

## **Deepening ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership**

**2<sup>ND</sup> Round Table on  
ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT)  
Co-organised by  
Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)  
&  
Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lao PDR  
Supported by  
ASEAN Secretariat    Government of India    Government of Lao PDR**

**Don Chan Palace, Vientiane, Lao PDR  
10 September 2013**

### **Draft Summary of the Round Table**

1. The second Round Table on ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT) was held on 10 September 2013 at Vientiane, Lao PDR. It was co-organised by the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi and Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR, Vientiane with support of Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Lao PDR and ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta. The Round Table was inaugurated by Mr. Salman Khurshid, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of India. Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR delivered the welcome and opening address. Dr. AKP Mochtan, Dy. Secretary General, ASEAN Secretariat gave a special address. Besides, Director-Generals of RIS and IFA also took part in this event. The RIS Volume "ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: Perspective from the ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks", which was the Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Round Table of AINTT, was released at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round Table. About 60 senior people attended this Round Table with participation of representatives of think-tanks of ASEAN countries.

2. As agreed at the 1<sup>st</sup> Round Table, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round Table was organised in the ASEAN region. Prominent Think-Tanks of the ASEAN countries were represented by their nominated senior resource persons. Drawing on the *ASEAN-India Vision Statement*, issued at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit 2012, the theme of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round Table was identified as "Deepening ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership". There were three major sessions in this Round Table, each of which dealt with the key challenges in the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: (i) economic cooperation, (ii) connectivity, and (iii) socio-cultural and development cooperation, followed by (iv) a high level panel discussion on 'ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: New Frontiers'.

3. The objective of this Round Table was to bring together participants of 10 ASEAN member countries and India to share their ideas, perspectives and experiences as part of efforts to promote ASEAN-India integration in the context of ASEAN Economic Community by 2015 as well as East Asia Summit Community in the later stage. Through a lively and constructive discussion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round Table of AINTT brought us comprehensive regional cooperation and integration issues, not only on partnership between ASEAN and India but also on East Asia Summit group relations. In addition, the Round Table also had very stimulating discussions on various connectivity aspects of ASEAN-India strategic partnership. Session-wise some major discussion points are as follows.

### **Session I: ASEAN-India Strategic Partner: Economic Cooperation**

4. The importance of economic cooperation has become a significant part of emerging consensus on recent development discourse as ASEAN and India have experienced economic growth process and achieved significant improvements in income equality, poverty alleviation and other socio-economic shortcomings. Implementation of AIFTA has been responded positively by the business community as indicated by the significant increase of total trade between ASEAN and India. However, there are many challenges in economic cooperation discussed in this Round Table, and some are as follows:

- No direct flight between CLV and India, and more particularly between Lao PDR and India, resulting in high costs of transportation.
- The costs of trading, customs process, rules of origins and trade protectionism are keys barriers to economic integration between ASEAN and India.
- A large number of SMEs are not familiarized with tariff preferences.
- The volume of bilateral and multilateral cooperation on tourism, trade and banking system between India and ASEAN is still low compared with potentials.

5. Some broad recommendations of this session are as follows:

- Sign the ASEAN-India Trade in Services and Investment Agreements by the ASEAN-India Economic Ministers in the upcoming October 2013 in order to intensify economic cooperation between ASEAN and India through negotiations on the RCEP.
- AIFTA should consider proposing a deepening liberalization among the members by addressing not only the issues of trade and investment, but also the issue of capacity building for business actors categorized as SMEs. Now-a-days, SMEs are the largest business entity as well as the backbone of most of the ASEAN countries and India.

- AIFTA should make lobbies to ASEAN members that are still have double standard under RCEP and TPP. It is better for ASEAN to focus on RCEP.
- AIFTA should propose a clear mechanism of RCEP liberalization in a concrete manner. More time bound actions are needed on NTBs, technical cooperation, capacity building, intellectual property right, dispute settlement mechanism etc.

## **Session II: ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: Connectivity**

6. The recognition of the importance of connectivity is indicated by the fact that all ASEAN-India countries have established state agencies to tackle various aspects of connectivity. However, the multiplicity of the state agencies often create problems of coordination and governance in particular financial support to implement the highway projects. Building a convergence strategy is an important effort to solve this problem. The difference in the stages of development also creates differences in the implementation of connectivity projects. Relatively developed countries such as India and older ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) generally have an advanced connectivity system in place, whereas the developing countries, due to their limitations, usually have a less developed connectivity system. Thus, while development stage matters, there are other factors, such as government's commitment and approach, that shape the implementation of connectivity policies is vital for implementation of connectivity projects. Cooperation between all actors in various aspects, including technical assistance and financial support, would be beneficial for supporting the implementation of the regional connectivity. The session has identified the following key challenges:

- No direct physical connectivity between CLV and India, causing high cost of transportation;
- Shortage of financial resources and human resources delay the connectivity projects; and
- Myanmar is the only country to share border with India. Therefore, timely completion of connectivity projects in Myanmar is vital for stronger ASEAN-India relations.

