

Newsletter from the Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN
No. 17: Clarifying the Areas of ASEAN-Japan Cooperation

30 April 2024



Working Lunch with the Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn
(17 April 2024, credit: ASEAN Secretariat)

The city has returned to its ordinary hustle and bustle, as Ramadan (fasting month) followed by the Lebaran holiday has come to an end. Work is now focused on implementation and following-up, after a series of events immediately after the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation.

To summarize the 50th anniversary, I contributed an article titled [“Towards the Realization of the Vision for the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation”](#) and [“Towards a Future of ‘Co-Creation’ through ‘Trust’”](#) for the April issue of Indonesia magazine and the 25 April edition of the Jakarta Newspaper, respectively. The task ahead is to promote efforts by a wide range of related organizations and explore cooperation with new partners through continuous follow-up of the Implementation Plan adopted at the Commemorative Summit last December.

The key to achieving this is to organize the 130 items in the Implementation Plan and identify areas of cooperation between ASEAN and Japan. In this edition of the Ambassador's Newsletter, I would like to report on new developments, initiatives and discuss with you the importance of understanding areas of cooperation between ASEAN and Japan.

TRUST AND DISTRUST RANKINGS OF MAJOR POWERS IN THE REGION

The "trust" and "distrust" rankings of the countries that can exert influence on Southeast Asia are based on a consolidated five-point Likert scale of positive and negative responses ("Very Confident" to "No Confidence"). The "No Comment" responses are removed from this analysis.

Japan maintained its solid lead as the region's most trusted power (58.9%) with the US coming in second (54.2%), followed by the EU (41.5%), China (24.8%), and India (24.2%). At the country level, the largest drops in trust levels towards Japan are recorded in Brunei (17.2%) and Laos (12.2%). The biggest jumps in confidence levels towards Japan can be found in Cambodia (8.7%) in 2023 to 81.6% in 2024 and Myanmar (4.8%) in 2023 to 46.7% in 2024. The view that Japan is a responsible international law advocate is still strong at 36.2%, albeit a decline from 41.0% in 2023. The assessment that Japan has vast economic resources and the political will to provide global leadership remained steadfast at 27.7%. Japan's respectful, considerate, low-key style of approach to the region, and its call to regional partners to "co-create" a vision together at the 50th ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit in December 2023 was well played.

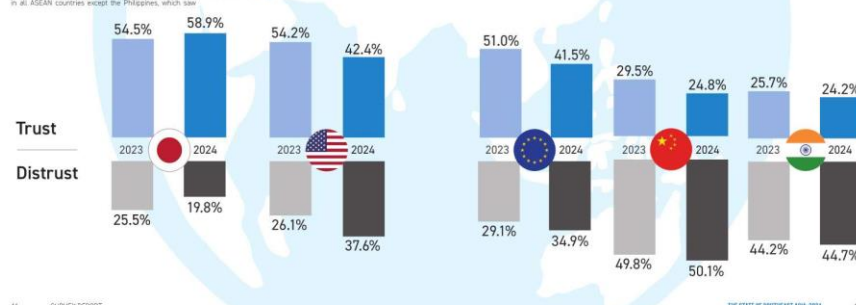
Trust in the US recorded a significant drop from 54.2% last year to 42.4% this year. Southeast Asia appears cautious of the Biden Administration, with Presidential elections soon to be held in November 2024. The decline in trust is evident in all ASEAN countries except the Philippines, which saw

a slight increase of 4.3%. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr received a warm reception at the White House last year and the signing of the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement was positively welcomed by the Philippines. The largest drops in levels of confidence towards the US can be observed in Laos (18.0%), Cambodia (18.0%), and Brunei (28.1%). While the majority of those who trust the US attribute this to its vast economic resources and political will (45.0%), those who distrust it hold a prevailing view that the US is distracted by its internal affairs, thus unable to focus on global concerns and issues (77.0%).

Trust in the EU has also declined, albeit to a lesser extent compared to the US. From 51.0% in 2023, trust in the EU decreased to 41.5% in 2024, while distrust levels rose from 29.1% to 34.9%. Those who regard the EU positively attribute their trust to the EU's stance on the environment, human rights, and climate change. Conversely, those who distrust the EU think it is distracted by its internal affairs and trust cannot focus on global concerns and issues. This view is particularly strong in the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam.

