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## Discussion Report Talking ASEAN

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Revisiting the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit:  
The Prospect of Continuity Laos' Chairmanship

Jakarta, September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2023



## Introduction

On Wednesday, 27 September 2023, The Habibie Center (THC) convened the Talking ASEAN seminar entitled “**Revisiting the 43rd ASEAN Summit: The Prospect of Continuity between Indonesia and Laos’ ASEAN Chairmanships.**” The seminar featured **H.E. M.I. Derry Aman** (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of The Republic of Indonesia to ASEAN), **H.E. Bovonethat Douangchak** (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Lao PDR to ASEAN), **Kornelius Purba** (Senior Editor, The Jakarta Post) – and was moderated by **Herawati** (Researcher of ASEAN Studies Program, THC).

The objectives of this seminar were to: (a) comprehend the results of the 43rd ASEAN Summit and related meetings, especially their implications for regional dynamics and development; (b) compare the outcomes of the 43rd ASEAN Summit and the related meetings to the 42nd ASEAN Summit to further assess the progress of Indonesia’s ASEAN Chairmanship and its impact in Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region; (c) comprehend ASEAN’s stance on the Cross-Strait Relations based on the outcome of 43rd ASEAN Summit and related meetings; and (d) explore potential approaches needed by the upcoming ASEAN Chair to address pressing issues from within and beyond the region.

This discussion report summarized the key points of each speaker as well as the following questions and answers session.

# PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



**H.E. M.I. Derry Aman**  
(Permanent Representative of The  
Republic of Indonesia to ASEAN)



The theme of this year's ASEAN Chairmanship represents three pillars/clusters, namely "ASEAN Matters," "Epicentrum of Growth," and mainstreaming and implementing the AOIP. Indonesia's Chairmanship occurred as various geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges unfolded at the global and regional levels. Therefore, Indonesia aims at understanding how ASEAN can best contribute to such challenges. There were specific areas Indonesia highlighted to boost regional economic growth, particularly with respect to food security, energy security, regional health architecture, financial stability, and a special emphasis dedicated to the development of an electric vehicle ecosystem. These are encapsulated by the "Epicentrum of Growth" component.

In terms of the "ASEAN Matters" pillar, Indonesia aimed to maintain ASEAN's strategic value, significance, and relevance. ASEAN should contribute to global development. ASEAN should also matter for its own people, as well as externally by contributing and influencing the Indo-Pacific region and various global situations. "ASEAN Matters" means that ASEAN is able to navigate regional development.

Indonesia clearly prioritized the mainstreaming and prioritization of the AOIP, which has been stipulated in various documents and embodied by the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum. Indonesia attempted to identify what projects and practical cooperation had been developed and could be developed in the future. The AOIP envisions the Indo-Pacific as a region

of development, inclusivity, peace, stability, and prosperity. This priority signaled ASEAN's vigor to embrace the enthusiasm of various dialogue partners in developing various cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

The 42nd ASEAN Summit was convened in May 2023, which was one of the highlights of Indonesia's chairmanship. During the Summit, there were eleven outcome documents, which were intended to address various issues. One of the most important deliverables was an outcome on how ASEAN would see itself in 2025 and how it envisioned itself in 2045. Timor-Leste's observer status could also be regarded as an important milestone.

The 43rd ASEAN Summit was convened in September 2023 in Jakarta, which produced 90 outcome documents which were thoroughly negotiated. Ambassador Aman deemed the results of this year's chairmanship to be satisfactory. Aside from discussions with dialogue partners, there were 9 dialogues with 9 international organizations. ASEAN succeeded in maintaining ASEAN Centrality, enhancing ASEAN's norms and values, as well as strengthening relations with dialogue partners. Ambassador Aman noted that all attendants succeeded in demonstrating a collective will to come together to form a consensus, most notably by coming up with an outcome document of the East Asia Summit (EAS) after two years of failure to do so.

Following the EAS, all member states agreed on expanding areas of cooperation and noted various regional and international

issues. Then, the AIPF, which was attended by 2,500 participants, 96 speakers, and 16 companies resulted in the identification of 93 implemented and ongoing cooperation projects between ASEAN and its partners (including government-to-government and government-to-business cooperation) valued at USD 38.2 billion. Moreover, the forum had mapped 73 potential projects, valued at USD 17.8 billion.

