Government, in particular, the use of digital contact tracing systems to combat COVID-19 (TraceTogether and SafeEntry), the streamlining of business applications (GoBusiness), and the adoption of agile in-house software development (SG Tech Stack). He also led the development of strategies and policy reviews that are foundational to Smart Nation, including the Digital Government Blueprint, National Artificial Intelligence Strategy, and Public Sector Data Security Review. He was a ministerial facilitator for many rounds of negotiations between 2011 to 2015 that led to the Paris Agreement on climate change at the United Nations. He initiated the Transboundary Haze Pollution Act in 2014 to deter offending local and overseas entities that cause haze. He rolled out numerous key initiatives and policies throughout his political career. At the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, he increased the capacity for desalination and NEWater production substantially. In 2011, he restarted the building of new hawker centres after 26 years, to ensure that everyone has access to a wide variety of good, fresh, and affordable food in an informal setting, and to enable local hawkers to make a good living. He initiated the Progressive Wage Model in 2014 for cleaners, who became the first group of workers to enjoy increased wages and better terms of employment. At the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, he established the ComCare system to enhance comprehensive social assistance for all Singaporeans in need. He also oversaw the redevelopment of the National Stadium in 2010. At the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, he worked on the National Broadband Fibre Network project to bring ultra-high speed, low-cost, and efficient fibre broadband to all households and enterprises in Singapore. He also moved new legislation and amendments to existing legislation in Parliament, including the Mental Capacity Act, which provides for Lasting Power of Attorney so that seniors can nominate a proxy.



## **Professor Sachin Chaturvedi**

**Director General, RIS, New Delhi**

Professor Sachin Chaturvedi is currently Director General at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). He works on issues related to development economics, involving development finance, SDGs and South-South Cooperation, apart from trade, investment and innovation linkages with special focus on WTO. He has persistently endeavored to build up institutions and launching of networks, both at national and international levels. He is credited with the launch of Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST) and Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC). He has also created “Delhi Process”, a major forum for exchange of ideas on South-South and triangular Cooperation. He has

been part of several important initiatives of the Government of India and takes keen interest in transforming economic policymaking towards integrated and evidence-based approaches. He is one of the foremost commentators on India's external sector economic engagements and partnerships. He is considered as most dynamic and affable by his peers and has mentored several bright scholars and researchers in the profession. He has authored/edited more than 22 books, apart from contributing several chapters in the edited volumes and published several research articles in prestigious journals. He is on the Editorial Board of several journals including the South Asian Economic Journal, IDS Bulletin, Sussex, UK among others. His book "The Logic of Sharing – Indian Approach to South-South Cooperation" has been acclaimed internationally as one of the best volumes on international development cooperation. He was also the 'Global Justice Fellow' at the MacMillan Center for International Affairs at Yale University (2009-2010) and has served as a Visiting Professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and was a Developing Country Fellow at the University of Amsterdam (1996), Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla (2003), and Visiting Scholar at the German Development Institute (2007). Presently, he is also Independent Director on the Board of Reserve Bank of India.



## **Mr Choi Shing Kwok**

**Director and CEO, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore**

Mr Choi Shing Kwok was appointed Director and CEO of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute on 15 January 2018 and also took on the role of Head of ASEAN Studies Centre at the institute in March 2020. He concurrently holds a number of board and advisory appointments on companies, charities and research establishments in Singapore. Prior to this appointment, He was the Permanent Secretary in the then Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (now renamed the Ministry of Sustainability and Environment) from 2012 to 2017. He started his career in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) in 1978 and held various appointments in the SAF and Ministry of Defence till 2005. After leaving the Ministry of Defence, he held the post of Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Transport from 2005 to 2012. He studied at the University of Cambridge, graduating with Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Engineering in 1981 and 1985 respectively. He also obtained a Master's in Public Administration degree from Harvard University in 1994. He was awarded the Public Administration Medal (Silver) (Military) in 1993 and the Meritorious Service Medal in 2000 for his contributions to Singapore.

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## Inaugural Session

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### Dr Shilpak Ambule

#### High Commissioner of India to Singapore

Dr Shilpak Ambule grew up in Pune and did his schooling, junior college and graduation from Abhinava Vidyalaya, Fergusson College and BJ Medical College respectively. He has completed the Master's degree program in Translation and Interpretation (T&I) in Chinese-English from MIIS, Monterey, California. He joined the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) in 2002 and after learning Chinese language, spent 8 years in Beijing in the Indian Embassy working as Third Secretary, Second Secretary and First Secretary in the Political Wing and as Chief of Staff to Ambassador. He then served in Headquarters as the Deputy Head of the East Asia Division and as the Chief of Staff of the Indian Foreign Secretary from January 2015 to August 2018. After a brief stint as Deputy High Commissioner of India in Colombo from August 2018 – July 2019, he returned to Delhi and served as Joint Secretary in the External Affairs Minister's office till 24th June, 2022. He took over as Joint Secretary (East Asia) in June 2022 and continued to hold dual charge till 22 July 2023. He is currently serving as High Commissioner to Singapore since 23rd July 2023.



### Dr Kao Kim Hourn

#### Secretary-General of ASEAN

Dr Kao Kim Hourn's career has focused on strengthening Cambodia's international relations, particularly in ASEAN, driving policy advocacy and promoting research, education, and development. He had served as a two-term Minister Delegate attached to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, from 2013 to 2022 and has authored dozens of books and articles on Cambodia and ASEAN. He is a Member of the Supreme National Economic Council, a Senior Fellow at the Jeffrey Cheah Institute on Southeast Asia, and a Member of the Global Council of The Asia Society. He serves as a Member of the Board of Directors for the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace and the Worldwide Support for Development. With the mission of providing education to the disadvantaged Cambodian youths, He established The University of Cambodia in 2003 and continued to serve as the university president until he stepped down in October 2022. For his services to Cambodia, he received the Royal Order of Cambodia, the Royal Order of Sowathara, and the Grand Order of National Merit, among others. He was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Public Service from Ohio University in the United States, in 2007, and an Honorary Doctorate in Literature from the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology in India, in 2014. In addition, he received an Honorary Doctorate in Political Science from the Busan University of Foreign Studies, in the Republic of Korea, in June 2023, in recognition of his work and contribution to ASEAN. In recognition of his achievements in the field of political science and international affairs, he was conferred the Honorary Title of "Guest Professor" by Zhengzhou University,

