

Newsletter from the Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN

No.24: What are Japan's Strengths in ASEAN

29 November 2024



The 50th ASEAN-Japan Business Meeting

(7 November 2024, in Bangkok, credit: the Japan Association of Corporate Executives)

After the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings in October, November turned out to be a period to reflect on this year and start preparations for the next year while attending various events.

In early November, I attended the 50th ASEAN-Japan Business Meeting (AJBM) in Bangkok and also visited the ASEAN centres for cybersecurity and active ageing. In mid-November, I hosted a briefing in Jakarta introducing the 60 winning companies and organizations of the ASEAN Blue Economy Innovation Project. In late November, I attended a welcoming dinner for the Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Program (SSEAYP) in Jakarta and gave a lecture at a JETRO seminar.

One issue that was discussed during these events, and which I have been reflecting on personally, is: What are Japan's strengths in ASEAN? What should Japan focus on to succeed? In this edition of the Ambassador's Newsletter, I would like to explore this point together with you.



The 50th ASEAN-Japan Business Meeting

(7 November 2024, in Bangkok, credit: the Japan Association of Corporate Executives)

● The 50th ASEAN-Japan Business Meeting

On 6-8 November, I traveled to Bangkok to attend [the 50th ASEAN-Japan Business Meeting](#) (AJBM). This meeting has been jointly organized by the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai) and counterparts from ASEAN countries every year since 1974, and this year marks its 50th edition.

The theme of this year's meeting was "Building Resilient Partnership for Sustainable Future", and discussions focused on [four common challenges](#): food security, sustainable tourism, mobility, and human resource development. Over 250 business leaders from Japan and various ASEAN countries participated in the discussions.

I participated in a panel session on the “Japan-ASEAN Talent Circulation Platform”. To create local solutions addressing global issues in ASEAN, a growth center of the world, it is essential to create organizations and culture where ASEAN-Japan human resources work together. The Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) has now joined this initiative of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives, and discussions made significant progress. We hope to announce the outcomes of a pilot project at next year's meeting in Tokyo.



Visit to the ASEAN-Japan Cybersecurity Capacity Building Centre (ACCBC)

(8 November 2024, in Bangkok)

● Cooperation through ASEAN Centres

On the occasion of my trip to Bangkok, I visited [the ASEAN Centre for Active Ageing and Innovation \(ACAI\)](#) and [the ASEAN-Japan Cybersecurity Capacity Building Centre \(AJCCBC\)](#), where I was briefed on their activities and expectations for Japan. Japan's strengths can be fully leveraged in these areas.

The ACAI, which focuses on ageing-related issues, was established in 2019, but due to the outbreak of COVID-19, its full-scale operations only began recently. A new director was appointed just a few months ago, and they have now received approval for their budget and business plans. We exchanged views on how Japan's experiences and systems can be utilized in ASEAN going forward.

The AJCCBC, which focuses on cybersecurity, began operations in 2018. It is now jointly managed by Thailand's National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) and JICA, and its activities are running smoothly. Face-to-face training for government officials from ASEAN countries has proven valuable not only for acquiring technical skills but also for building relationships and providing a foundation for policy dialogue.



Briefing on ASEAN Blue Economy Innovation Project

(18 November 2024, at ASEAN Headquarters/Secretariat, credit: UNDP)

● Briefing on ASEAN Blue Economy Innovation Project

On 18 November, our mission co-hosted a briefing on [the ASEAN Blue Economy Innovation Project](#) with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at the ASEAN Headquarters/Secretariat in Jakarta. The meeting was attended by ASEAN Permanent Representatives and Ambassadors of External Partners.

This project invited innovation proposals related to the blue economy from 10 ASEAN countries and Timor-Leste, selecting the top 60 companies/organizations for funding and incubation support, and facilitating matching with private-sector entities, including Japanese companies. During this meeting, we introduced [the projects of all 60 winning companies/ organizations](#), which were [selected and announced on the occasion of the ASEAN-related Summit Meetings in October](#), and provided an update on preparations for a private-sector matching event scheduled for February next year.