China has experienced a marginal decrease in trust levels from 29.5% in 2023 to 24.8% this year, accompanied by a slight increase in distrust from 49.8% to 50.1%. These changes indicate relatively stable perceptions of China among Southeast Asian countries, with trust levels remaining relatively low compared to other major powers. China is Southeast Asia's largest trading partner, but it is also the region's largest source of insecurity. China's increasingly assertive behaviour in the South China Sea is one area of concern. Another is China's slowing economy, forecasted to slow to 4.2% in 2024, which may seriously impact regional economies. At the country level, drastic decreases in trust levels are recorded in Brunei (45.3%), Cambodia (21.9%), and Laos (11.7%). The prevailing reason for distrust levels in China can be attributed to concerns that China's economic and military power could be used to threaten their country's interests and sovereignty. Meanwhile, the reason behind trust in China is the country's vast economic resources and strong political will to provide global leadership. This positive perception is strong in countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

The geopolitical environment for Southeast Asia has become harder, and this is not because of the US-China rivalry factor alone. The multilateral global trading system is not as open as it used to be as countries respond to major events such as the Russia-Ukraine war, Israel-Hamas conflict, Red Sea attacks, with in-kind export control restrictions and domestic export bans on items from rice to critical minerals. Without the help of trusted partners to buffer the international rules-based order, Southeast Asia can only look forward to a long, bumpy road ahead.



Excerpts from "The State of Southeast Asia 2024" (2 April 2024)

●ASEAN Perception Surveys

On 2 April, the ASEAN Studies Centre of ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, a Singapore-based think tank, released ["The State of Southeast Asia 2024"](#). It is a perception survey on ASEAN, which was widely reported in Japan ([NHK](#), [Nikkei](#), [Asahi](#), [Kyodo](#), etc.). The survey is conducted annually since 2019 and was conducted among approximately 2,000 researchers, businessperson, civil society, media personnel, and government and international organization officials from 10 ASEAN Member States. I attended and listened to [the presentation webinar](#) online from Jakarta.

The survey covered various issues, and "trust" ranked first for Japan among major countries, an improved result from last year's. I am pleased to see the analysis that "Japan's respectful, considerate, low-key style of approach to the region, and its call for regional partners to "co-create" a vision together at the 50th ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit in December 2023 was well played."

In addition, [a public opinion poll on Japan by ASEAN](#) released by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March of this year also showed that trust towards Japan and Japan's contributions to world peace and economy are highly valued. This highly scored evaluation of Japan should not be taken for granted, and we need to maintain and expand this value through unrelenting efforts.



Working Dinner with Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN, H.E. Ekkaphab
(18 April 2024)

●Series of Discussions on Concrete Steps Towards Cooperation

On 5 April, the Working Group (WG) meeting of the ASEAN-Japan Joint Coordination Committee (AJJCC) was held. This is the first round of discussions to follow up on the Commemorative Summit held last December, discussing immediate issues and concrete arrangements for the AJJCC to be held on 10 June 2024.

After the Lebaran holiday on 17 April, I invited Secretary-General of ASEAN, H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, at my residence for [a working lunch](#). We discussed the Secretary-General's attendance at the coming OECD Ministerial Council Meeting in early May, which Japan will chair on the occasion of 60th anniversary of Japan's accession to the OECD, as well as his visit to Japan in late May.

The following day on 18 April, I invited Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for Socio-Cultural Community, H.E. Ekkaphab Phanthavong, to a working dinner at my residence. We discussed tangible steps for ASEAN-Japan cooperation, including in areas of health, disaster management, and cultural exchanges.



Meeting with Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for Political-Security Community, H.E. Dato' Astana
(22 April 2024, credit: ASEAN Secretariat)

The following week on 22 April, I had [a meeting](#) with H.E. Dato' Astanah Abdul Aziz, the newly appointed Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for Political-Security Community, at the ASEAN Secretariat. H.E. Dato' Astanah is a former Malaysian diplomat, and this was the first lengthy discussion with her since her arrival in February of this year. We were able to have a frank exchange of views on the arrangements to follow up on the implementation plan for ASEAN-Japan cooperation, and how the ASEAN-led regional cooperation framework should be utilized for peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and the world.