in Henan Province, the People's Republic of China, on 15 October 2023. He was conferred an Honourable Member of the International Advisory Board of the Institute of ASEAN Studies at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom, on 2nd November 2023. Most recently, he was conferred the title of "Specially Invited Professor" by Hiroshima University, Japan, on 21 May 2024. He started his career with the work in the think tank in Cambodia, dedicated to ASEAN and international affairs, after his return from his studies in the United States, in January 1993. He later joined the Royal Government of Cambodia where he had served, from August 2001 to August 2013, in a variety of capacities, including a post as Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, for two terms, from 2004 to 2013.

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## Session I: Connectivity and Regional Value Chains

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### Dr Prabir De

Professor, CEMC at RIS, New Delhi

Dr Prabir De is a Professor CEMC at RIS. He has over three and half decades of full-time research and teaching experiences in India and abroad. He works in the field of international economics and has research interests in international trade and development. He has been conducting policy research for the Government of India and several national and international organisations including UN agencies and multilateral development banks. Graduated with honours in economics from the Scottish Church College in Kolkata, he did his Masters in economics from the University of Calcutta and Ph.D. in economics from the Jadavpur University, Kolkata. He was a Visiting Fellow of the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADB); Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP); Institute of Developing Economies (IDE); and Visiting Senior Fellow of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). His recent edited books include "Thirty Years of ASEAN-India Relations: Towards Indo-Pacific", and "Indo-Pacific and ASEAN: New Balances and New Challenges for Asian Integration and Stability", published by the Routledge in 2024. He has contributed several research papers in international journals and written books on trade and development. He is also the Founding Editor of the Journal of Asian Economic Integration, published by Sage, and Journal of Land Ports and Border Economy, published by Routledge.



### Professor S. K. Mohanty

RIS, New Delhi

Professor S K Mohanty, RIS has been working on BIMSTEC, with a particular focus on regional integration and Agricultural Value Chains. His research interest in the region also includes trade and tariffs, trade modelling, ESG, macroeconomic analysis, and regional trade financing.

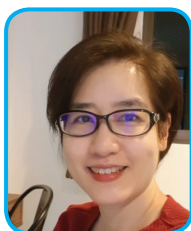
His research encompasses a range of issues including regional trading arrangements, multilateralism, technology-intensive trade, trade classifications, MSME, South Asia and trade dynamics with China. He has led numerous international studies on topics like bilateral and regional Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), food processing industries in Asia and development cooperation in the Southern perspectives. He has contributed significantly to India's national policies on Blue Economy and maritime affairs as a member of various committees in the Ministry of Commerce, PMEAC and the Niti Aayog. His current work also includes research on various FTAs which are under negotiation. He was previously teaching at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.



### **Dr Jayant Menon**

**Visiting Senior Fellow, ISEAS– Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore**

Dr Jayant Menon joined the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute in 2020 as Senior Fellow to continue his work on trade and development in the Asian region, following a long career at the ADB. His last post at the ADB was Lead Economist (Director level post) in the Office of the Chief Economist. He began his work life as an academic in Australia, spending almost a decade at the Centre of Policy Studies at Monash University, world-renowned for computable general equilibrium modelling. He also worked at the University of Melbourne, Victoria University, the American University in Washington, DC and the ADB Institute in Tokyo. He has served as a Board Director of CDRI, Cambodia, and on the Advisory Board of the University of Nottingham, Malaysia. He holds adjunct appointments with the Australian National University, University of Nottingham, UK and IDEAS, Malaysia. He has authored/edited more than 15 books, 50 chapters in books, and 80 articles in peer-reviewed journals.



### **Dr Witada Anukoonwattaka**

**Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP, Bangkok**

Dr Witada Anukoonwattaka is a core researcher for the division, in particular the Trade Policy and Facilitation Section, and leading the DigiSRII 1.0 project of ESCAP. Her research areas cover economic impacts of trade and investment policies as well as contemporary trade issues of Asia-Pacific countries including trade tensions, global value chains, regional integration, services and digital-trade policies, and trade policies to support sustainable development. She has also run and served as a resource person for capacity-building programmes, particularly those related to evidence-based policymaking and research. Before joining ESCAP, she was a lecturer of the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat University, Thailand, and also worked in the advisory team of Thailand's minister of industry, foreign affairs, and commissioner of Thailand's National Telecommunications Commission. She holds a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Melbourne, Australia.



## **Professor C. Veeramani**

**Director, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram**

Professor C. Veeramani leads the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in Thiruvananthapuram as Director and RBI Chair Professor. Before this, he held professorships at IGIDR Mumbai and faculty positions at ICRIER Delhi and IIT Bombay. He also served as a Visiting Fellow at the Australian National University's Crawford School. Holding a Ph.D. and M.Phil. in Economics (JNU, New Delhi), his doctoral dissertation won the EXIM Bank research award in 2003. He holds editorial responsibility as Joint Managing Editor of the Journal of Quantitative Economics. He also contributes his expertise on key committees, including the RBI's External Commercial Borrowings Committee and the India EXIM Bank's Export Leading Index review panel. His research focuses on critical areas impacting India's economic landscape, including Global Value Chains, Trade Patterns and Policy, FDI, Productivity and Labor Market Outcomes. His research underpins a Chapter titled "Creating Jobs and Growth by Specializing in Exports in Network Products" of the Economic Survey 2019-20 (Volume 1) published by India's Ministry of Finance.