Innovation projects from four to eight companies/ organizations per country were introduced in a [video](#), showcasing the significant potential of the blue economy in ASEAN. Innovation is not just about proposing ideas but about aiming to scale them up through social implementation. Each selected company/ organization will receive US\$40,000 in funding and incubation support and will be introduced widely to the private sector in the region. We hope that this ASEAN-UNDP-Japan collaboration will thrive not only in ASEAN but also in the broader Indo-Pacific region and globally.



Welcoming dinner of the Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Program (SSEAYP)

(21 November 2024, in Jakarta)

● Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Program (SSEAYP)

On 21-25 November, the Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Program (SSEAYP) made a stop in Jakarta. This [SSEAYP](#), initiated in 1974 through a joint declaration between ASEAN countries and Japan, is celebrating its 50th anniversary and 48th edition this year. [This year](#), the program involves 160 youths: 15 from each ASEAN country, 20 from Japan, and 3 observers from Timor-Leste. Over the course of a month, the participants visited Ho Chi Minh and Jakarta.

I attended [the welcoming dinner](#) on the first day of their arrival in Jakarta. After opening remarks and a gift exchange ceremony, participants performed for three minutes each in their respective countries. Each group wore matching uniforms at first, but before the performances, they changed into their national costumes and presented impressive cultural performances that surpassed the amateur level. The event culminated in a lively group dance with everyone participating. Participants also had the opportunity to stay with local families over the weekend, where they spent meaningful time in the community.

On board, participants engage in themed discussions in English during the day, and each country performs a 75-minute cultural performance at night. I believe that such exchanges, which foster a sense of unity among participants, contribute to mutual understanding and trust between ASEAN and Japan.



ASEAN seminar hosted by JETRO Indonesia
(22 November 2024, at the Japan Foundation Jakarta)

● JETRO-hosted ASEAN Seminar

On 22 November, I had the opportunity to speak at the ASEAN seminar hosted by JETRO Indonesia. The event was held at the Japan Foundation Jakarta, with around 60 participants on-site and approximately 300 joining online. The theme was "Japan and ASEAN – A History of Trust, A Future Built Together", and the seminar provided a platform to review the progress since the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation last year and share new directions for the future.

In my presentation, I discussed the history, current state, and future of ASEAN-Japan relations, covering recent trends in ASEAN, key ASEAN-Japan cooperation initiatives, and my personal experiences and reflections in the region.

[The presentation material](#) is available on the website, please take a look.

During the seminar, I was asked what strengths (comparative advantages) Japan can bring to ASEAN in the future. I believe Japan can leverage its half-century of successful experience in manufacturing in ASEAN countries and, as a "leading problem-solving nation", apply its technologies and expertise in diverse fields across the growing ASEAN region. I also hope to continue providing various opportunities through public-private partnerships.



Luncheon with the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, H.E. Amb. Sarah Al Bakri Devadason

(20 November 2024, at the residence of the Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN)

● Towards the year of Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship

Next year, 2025, Malaysia will take on the role of ASEAN Chair. On 20 November, I invited the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, H.E. Amb. Sarah Al Bakri Devadason, to the residence of the Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN to be briefed on Malaysia's priorities and preparations for its chairmanship, and to exchange views on ASEAN-Japan cooperation and support for the chairmanship.

The theme for ASEAN in 2025 will be "Inclusivity and Sustainability". As [announced by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, H.E. Y.B. Dato' Seri Utama Haji Mohamad Bin Haji Hasan](#), during [the launching ceremony of the logo and theme](#) on 22 October, the priorities will be: (1) Fortifying ASEAN centrality, (2) Promoting ASEAN intra-trade, investment, and scientific and technological innovation, and (3) Fostering inclusivity and sustainability (narrowing the development gap, improving living standards, and mitigating the impacts of climate change). They are also set to adopt the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.

While supporting ASEAN Chair's leadership, our challenge will be to maximize Japan's strengths and to make ASEAN-Japan cooperation bring about tangible results. I look forward to working with you all in the coming year to further advance ASEAN cooperation in many fields. Thank you for your continued support.

Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN
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