There were four key takeaways from Indonesia's 2023 ASEAN Chairmanship. First, this year's chairmanship contributed to the process of ASEAN Community-building. The second takeaway is re-asserting ASEAN centrality in the region through numerous ASEAN-led mechanisms, emphasizing ASEAN's position in the driver's seat on regional matters within Southeast Asia and Indo-Pacific. Third, it managed to underscore ASEAN's relevance as a norm and value-setter. Lastly, Indonesia's 2023 Chairmanship demonstrated its vigor in strengthening relations with external partners, further enhancing ASEAN unity and centrality.

In conclusion, Indonesia's chairmanship succeeded in setting out a long-term regional vision, making ASEAN matters and more resilient to various global and regional challenges, making Southeast Asia and ASEAN as an Epicentrum of Growth, as well as making Indo-Pacific a region of peace through an inclusive, concrete cooperative approach. Moreover, Ambassador Aman also concluded that ASEAN's success was also demonstrated by the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) to strengthen cooperation with non-ASEAN regions. He also affirmed Indonesia's full support for Laos chairmanship next year.

# PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



**Kornelius Purba**  
(Senior Editor, The Jakarta Post)



## FROM TPP, CPTPP to IPEF

After President Donald Trump dropped out of the Treaty in 2017, Japan and Australia tried to rebuild the **Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)** into the **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)**. It is practically paralyzed, and China applied for membership.

But when Joe Biden took office in 2021, he also rejected the new partnership scheme and proposed a new initiative called the **Indo-Pacific Economic Partnership (IPEF)** without congressional approval. It can be said that IPEF has killed the CPTPP.

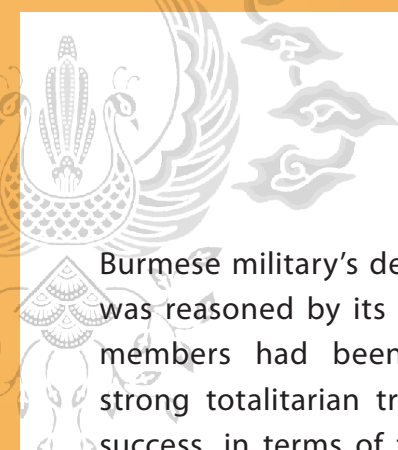
Members are the US, ASEAN, Australia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Fiji and India. It does work at all.

Mr. Kornelius Purba began his remark by expressing his regret over the Timor-Leste Prime Minister's statement on Timor-Leste's hesitance to join ASEAN over human rights violations in Myanmar.

Mr. Purba noted that one of the most important outcomes is the entry into force of RCEP, which had already been ratified by nine member states with various important dialogue partners such as China and Japan. He noted that RCEP will help ASEAN to enter the global market. Apart from RCEP, he noted that Japan and Australia had been especially eager to establish the Trans-Pacific Partnership to contain China, particularly during Obama's presidency. During Trump's presidency, Japan was eager to revive TPP by transforming TPP into CP-TPP, followed by China's application. However, he noted that TPP was already dead.

With regards to IPEF, he noted that there would be nothing to lose for Indonesia should it join the forum.

In terms of Myanmar, he saw that no progress had been made, although he did not mount the blame on Indonesia. ASEAN Member States' attitude towards the Myanmar issue differed between states in the sub-Mekong region and the other member states. Jokowi was initially optimistic about the role of the Special Envoy, although later on it dissipated. Moreover, Aung San Suu Kyi had a track record of defending the military. She also refused to visit Indonesia and Malaysia because she deemed that both countries had a pro-Rohingya stance. The National Unity Government (NUG) had been too demanding of ASEAN as well, without looking at its stance on the regional grouping when it was still in power. Moreover, the



Burmese military's denial of its commitments was reasoned by its belief that many ASEAN members had been pro-junta, Myanmar's strong totalitarian tradition, etc. Indonesia's success, in terms of the Myanmar issue, was the agreement on having the Philippines hosting the ASEAN Summit in 2026.

Mr. Purba problematized the clarity of the AOIP, which he deemed to be conceptually unclear. He viewed this to be intentional. In terms of maritime cooperation, ASEAN historically gravitated towards issues in the South China Sea. He questioned the ownership of the Indo-Pacific concept in ASEAN; although ASEAN might take the driver's seat, it does not necessarily mean that it is "owned" by ASEAN.

He also lamented ASEAN's attitude towards AUKUS and the Quad, which were intended to contain China. He argued that the ASEAN Member States, despite various expressions of regrets and pessimisms for the sudden announcement of AUKUS, were largely tepid and not too negative.