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## **Session II: ASEAN-India Cooperation for Green Energy Transition**

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## **Dr Mirza Sadaqat Huda**

**Lead Researcher, Climate Change in Southeast Asia Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore**

Dr Mirza contributes to Climate Change in Southeast Asia Programme (CCSEAP) projects on energy, climate change and natural resource governance in Southeast Asia. In 2023, he led one of the first independent studies on the Laos-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore Power Integration Project (LTMS-PIP), which used more than 30 interviews with policymakers and GIS mapping to examine the implications of the 'pathfinder' project on the ASEAN Power Grid. Prior to joining ISEAS, he worked on energy transition issues in Central Asia and South Asia at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Nanyang Technological University. He received the 2020-2021 Clean EDGE Asia Fellowship sponsored by the National Bureau of Asian Research and the Bureau of Energy Resources at the U.S. Department of State; and 2021-2022 Asian Development Bank and CAREC Institute Visiting Fellowship. He earned his PhD on transnational energy cooperation from the University of Queensland.



## **Dr Chandra Bhushan**

**President, iFOREST, New Delhi**

Dr Chandra Bhushan is one of India's foremost public policy experts and the founder-CEO of International Forum for Environment, Sustainability & Technology (iFOREST). Over the past two and a half decades, he has been engaging on a wide range of environmental issues through research and writing and has remained at the forefront of several public policy campaigns. An engineer and environmental planner by training, he integrates scientific and technical expertise with understanding of socio-economic realities to solve multi-dimensional environmental and developmental challenges. His scope of work encompasses both global and local issues, from climate change and energy transformation to rights of mining-affected people and environmental governance. He has authored/ co-authored 20 books, more than 60 reports and numerous articles. He advises a number of eminent institutions worldwide. He is an expert member for the BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) group of countries on Climate Change. He served as a Member, Engagement Committee of the Future Earth. In 2017, he was conferred with the Ozone Award by the UN-Environment's for his contributions towards the framing of the Kigali Amendments to the Montreal Protocol. He is also a columnist for India's leading media houses including Times of India, Malayala Manorama, Financial Express, and Gaon Connection.



## **Dr Kannika Thampanishvong**

**Section Head, Puey Ungphakorn Institute for Economic Research, Bangkok**

Dr Kannika obtained her master's degree and Ph.D. degree in Economics from University of Warwick, United Kingdom. Currently, she serves as Section Head at Puey Ungphakorn Institute for Economic Research. She was formerly Senior Research Fellow at Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) and a lecturer in the School of Economics and Finance, University of St Andrews. She is specialized in International Monetary Economics, Environmental Economics and Behavioral Economics, especially in climate change policy and green growth. She was awarded the Puey Ungphakorn Golden Medal Award for Best Young Economist in 2021. Her research interests are Behavioral Economics, Environmental and Ecological Economics (Climate Change) and International Finance.



## **Dr Shantanu Dixit**

**Group Coordinator, Prayas Energy Group, Pune**

Dr Shantanu is one of the founding members of Prayas (Energy Group) and was the Coordinator of the Group from 2012 to 2021. Since 1992, as part of Prayas, he has worked on a range of power sector-related issues from techno-economic, legal, and broader public interest perspectives. These research issues include resource

planning, power purchase agreements, agricultural electricity consumption, tariff and financial aspects of distribution companies, electricity markets, restructuring, and regulation. He contributes to the development of the Indian energy sector and the protection of consumer interests through research, extensive policy, and regulatory engagement in many states and at the National level. He has been part of many official committees formed by Central and state governments and regulatory commissions.



## **Dr Do Nom Thong**

**Former Deputy Director General of International Cooperation, Vietnam Ministry of Natural Resources, Vietnam**

Dr Thang Nam Do is a Fellow in the Resources, Environment, and Development Program at the Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University (ANU). With over 25 years of experience working across Southeast Asia, he specializes in energy transition, climate change, and environmental policy, with a particular focus on Vietnam, the Mekong region, and Southeast Asia. He has held key leadership roles, including Chair of the ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change and Deputy Director General at Vietnam's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, where he contributed to shaping Vietnam's climate and energy policies. His expertise spans both academic and policy spheres, having collaborated with international organizations like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the Global Environment Facility. He has published in high impact journals such as *Energy Policy* and *Climate Policy*, focusing on the clean energy transition, carbon pricing, and sustainable cross-border electricity trade in the Mekong region. His research informs decision-making on energy and environmental sustainability in Southeast Asia. He is currently involved in leading research and policy engagement for accelerating decarbonization in developing Asia, notably through his role as guest editor of *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*.

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## Session III: Digitalisation and MSME Development

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### **Dr Amit Kapoor**

Chair, Institute for Competitiveness and lecturer, Stanford University

Dr Amit Kapoor is Honorary Chairman at Institute for Competitiveness, India. He is an affiliate faculty for the Microeconomics of Competitiveness & Value Based Health Care Delivery courses of Institute of Strategy and Competitiveness, Harvard Business School and an instructor with Harvard Business Publishing in the area of Strategy, Competitiveness and Business Models in addition to being a lecturer at Stanford University wherein he teaches courses on Reimagining Capitalism, Innovation & Competitiveness and Understanding Modern India. He has been inducted into the Competitiveness Hall of Fame which is administered by Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness at Harvard Business School in addition to being the recipient of the Ruth Greene Memorial Award winner for writing the best case of the year, by North American Case Research Association (NACRA). He is the author of bestsellers “Riding the Tiger”, which he has co-authored with Wilfried Aulber and “The Age of Awakening: The Story of the Indian Economy Since Independence” published by Penguin Random House. He recently published a book titled “The Elephant Moves” with Amitabh Kant on India’s Competitiveness and one on “Jyotirlingams” with Bibek Debroy. He has worked with NITI Aayog on conceptualizing the Innovation Index, Export Preparedness Index, School Education Quality Index, District Potentiality Index et al. He has worked with Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister to develop indices on Ease of Living for Elderly, Foundational Learning and Numeracy Index, Social Progress Index for Indian States and Districts. He is a columnist with Economic Times, Business Standard, Mint, Financial Express and Business World and had published over 1000 opinion pieces in addition to his academic contributions.



