

INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



*Southeast Asia & Oceania
Centre
Monthly Newsletter*

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Insight Southeast Asia

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Southeast Asia & Oceania Digest

The countries of Southeast Asia have mostly had differing views on political and security developments. Unsurprisingly, there are a [range of views](#) on the Ukraine crisis. Since the economic relations of the ASEAN region with Russia are limited, there won't be any direct economic impact due to sanctions on Russia, but an increase in fuel prices will affect the post-COVID recovery of ASEAN economies. While Singapore has most vocally condemned Russia's actions; Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines have taken a softer approach. Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Malaysia have abstained from any condemnation and Myanmar junta government has explicitly supported Russia in its invasion of Ukraine.

ASEAN Defence Meetings Talk Security

ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting Working Group and ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting Plus Working Group organised a two-day virtual conference on 28 and 29 March, 2022. The theme of the meetings was "[Solidarity for Harmonious Peace](#)" and was chaired by Deputy Director-General of Foreign Affairs Lay Chenda from Cambodia's Ministry of National Defence. Terms and conditions for ASEAN information and cybersecurity, and establishment of Southeast Asia maritime law enforcement initiative were discussed at the event. Notably, cyber security and emerging technologies has been one of the prime areas of interest in Southeast Asia, apart from the issues of maritime domain, which include not only

threats of piracy, illegal drug and human trafficking on the region's vast coasts but also territorial disputes among many ASEAN member states, China and Taiwan

The Philippines and the US begin Joint Exercise

Filipino and American forces are conducting large-scale joint exercises including participation of 9000 soldiers from Navy, Airforce and Army out of which 5100 are US personnel. The [Balikatan exercise](#) comes towards the end of Duterte's term and barely a month before the presidential elections in the Philippines. The exercise began on 28 March and will continue till April 8, 2022. The timing of the exercise in the midst of geopolitical uncertainty such as the war in Ukraine reinforces the US-Philippines alliance. There had been considerable disturbance in this alliance as president Duterte grew closer to China in an effort to avail economic benefits for the Philippines. However, that strategy did not work as expected and Manila has been pivoting back to its alliance with the Americans.

Singapore PM Visits the White House

Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong visited the United States on 28 March, 2022 for a seven-day tour to meet President Biden, Vice-president Harris and other key officials in his government. His meeting at the [White House included](#) the Ukraine crisis, stability in the Indo-Pacific region, climate change and supply chain resilience. He also met the [Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin](#) at the Pentagon where they "reaffirmed strong bilateral ties." Some important subjects of the discussion pertained to cyber and artificial intelligence, joint training and sustained US engagement in Southeast Asia. Singapore

has been one of the US' strongest allies in the Southeast Asian region. A number of high level visits in the past year to Singapore have underlined the significant position of Singapore in the US' Indo-Pacific strategy and outreach to Southeast Asia.

India and Indonesia Hold Second Security Dialogue

The second round of the [India-Indonesia Security Dialogue](#) (IISD) was held in Jakarta on 17 March, 2022. It was attended by India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Mohammad Mahfud MD. They discussed terrorism and violent extremism, and enhancing defence, maritime, and security cooperation between the two countries, apart from current global security issues. Memorandum of Understanding for Security Dialogue was signed between the two leaders and they reiterated the importance of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between their two nations. India will be hosting the third round of IISD in New Delhi. India and Indonesia have both struggled with issues of terrorism and rising extremism within their borders. A joint strategy and effort may be useful in achieving formidable results for counterterrorism and rehabilitation of radical extremists.

US May be Imposing Tariff on Solar Panels from Southeast Asia

As a result of a petition by Auxin Solar, the US Commerce Department may end up imposing tariffs on [import of solar panels](#) from Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Cambodia. Allegedly, Chinese manufacturers of solar panels in these countries have attempted to escape tariffs imposed on China on these items. Auxin Solar is only one of many solar producers

in the US that appear to hold a grievance against this phenomenon as they are unable to compete with cheaper solar panels coming from these countries. Some solar trade groups believe this move will hurt the American effort in addressing climate change, and may jeopardise Biden administration's goal of reducing use of fossil fuels. About 80 percent of solar panels to be installed in the US this year have been imported from these four countries in concern. This measure could potentially lead to US' disagreements with these countries, particularly Vietnam with which the US has a closer security relationship and an already unbalanced trade relationship.

ASEAN Envoy Reaches Myanmar

Cambodia's Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn is representing ASEAN as its special regional envoy to Myanmar and arrived at the country on 21 March, 2022. The envoy and ASEAN Secretary General Lim Jock Hoi [met the junta leader](#) Min Aung Hlaing and other top officials to talk about implementation of the ASEAN five-point resolution which includes immediate cessation of violence, provision of humanitarian aid, and mediation between all concerned parties by the ASEAN special envoy. The envoy had expressed willingness to meet with the shadow government National Unity Government (NUG) to act as a bridge between the NUG and the military. However, this would be done in a way that it doesn't cause friction in the relations between the envoy and the junta regime. The ASEAN leadership has been criticised by many western nations for not taking sufficient efforts to resolve the crisis in Myanmar. The evolving security situation in Myanmar will be of paramount significance for stability in the Southeast Asian region.