Prior to that, on 13 April, we invited Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for Community and Corporate Affairs, H.E. Mr. Nararya S. Soeprapto, to a welcome dinner at my residence, and on 28 April, we were invited by Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for Economic Community, H.E. Mr. Satvinder Singh, to a working lunch to discuss in-depth in materializing various initiatives in his respective areas of responsibility.

ASEAN is a regional organization consisting of 10 Member States and becoming institutionalized through the many years of cooperation, and through discussions with the Secretariat officials, we can unite our respective views and promote cooperation efficiently and effectively.

Areas of ASEAN-Japan Cooperation			Mission of Japan to ASEAN April 2024
Heart-to-Heart Partners across Generations	Partners for Co-creation of Economy and Society of the Future	Partners for Peace and Stability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Youth and People-to-People Exchanges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership to Co-create a Future with the Next Generation: WA Project 2.0* ◆ Cultural and Intellectual Exchanges ◆ Sports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chiang Mai Declaration ◆ Tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN-Japan Tourism Ministers' Special Dialogue ◆ Language ◆ Education ◆ Foreign Workers ◆ Science and Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN-Japan Science, Technology, and Innovation Collaboration ◆ Human Resource Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JICA-ASEAN Knowledge Co-Creation and Connectivity Initiative (JAKCCI) ◆ Business Exchanges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young / Generation Z Business Leaders' Summit ◆ Local Government Exchanges ◆ Support for ASEAN Capacity Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training in Japan for ASEAN Secretariat officials ◆ Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for ASEAN booths and acceptance of young ASEAN officials in Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN-Japan Economic Co-Creation Vision*, Future Design and Action Plan*, ASEAN-Japan Co-Creation Initiative for the Next-Generation Automotive Industry ■ Finance ■ Connectivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative ■ Transport <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Luang Prabang Action Plan ■ Climate Change and Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Program for ASEAN Climate and Environment (SPACE) ■ Energy and Critical Minerals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) ■ Disaster Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) ■ Health and Social Welfare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) ■ Smart City and Urbanization ■ Digital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN-Japan Digital Work Plan, Outreach of Hiroshima AI Process to ASEAN ■ Outer Space ■ Agriculture and Food Systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN-Japan MIDORI Cooperation Plan ■ Narrowing the Gap ■ Gender ■ Labour ■ Civil Service ■ Rural Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rule of Law <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN-Japan Work Plan on Law and Justice ● Maritime Security ● Defense <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Initiative for Enhanced Defense Cooperation (JASMINE) ● WPS, YPS, Peacebuilding ● Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation ● Human Rights ● Transnational Crimes ● Cybersecurity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for ASEAN-Japan Cyber Security Capacity Building Center (AJCCBC) ● Disinformation ● Competition Policy and Law ● Immigration ● Landmines ● Regional Architecture <p>The asterisk (*) signifies that the cooperation straddles multiple areas. Please note that cooperation initiatives in this chart are illustrative and not exhaustive.</p>	

Chart of 43 areas of ASEAN-Japan cooperation (Prepared in April 2024)

●Clarifying the Areas of ASEAN-Japan Cooperation

As the Commemorative Summit has taken place, the proceeding task is to immediately follow up on the Implementation Plan and create a framework to ensure the outcomes are widely understood. The key is to organize the 130 items of the Implementation Plan and to clarify the areas of ASEAN-Japan cooperation.

Under the three pillars of the Joint Vision Statement, the 130 items of the Implementation Plan are categorized by issue and related ministries and agencies, resulting into 43 areas (see chart above). The overall picture of the areas of ASEAN-Japan cooperation can now be seen in short. In the future, the progress of cooperation in each area can be identified by looking at the efforts of the related ministries and agencies in charge. This kind of organization and “visualization” is possible only now, as implementation is about to begin.

I am very pleased that we were able to clarify the areas of ASEAN-Japan cooperation with full support from relevant stakeholders in both ASEAN and Japan. From now, we will strive to formulate and develop specific cooperation projects in respective areas and to promote cooperation with new partners. I would be grateful if you could kindly extend continued cooperation with us.

Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN
KIYA Masahiko