### **Ms Sharon Buteau**

Executive Director, LEAD, Krea University, Bengaluru

Ms Sharon Buteau combines expansive experience of over 18 years in research and international development, with over 7 years in the field of digital financial services and financial inclusion. She is deeply passionate about finding effective solutions to promote enterprise growth and development and realising the untapped potential of micro and small businesses. At LEAD, she focuses on bringing the right combination of talent, expertise and stakeholders together to ensure that investments and efforts are perfectly aligned with the desired goals. She holds significant expertise on how to leverage co-creation, collaborative processes, as well using the power of data from the ground up can improve socio-economic outcomes for individuals, households and enterprises. She has in-depth knowledge in “right-fit research methods” and significant experience

in the domain of financial capabilities and well-being, and small business and entrepreneurship development. Her started journey at LEAD in 2008, when she arrived in India with a strong desire to improve society by producing impactful knowledge that can bring positive change. Prior to joining LEAD, she was an economist with Analysis Group in Montreal Canada. Sharon holds an MSc in Economics from the Universite du Quebec a Montreal, as well as an MA in Social Research Methods from the London School of Economics.



## **Dr Tanu Goyal**

**Senior Fellow, ICRIER, New Delhi**

Dr Tanu Goyal has more than 15 years of experience in policy-oriented research. Over the last few years, she has worked extensively on diverse set of issues relevant to India's domestic and international policy discourse, including architectural elements of free trade agreements, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and G20 issues. She has authored several research papers, reports, and articles in leading newspapers on these subjects. She has co-authored a book on India's special economic zones, published by Springer and co-edited a book on India-European Union free trade agreement, published by Sage Publications. She is also an advisor to the Trade and Investment Analytics wing of the Department of Commerce, Government of India and member. She received her PhD from Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, India



## **Dr Hendri Saparini**

**Founder, Center of Reform on Economics (CORE), Jakarta**

Dr Hendri Saparini is founder of CORE, Indonesia. Presently she is lecturer in State Administration Institute (LAN/Lembaga Administrasi Negara), Jawa Tengah and Jawa Barat Education and Training Center. She is also Chairperson of Economic Experts Council of Muhammadiyah, Member of Steering Committee for Indonesian Fontech Society (IFSoc), Vice Chairperson of Expert Committee of IAEI (Association of Experts on Islamic Economics), Vice Chairperson of Advisory Council for Communication Centre for Shari'a Economic, Member of Expert Council of Indonesian Young Indigenous Entrepreneur and Member of Indonesian Association of Economists. Previously, she has been member of Committee for National Economics and Industry (KEIN, Komite Ekonomi dan Industri nasional), chairperson of Public Policy Committee of State Owned Enterprise (SOE) Ministry and Member of Committee of Syari'ah Financial Service Development - OJK (Financial Service Authority). She has received many prestigious awards such as Indonesian Young Economist 2009 from Megawati Soekarnoputri, Chairwoman of PDI-Perjuangan and many more. She pursued her Doctor of Philosophy in International Political Economy and MPhil in International Policy Management from Graduate School of International Political Economy from University of Tsukuba, Japan.



## **Dr Somdeth Bodhisane**

Acting Director, Institute for Industry and Commerce (IIC), Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC), Vientiane

Dr Somdeth Bodhisane is the Acting Director of Division at the Institute for Industry and Commerce (IIC), Ministry of Industry and Commerce (Laos). Before joining the IIC, he used to be a research fellow and a lecturer in Health Economics, Health Financing, Cost-Benefit Analysis, and Research Methodology at the College of Public health Science (CPHS), Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand. He is an experience postdoctoral research fellow with a demonstrated history of working in the higher education industry. Skilled in data collection, qualitative and quantitative research methodology, he has published a series of top impact journals (categorized in both ISI and Scopus databases) and book chapters on health economics and trade policies. He is currently a visiting lecturer at the College of Public health Science (CPHS), Chulalongkorn University. Besides, he has been reviewer for the International Journal of Health Policy, Management and Journal of Health Research, and other accredited journals.

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## **Session IV: FINTECH and Cross Border Digital Payments**

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## **Ms Kristina Fong**

Lead Researcher, ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Ms Kristina Fong joined ISEAS as the Lead Researcher (Economic Affairs) of ASEAN Studies Centre in June 2023. Prior to her current role, she has held various positions in both the private sector and multilateral organisations, as an economist and public policy specialist. At ISEAS, she aims to focus her research on digital policy and development finance, with aims to build upon her previous research experience garnered in these areas at the World Bank. She holds a BSc in Economics from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Master's in Economics from the University of Malaya.



## **Dr Gloria O. Pasadilla**

Partner and Business Director, Leadership Design Pte Ltd, Philippines

Dr Gloria O. Pasadilla is a Trade Policy Consultant. She spent 9 years in Singapore working as Business Partner and Director in a consulting firm in Singapore as well as with the Policy Support Unit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Secretariat. She also worked for three years as Research Fellow at the ADB Institute in Tokyo. She has published extensively on various trade issues including on services and digital trade, global value chains, labor and the gig economy and others. She worked briefly as a trade negotiator while working

with the government. She holds a PhD in Economics from New York University, USA; master's in international law and economics (summa cum laude) from the World Trade Institute in Bern, Switzerland.



### **Dr Srinivas Yanamandra**

**Senior Vice President and Group Head Regulatory Affairs and Policy, Paytm, Gurugram**

Dr Srinivas Yanamandra is currently the Group Head - Regulatory Affairs & Policy at One97 Communications Limited (PayTM). Prior to this, he held senior positions in compliance functions at BRICS New Development Bank (Shanghai), and IDFC First & ICICI Bank in Mumbai. He is a Chartered Accountant, a Cost & Management Accountant, a Fellow of International Compliance Association (UK), a Certified Anti Money Laundering Specialist (USA), and holds a doctorate from the University of Manchester (UK). His professional expertise spans across various aspects of governance, risk management, financial crime compliance, electronic payments, digital currencies, and fintech regulation. He was the recipient of "CA Global Achiever Award 2019" from the Institute of Chartered Accountant of India. He is a TEDx speaker and is also associated with various academic institutes as a guest faculty in India and abroad.