He noted that the change from the ASEAN Secretariat to the ASEAN Headquarters should be appreciated, although he still saw that enhancing the role of the Secretary-General would still be needed. He viewed that ASEAN might mimic the African Union's institutional framework, particularly with regard to the latter's ability to dispatch peacekeeping operations to areas of conflict.

Mr. Purba argued that Laos would stick to maintaining ASEAN's position as the main driving force. In response to suspicions of Chinese influence, he believed that these claims were groundless. He also views that the decision to suspend Myanmar's attendance in ASEAN meetings would remain under Laos' chairmanship.

# PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



**H.E. Bovonethat Douangchak**  
(Ambassador Extraordinary and  
Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative  
of the Lao PDR to ASEAN)



Ambassador Douangchak began his remark by congratulating Indonesia's success in concluding its chairmanship and the 43rd ASEAN Summit. He viewed that at the global and regional level, ASEAN had been facing great geopolitical challenges. AMS have reaffirmed its commitment to further enhance ASEAN's centrality to work towards the fulfillment of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the formulation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. ASEAN also reaffirmed their shared commitment to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Next year will be Laos' third time to assume ASEAN Chairmanship. It will build upon Indonesia's 2023 Chairmanship and its past chairmanships, as well as continuing works in developing the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. The details of the key priorities are still being developed by Laos.

Laos will continue to enhance ASEAN cooperation, ASEAN external relations, and ensure ASEAN centrality and unity. It will also improve ASEAN's connectivity and development in various economic issues, such as growth, sustainability, and digital economy. Moreover, Laotian chairmanship also aims to improve people-to-people exchange, cooperation for climate resilience, empowering women, and health development.

Laos will uphold the theme of "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience" for its 2024 ASEAN Chairmanship. Ambassador Douangchak noted Laos' prospective priorities for next year. Under the socio-cultural pillar, he noted that Laos will prioritize cooperation in culture and arts, environmental issues, women and children, as well as health by transforming ASEAN health development. Moreover, under the economic pillar, Laos will emphasize three strategic thrusts: integrating and connecting the regional economy, promoting a sustainable and inclusive economy, as well as transformation for future changes.



# QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

## Questions

**Muhammad A. Khairi (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta):**

To Ambassador Douangchak, in terms of Timor-Leste's accession, notwithstanding Xanana Gusmao's comment, is there any plan from Laos to fast-track Timor-Leste's accession?

## Responses

**H.E. Bovonethat Douangchak (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Lao PDR to ASEAN):**

Timor-Leste has applied to be a member since 2011 and during Cambodia's chairmanship in 2022, ASEAN has in principle accepted Timor-Leste as an observer. ASEAN already has a roadmap on the accession, and it would be impossible to estimate the exact year of actual accession. Lao PDR will continue to stick to the roadmap.

**H.E. M.I. Derry Aman (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of The Republic of Indonesia to ASEAN):**

ASEAN has already agreed on the roadmap, which should be the guideline for Timor-Leste, as well as for ASEAN to decide when the right time will be to finally accept Timor-Leste. It will be open-ended and largely depend on how fast Timor-Leste will be able to fulfill the guideline. It's not the chair's responsibility to accelerate, but Timor-Leste's to adhere to the guideline. Timor-Leste has attended as an observer, and it has become a whole-of-government effort to fulfill the guideline.

## Questions

**Layla (Universitas Al Azhar Indonesia):**

To Kornelius Purba, why do you think that we have nothing to lose by joining IPEF?

## Responses

**Kornelius Purba (Senior Editor, The Jakarta Post):**

When Trump decided to pull out of TPP, he believed that it was largely informed by Trump's own antagonistic view of Obama, as well as the negative public sentiment directed towards TPP. For Japan and Australia, reviving TPP was expected to allow Trump's successor to resume membership. Yet, when Biden assumed power, the American public was largely still against TPP. He opted for

IPEF which is non-binding. Its non-binding nature means that Indonesia might obtain benefits and will not lose anything if it ends up not working.

## Questions

**Luthfy Ramiz (The Habibie Center):**

To Kornelius Purba, with regards to the comparison to the African Union, what are the reasons for that comparison?

## Responses

**Kornelius Purba (Senior Editor, The Jakarta Post):**

Years ago, ASEAN thought that the EU was the model regional organization for ASEAN. It has come to realize that it would not fit with ASEAN's non-interference spirit. Despite progress in regionalism, non-interference is still strongly held. The African Union might be a viable model given that its ability to send peacekeeping operations and success in joining G20 serves as a success story.