### **Dr Rachel Gong**

**Khazanah Research Institute, Kaula Lumpur**

Dr Rachel Gong is a Deputy Director of Research at Khazanah Research Institute (KRI). Her ongoing research aims to improve digital inclusion and digital governance. She established KRI's research track on digital technologies with the book, "#NetworkedNation: Navigating Challenges, Realising Opportunities of Digital Transformation" and continues to lead the team working on digital transformation and digital policy. Her primary research interests lie in how digital technologies affect society, and her research has been published in peer-reviewed journals such as Sociological Perspectives, the Journal of Consumer Culture, and the Journal of Technology in Human Services. Rachel graduated summa cum laude from Princeton University and received her PhD in sociology from Stanford University.



### **Dr Priyadarshi Dash**

**Associate Professor, RIS, New Delhi**

Dr Priyadarshi Dash is Associate Professor at Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, India. He has more than 15 years of experience in policy research on trade, investment, infrastructure and fintech issues in the context of G20, IORA, BIMSTEC and Indo-Pacific. He has published two books titled 'Asia-Africa Growth Corridor: Development and Cooperation in Indo-Pacific' and 'Universal Banking in India: Evolution, Trends and Performance' and several papers in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes. He served as a Co-Chair of the Task Force-5 (Reassessing Global Financial Order) of Think 20

during Indian Presidency of G20. He is member of the Editorial Advisory Board of Cambridge Scholars Publishing, London and Advances in Economics and Business; Member of Editorial Review Board of Virtual Economics; Managing Editor of G20 Digest, and Co-Editor of Journal of Asian Economic Integration. He has a short fellowship stint at Korea Institute for Industrial Economics and Trade (KIET), Seoul in 2012. Dr Dash holds M.Phil in Planning & Development and PhD in Economics from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay”.

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## Session V: Strengthening International Rule of Law Using the TAC

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### Ms Joanne Lin

Senior Fellow and ASC Co-coordinator, ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Ms Joanne Lin is the Senior Fellow and Co-Coordinator of the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore. She has over 15 years of work experience in the Singapore public sector, regional and international organisations, think tanks, and NGOs. She has previously served at the ASEAN Secretariat from 2015 to 2021 and was the Head of the External Relations Division under the ASEAN Political-Security Community Department. Her research includes ASEAN institutions, external relations, and political-security developments in ASEAN.



### Professor Chintamani Mahapatra

Director, Kalinga Institute, New Delhi

Professor Chintamani Mahapatra is currently the Founder and Honorary Chairperson of Kalinga Institute of Indo-Pacific Studies. He is a Member of the Academic Council of Chandigarh University and the Governing Council of VPM Centre for International Studies, Mumbai. He is a member of the Board of Management and Planning of Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, Karnataka and Vir Surendra Sai University of Technology, Burla, Odisha. He is a Visiting Professor at Impact & Policy Research Institute, New Delhi. He was a Professor of International Studies at the School of International Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University and served as Rector (Pro-Vice Chancellor) of Jawaharlal Nehru University from March 2016 for about six years. He was also the editor of Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, published by the Association of Indian Diplomats. He has held prominent positions, such as Member, UGC Review Committee, Area Studies Programme, Member, Fellowship Expert Committee, ICSSR, Member, Editorial Board, Strategic Analysis, Institute of Defense Studies and Analyses, Member, Editorial Board, Diaspora Studies and Member, Committee on Studies, Academy of International Studies, Jalia Millia Islamia. Recently, he was Tagore Chair Professor at Yunnan University of China. He has conducted research in several US Presidential Libraries and US National

Archives; and British Public Record Office in London. He has authored four books, edited four volumes, and has contributed chapters to above 30 edited books. He has published above 70 research articles in reputed journals. He has a wide range of exposure to international academic institutions in the US, UK, France, Israel, Australia, Sweden, China, Vietnam, Singapore and Austria. He has been awarded a number of international fellowships, such as Fulbright Fellowship, Commonwealth Fellowship, and Visiting Fellowships to undertake research in the US, UK, Austria, Australia and many other countries. He has been a visiting faculty in several UGC-run Academic Staff Colleges, the Foreign Service Institute of the Ministry of External Affairs, National Defense College, Army War College, Naval War College and the College of Air Warfare.



### **Dr Him Raksmeay**

#### **Executive Director, Cambodian Center for Regional Studies, Phnom Penh**

Dr Him Raksmeay is currently the Executive Director of the Cambodian Center for Regional Studies (CCRS), a newly-established independent foreign policy think tank based in Cambodia. He was a research fellow at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) from 2018-2023. From March 2022 to December 2023, he also was a researcher at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), and a lecturer at the Department of International Relations (DIR), Institute for International Studies and Public Policy (IISPP), Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). His research interests include Cambodia's Domestic and Foreign Affairs, Great Power Competition, ASEAN, and Political Security in Southeast Asia and East Asia as well as various strategic trends concerning the region.



### **Dr Zaw Oo**

#### **Executive Director, Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) Yangon**

Dr Zaw Oo is Executive Director of the Centre for Economic and Social Development, an independent and non-profit think-tank advising and designing major economic reforms of Myanmar since 2012. He also played a leading role in Myanmar's reengagement with the international community. He was a chief negotiator for the Paris Club's debt relief programs in 2013 before Myanmar was reintegrated into international financial institutions. He served as the first national coordinator from 2012 to 2017 for the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative, an Oslo-based international organization, in facilitating major reform initiatives in energy and mining sectors. He holds graduate degrees in international development, banking, and finance from the School of International and Public Affairs in Columbia University and the School of International Service from American University. He has also received executive training from Harvard University, Oxford University and Turin University on public finance, energy and labor economics. He has held fellowships and research positions in various universities including Chiang Mai University of Thailand, National University of Singapore, Institute of World Politics and Economics of Vietnam, Stockholm School of Economics of Sweden, Chr. Michelsen Institute of Norway, and United States Institute of Peace.



## **Dr Joefe B. Santarita**

**Professor, Asian Center, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City**

Dr Joefe B. Santarita is Professor and former Dean of the University of the Philippines' Asian Center. In 2012, he was conferred the Doctor of Philosophy in South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. His research interest focuses on India-ASEAN relations, data diplomacy, migration, and maritime history, and has published several books, chapters, and journal articles. He also served as associate editor and editorial board member of leading journals in the Philippines and as reviewers of international publications. Currently, he serves as the President of the ASEAN Studies Association of the Philippines.



## **Dr Iqbal Singh Sevea**

**Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, Singapore**

Dr Iqbal Singh Sevea is Director of the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He is an internationally recognised scholar of contemporary and modern South Asia whose core research focuses on South Asian politics, social and political thought, governance and Islamic thought. He has held academic appointments in leading institutions globally and authored several publications. Before joining ISAS, he was an Associate Professor with the Department of History at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill where he was a faculty member from 2012 to 2021. Prior to this, he was an Assistant Professor and the Coordinator of the Contemporary Islam Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His publications include *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), *India and the Future of G20: Shaping Policies for a Better World* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023) and *Islamic Political Thought in Modern South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming, 2024). He has also published articles and chapters on ethnonationalism in South Asia, the Partition and its aftermath, culture and state ideology in Pakistan, modern Islamic thought, the spread of transnational Islamic movements across the Indian Ocean, conceptions of bodily piety in South Asia and Muslim education in South Asia. He holds a DPhil in History from the University of Oxford.

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## Session VI: Way Forward for ASEAN-India Relations

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### **Ambassador Lawrence Anderson**

**Senior Fellow, RSIS, Singapore**

Ambassador Lawrence Anderson is Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He joined RSIS in November 2021 after a 37-year career in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). His areas of interest include regional security in the Asia-Pacific, ASEAN, Sino-US strategic competition, and conflicts including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Israel-Palestinian war. He was formerly Singapore's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Cambodia. He is a Senior Fellow at the MFA Diplomatic Academy. He is also Singapore's Representative to the Advisory Board of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR). He is editor of the book "Beyond the Handshake: The Singapore Foreign Service", a collection of essays by former Ambassadors and senior officials who served in the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has also contributed commentaries and articles to books and publications in both Singapore and abroad.



### **Dr C. Raja Mohan**

**Non-Resident Distinguished Fellow, ASPI, New Delhi**

Dr C. Raja Mohan is a Non-Resident Distinguished Fellow with the Asia Society Policy Institute. He is a Visiting Research Professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), National University of Singapore, and was previously the Director of ISAS. He was the founding director of Carnegie India in Delhi, the sixth international center of Carnegie Endowment for Peace. He was associated with several Indian think tanks, including the Institute of Defense Studies and Analyses, the Observer Research Foundation, and the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi. He was a Professor of South Asian Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and the Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. He served on India's National Security Advisory Board. He was the Henry A. Kissinger Chair in Foreign Policy and International Relations at the Kluge Center, US Library of Congress, Washington DC, during 2009-10. He convened the India chapter of Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, during 1995-2005. He has published widely on India's foreign and security policies, Asian geopolitics, and the global governance of advanced technologies. In his most recent, he co-authored the Adelphi Book, *The New Asian Geopolitics: Military Power and Regional Order* published by the International Institute of Strategic Studies, London in 2021. He is a columnist for Foreign Policy and the Indian Express.



## **Ambassador Preeti Saran**

**Former Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India**

Ambassador Preeti Saran joined the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) in 1982 and superannuated as Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in 2018, after serving as India's Ambassador in Vietnam from 2013-2016 and as India's Consul General in Toronto from 2008-2013. Her other overseas assignments include Geneva, Cairo, Dhaka, and Moscow. During her professional career spanning 36 years, she has worked extensively, both at Headquarters and in Indian Missions abroad, on India's neighbourhood including regional cooperation, the Indo-Pacific, the Americas, multilateral and cultural diplomacy. She was India's SOM leader in India-ASEAN meetings from 2016-2018 and has worked extensively in promoting India-ASEAN relations, notably during her tenure as Secretary (East), which included activating the review of the India-ASEAN FTA and successfully organising the year-long celebrations in the run-up to the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in New Delhi in January 2018. After superannuation, she was elected as a Member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, where she is presently serving her second term (2023-26). She is also a Member of the Governing Council and the Governing Board of the Indian Council for World Affairs and is on the Advisory Board of the India Foundation.



## **Dr Yose Rizal Damuri**

**Executive Director, CSIS, Jakarta**

Dr Yose Rizal Damuri is the Executive Director, Centre for Strategic and International Studies. His research activities focus on international trade, regional integration and globalization of value chain. He also maintains a keen interest in examining the political economy aspects of international economic governance and the multilateral trading system. He has authored numerous academic articles on these subjects and is currently directing his attention toward the implications of major power rivalries on the global and regional economic landscape. He received his PhD in International Economics from the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, Switzerland. He is active in many networks of research institutes in East Asia, such as in Asia Pacific Research Network on Trade (ARTNet) and ERIA Research Institute Network (ERIA-RIN) and Think 20 (G20). Currently he serves as the Co-Chair of Indonesia National Committee of Pacific Economic Cooperation (INCPEC). He plays an active role in various policy forum in Indonesia, including as the Research Coordinator of Indonesia Service Dialogue, a forum dedicated for the development of services sector in Indonesia.



## **Ambassador Pou Sothirak**

**Distinguished Senior Advisor, Cambodian Center for Regional Studies, Phnom Penh**

Ambassador Pou Sothirak was former Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace from 2013 to 2023 and currently is a retired academic. He serves voluntarily as Distinguished Senior Advisor to the Cambodian Center for Regional Studies (CCRS) since December 2023. He has been appointed as Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia since February 2014. He was appointed as Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia from September 2013 to January 2014. He was Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore from January 2009 to December 2012. He also served as Cambodian Ambassador to Japan from April 2005 to November 2008. He was elected Cambodian Member of Parliaments twice during the national general election in 1993 and 2003. He was appointed as Minister of Industry Mines and Energy of the Royal Government of Cambodia from 1993 to 1998. He obtained a degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering from Oregon State University, USA in March 1981 and had worked with the Boeing Company from 1981-1986. He served as humanitarian refugee volunteer at one of the refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodia border from 1986 to 1992. He has also written extensively on various challenging issues confronting the development of Cambodia and other issues related to peace and security of the region of Southeast Asia and beyond.