## Questions

**Marina Ika Sari (The Habibie Center):**

With regards to China's new map, how was the discussion like in ASEAN?

## Responses

**H.E. M.I. Derry Aman (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of The Republic of Indonesia to ASEAN):**

Ambassadors were not present during the ASEAN Summit; therefore, they were not privy to internal discussion. In terms of the EAS, the summit is leaders-led and topics of discussion depend on the attendants, wherein they can raise issues for discussion. However, whether or not the topic will be further discussed would depend on whether the other attendants would respond to the issue. Ambassador Aman assured that ASEAN would remain interested in pushing for discussions on the South China Sea.

**Kornelius Purba (Senior Editor, The Jakarta Post):**

Indonesia sticks to the 1982 UNCLOS and acknowledges the result of the 2016 Tribunal which ruled

in favor of the Philippines. China's claim is largely based on historical grounds. Xi Jinping faces domestic pressure, making him unable to be softer in the South China Sea. At the same time, most countries depend on their relations with China. The furthest ASEAN can go is by mentioning that all parties should follow the international law, which refers to the 1982 UNCLOS.

## Questions

**Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrila Sidiq (The Habibie Center):**

How will Indonesia respond and continue to support efforts to reform ASEAN?

## Responses

**H.E. M.I. Derry Aman (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of The Republic of Indonesia to ASEAN):**

Under Indonesia's chairmanship, it frames changes to ASEAN as "transformation" or "changes" instead of reform, which has a negative connotation. One of the priorities for Indonesia is to strengthen the effectiveness of ASEAN. In terms of revising the ASEAN Charter, a review mechanism is already in place. What Indonesia pushed was making ASEAN matters and resilient. In this case, Indonesia pushed for strengthening the decision-making process under the ASEAN Summit. What is hoped is that it will ensure that decisions will be made in future summits. Making ASEAN better as an institution will remain a sustainable agenda for Indonesia and all member states. Having a headquarter for ASEAN points to a renewed interest in strengthening ASEAN as an institution. Reform should not be attached to a certain chair.

The prospect of Myanmar's chairmanship in 2026 was discussed during ASEAN meetings. This was discussed with Myanmar, wherein Myanmar offered to give up its 2026 chairmanship and the Philippines offered to step in.

**H.E. Bovonethat Douangchak (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Lao PDR to ASEAN):**

Instead of reform, what ASEAN is doing is strengthening the effectiveness of ASEAN. ASEAN has reviewed the implementation of the ASEAN Charter and toward few clauses only.

**Kornelius Purba (Senior Editor, The Jakarta Post):**

Mr. Purba opined that talks about reform should be viewed with pessimism.



### **ABOUT ASEAN STUDIES PROGRAM**

The ASEAN Studies Program was established on February 24, 2010, to become a center of excellence on ASEAN related issues, which can assist in the development of the ASEAN Community by 2015. The Habibie Center through its ASEAN Studies Program, alongside other institutions working towards the same goal, hopes to contribute to the realization of a more people-oriented ASEAN that puts a high value on democracy and human rights.

The objective of the ASEAN Studies Program is not merely only to conduct research and discussion within academic and government circles, but also to strengthen public awareness by forming a strong network of civil society in the region that will be able to help spread the ASEAN message. With the establishment of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center aims to play its part within our capabilities to the ASEAN regional development.

### **ABOUT TALKING ASEAN**

Talking ASEAN is a monthly public dialogue held at The Habibie Center in Jakarta. Covering a wide array of issues related to ASEAN, Talking ASEAN addresses topics of: Economic Integration, Socio-cultural, & Democracy, human rights and regional peace, among others. Featuring local and visiting experts, Talking ASEAN is one of a series of twelve dialogues regularly held each month and open to a target audience consisting of ASEAN officials, foreign ambassadors & diplomats, academics, university students, businesses, and the media.

**PROJECT SUPERVISOR:** Mohammad Hasan Ansori (Executive Director) & Julia Novrita (Director for Program and Development) | **RESEARCHERS:** Marina Ika Sari, Luthfy Ramiz, Herawati, Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq | **FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION:** Dewi Isma Rikya Ikhsan, M. Sohib | **LAYOUT & DESIGN:** Mayka R. Asnawiyah

### **ASEAN Studies Program - The Habibie Center**

The Habibie Center Building - Jl. Kemang Selatan No.98, Jakarta 12560  
Tel: 62 21 781 7211 | Fax: 62 21 781 7212 | Email: thc@habibiecenter.or.id

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