## **H.E. Jayant N. Khobragade**

**Ambassador of India to ASEAN**

Ambassador Jayant Khobragade is a member of the Indian Foreign Service. He is currently serving as Ambassador to the Indian Mission in ASEAN, posted in Jakarta. He previously held diplomatic assignments including in Russia, Kazakhstan and Spain. He was India's Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic since August 2013 for three and a half years. He also worked in the different Divisions of the Ministry of External Affairs including the Disarmament and International Security Affairs.

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## **VALEDICTORY SESSION**

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## **Professor Chan Heng Chee**

**Chairman, Board of Trustees, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore**

Professor Chan Heng Chee is Chairman of the Board of Trustees of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. She is Ambassador-at-Large with the Singapore Foreign Ministry and holds the appointment of Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities in the Singapore University of Technology and Design. She was appointed a Member of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights in 2012 and continues to serve in that position. Ambassador Chan is the Deputy Chairman of the Social Science Research Council in Singapore. She is a Member of the Science of Cities Committee (National Research Foundation). She is a Trustee of the National University of Singapore, and of Yale-NUS College. In 2022 Ambassador Chan was appointed a Trustee of the University of the Arts Singapore. She is the Global Co-chair of Asia Society and a Board member of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).



## **Mr Siddhartha Nath**

**Joint Secretary (Indo-Pacific), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India**



## **Ms Sharon Seah**

Senior Fellow and Coordinator, ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Prior to academia, Ms Seah spent 15 years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Environment Agency of Singapore. Her research interests are in ASEAN, multilateralism, rule of law, and climate change. She graduated with a Master in Public and International Law from the University of Melbourne in 2018. She is co-editor of *50 Years of ASEAN and Singapore* (World Scientific: 2017) and editor of *Building a New Legal Order for the Oceans* (NUS Press: 2019) for Tommy Koh. She is also the lead author of *The State of Southeast Asia Survey Report* and the *Southeast Asia Climate Outlook Survey*.



## **Dr Pankaj Vashisht**

Coordinator, ASEAN-India Center, RIS, New Delhi

Dr Vashisht is an Associate Professor and Coordinator, ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). Prior to joining RIS, he was with Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relation. He has more than 15 years of experience in policy-oriented research. He specialises in the field of International trade, Technology, Labour Economics and Applied Econometrics. He has worked closely with policymakers in India both at centre and state level. He has also conducted research studies for various international organisations such as The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Elcano Royal Institute and Indian industry associations such as Auto Component Manufacturers Association (ACMA) and Society of Indian Auto Manufacturers (SIAM). He is the recipient of 'Young Scholar Grant' to attend the '38th NBER Summer Institute' held in Cambridge USA in 2015. He holds a PhD in Economics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has done substantial work on the implications of International Trade and Technology up-gradation for jobs in India. He has numerous publications which include a book on the competitiveness of Indian auto Industry, several chapters in edited volumes, papers in refereed national and international journals and working papers. He has also contributed articles to popular print medias as well.

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## List of Participants

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- **Dr Shahid Ahmed**  
Professor, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi
- **Dr Hazwan Haini**  
Researcher, Centre for Strategic and Policy Studies (CSPS), Brunei
- **Dr Rajeev Ranjan Chaturvedy**  
Associate Professor, Nalanda University, Bihar
- **Mr Tran My Hai Loc**  
Deputy Head, Department of Diplomatic Politics, Faculty of International Relations and Communication, Ho Chi Minh City
- **Dr Le Thi Hang Nga**  
Senior Researcher, ISAWAAS-Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi
- **Dr Teh Lip Li**  
Advisor, ASCC, Research and Media Culture and Art, ASEAN, Kaula Lumpur
- **Dr Yanitha Meena**  
Analyst, Foreign Policy & Security Studies Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS), Kaula Lumpur
- **Dr Tin Htoo Nain**  
Director, CEES, Yangon
- **Dr Piyanat Soikham**  
Founding Director, India Studies Center, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand
- **Dr Dorislyn A. Tabunda**  
Professor and Former Dean, School of International Relations, New Era University, Quezon City
- **Mr Ahmad Khairul Anwar bin Nor Hashim**  
Associate Researcher, Centre for Strategic and Policy Studies, Brunei
- **Dr Zuharain Yunmy Yunan**  
Senior Research Fellow, Center for South East Asian Study, Jakarta
- **Mr. Kaw Nyunt Lwin**  
Senior Researcher, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS)
- **Mrs Phengkhammy Phoungmany**  
Deputy Director General Institute of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lao PDR

# Some Glimpses from the Eighth Roundtable of ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks



## Eighth Roundtable of ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT)

### Navigating a World in Transition: Agenda for ASEAN-India Cooperation

7 - 8 November 2024

Singapore







## About AINTT

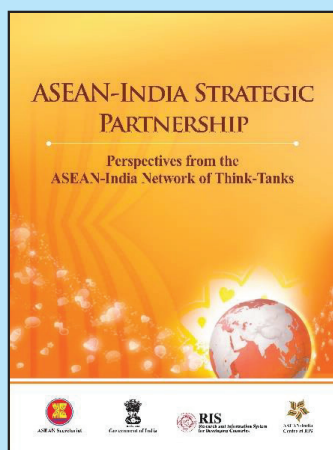
The global economic landscape is growing increasingly complex, creating a pressing need for robust networks among institutions, media, and businesses that can engage in policy dialogues and provide insightful recommendations for informed decision-making. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and ASEAN, effective since January 2010, has transformed the India-ASEAN partnership, which has now evolved into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as of 2022. India's Act East Policy prioritizes ASEAN as a key partner, recognizing that deeper integration with Asian counterparts best serves India's economic interests. The ASEAN-India FTA has created new avenues for trade collaboration, and both sides are committed to advancing economic integration through expanded agreements on services, investment, and other areas. Addressing issues of culture, connectivity, and commerce is essential to reinforce this partnership.

In light of this, the ASEAN India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT) was established following a decision by ASEAN and Indian leaders at their inaugural summit in November 2002. Recognizing the value of regular academic exchange, RIS took the initiative in 2004 to organize the ASEAN-India Vision 2020 conference, marking a significant step in defining a forward-looking agenda for regional cooperation. The importance of continuous dialogue was further highlighted at the 7th India-ASEAN Summit, where the Indian Prime Minister proposed a RoundTable of the ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks to bridge knowledge gaps and promote a long-term perspective on ASEAN-India relations.

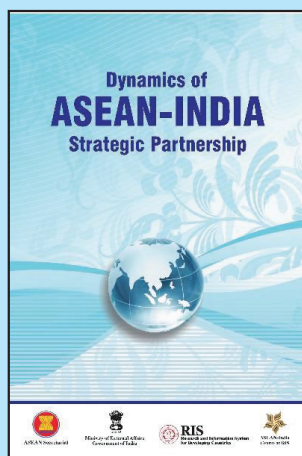
The first AINTT RoundTable was held in New Delhi in 2012, followed by roundtables in various ASEAN capitals: Vientiane in 2013, Hanoi in 2014, Kuala Lumpur in 2015, Jakarta in 2018, Bangkok in 2020, and Phnom Penh in 2022. These gatherings have become essential forums for policy research, advocacy, and people-to-people exchanges, strengthening the ASEAN-India partnership across multiple dimensions. By enabling robust intellectual exchanges and fostering closer ties among think-tanks, AINTT has continuously contributed to the evolving ASEAN-India relationship, addressing strategic issues in culture, connectivity, and commerce that are critical to this comprehensive partnership.

The AINTT Secretariat is located at the ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at the RIS. To know more about this network, please contact Dr Pankaj Vashisht at [pankaj.vashisht@ris.org.in](mailto:pankaj.vashisht@ris.org.in)

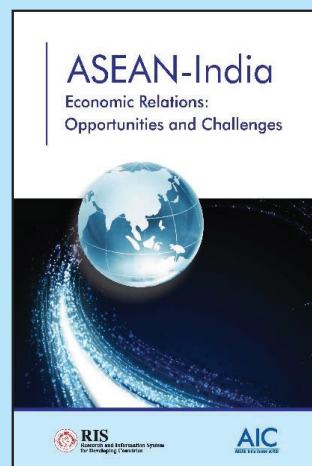
# Glimpses of Past AINTT



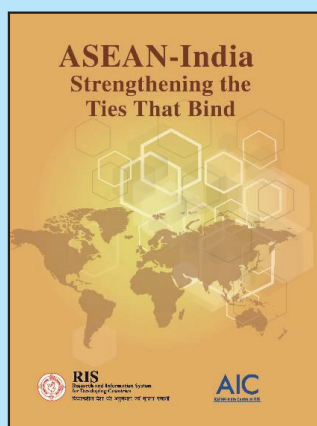
1<sup>st</sup> AINTT Proceedings  
2012



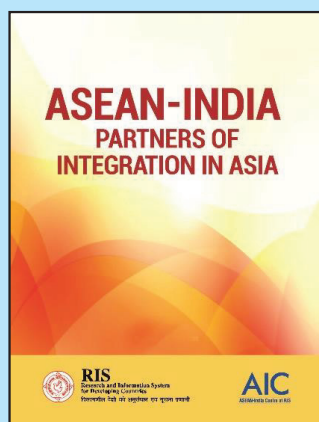
2<sup>nd</sup> AINTT Proceedings  
2013



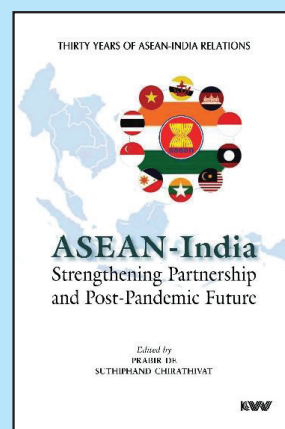
3<sup>rd</sup> AINTT Proceedings  
2014



4<sup>th</sup> AINTT Proceedings  
2015



5<sup>th</sup> AINTT Proceedings  
2018



6<sup>th</sup> AINTT Proceedings  
2020



7<sup>th</sup> AINTT Proceedings  
2022





## About RIS

Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) is a New Delhi-based autonomous policy research institute that specialises in issues related to international economic development, trade, investment and technology. RIS is envisioned as a forum for fostering effective policy dialogue and capacity-building among developing countries on global and regional economic issues.

The focus of the work programme of RIS is to promote South-South Cooperation and collaborate with developing countries in multilateral negotiations in various forums. RIS is engaged across inter-governmental processes of several regional economic cooperation initiatives. Through its intensive network of think tanks, RIS seeks to strengthen policy coherence on international economic issues and the development partnership canvas. For more information about RIS and its work programme, please visit its website: [www.ris.org.in](http://www.ris.org.in)

## About AIC

ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) has been working to strengthen India's strategic partnership with ASEAN in its realisation of the ASEAN Community. AIC at RIS undertakes research, policy advocacy and regular networking activities with relevant public/private agencies, organisations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN countries, with the aim of providing policy inputs, up-to-date information, data resources and sustained interaction, for strengthening ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership. For more information about AIC, please visit its website: <http://aic.ris.org.in>



**RIS**  
Research and Information System  
for Developing Countries  
विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली

**AIC**  
ASEAN-India Centre at RIS

Core IV-B, Fourth Floor, India Habitat Centre  
Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003, India  
Tel.: +91-11-2468 2177-80, Fax: +91-11-2468 2173-74  
E-mail: [aic@ris.org.in](mailto:aic@ris.org.in); [dgoffice@ris.org.in](mailto:dgoffice@ris.org.in)  
Website: [www.ris.org.in](http://www.ris.org.in); <http://aic.ris.org.in>



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