7. Some broad recommendations of this session are as follows:

- ASEAN and India should exert more efforts and cooperation to effectively implement the ASEAN-India Plan of Action 2010-2015;
- India should attach high priority to a quick implementation of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and its extension to Lao PDR and Cambodia.
- Encourage to work closely with the Indian Inter-Ministerial Group on ASEAN Connectivity to enhance air, sea, land and digital connectivity within ASEAN

through supporting the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity as well as the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2015; and between ASEAN and India, through ASEAN-India connectivity projects;

- Set a clear future plan for connectivity in each period in accordance with reality needed for ASEAN-India cooperation and move towards a more action oriented activities with more secured funding in the implementation process.
- India should undertake a study on connectivity projects that the country has been implementing and may likely to undertake in future, which we may call ASEAN-India Connectivity Partnership Study.
- Continued support for the implementation of the IAI Work Plan II, in particular the setting up of the Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDC) and the Centre for English Language Training (CELT) in the new ASEAN Member States, including Laos. This will, in turn, help narrow the development gaps within ASEAN as well as continue to implement initiatives for highway development to connect India to Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. This would facilitate trade, investment and tourism in the sub-region
- Work closely to ensure that the Vision Statement and the recommendations of the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (AIEPG) are translated into concrete action, taking into account the specific needs of new ASEAN Member States.

### **Session III: ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: Socio-Cultural and Development Cooperation**

8. The third session was devoted to identify new areas of socio-cultural and development cooperation in relation to ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership. The general consensus was that more emphasis should be given to stepping up people-to-people interactions vis-a-vis on political-security and economic cooperation. Greater people-to-people links provide enormous opportunities for peace, stability as well as deeper and broader economic integration. Panelists demonstrated that there are many areas that show good potential for cooperation in the socio-cultural pillar. Moving away from the government-to-government level interactions and more towards the people-to-people level would ensure more commitment, longevity and sincerity. Attention should be paid to contemporary socio-cultural linkages such as increasing direct flights, introducing visa on arrival schemes, establishing South Asian studies and language programs in ASEAN Universities and Southeast Asian studies in Indian Universities, opening Indian Cultural Centers, academic exchanges, business fairs and tourism. ASEAN and India need to ensure and speed up implementation of these people-to-people driven initiatives.

9. As ASEAN is striving to realize its Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint, it was suggested that cooperation in education, freer movement of workers, and social protection should be increased. Cooperation with the ASEAN University Network could

be stepped up to promote joint research in such areas as engineering, IT and Arts, exchange of students and professors between ASEAN and Indian universities, more scholarships, as well as share experiences in academic-industry collaborations. As ASEAN and India integrate further through trade and investment, movement of workers is expected to increase. However, movement of workers should not be limited to skilled workers as is currently agreed within ASEAN under the Framework Agreement in Services to liberalize movements of skilled workers, in order to ensure greater benefits and reduce development gap. ASEAN and India could also share experiences in many areas of social protection such as pension reforms, employment guarantee schemes, community-based health financing systems, expanding coverage to informal sector workers, non-labour market-based systems such as social pensions, etc.

10. Participants felt that exchanges in culture, arts, sports, and youth were also important in promoting greater ASEAN-India people-to-people interaction. Major challenges highlighted by participants are lack of funding to carry out projects, involvement of and effective coordination among various stakeholders at all levels including at the people-to-people level, coming up with specific targets and timeline for proposed initiatives, and gaps between recommendations and their actual implementation.

#### **Session IV: ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: New Frontiers**

11. The last session was on new frontiers aimed at identifying the new challenges to ASEAN-India relations, and suggesting the way forward for the partnership. Panelists found that there are many challenges to overcome in order for ASEAN-India strategic partnership to become effective. One of the challenges identified is how to realistically ensure realization of the various initiatives taking into consideration the different roles of multi-stakeholders, those who make policies and those who implement or transact in terms of synchronizing and prioritizing actions and ensuring clear partnership between these stakeholders to deliver results. The current phase of ASEAN-India relations shows that much emphasis has been placed on the material interest and power or the economic and security considerations, and less on the ideational influences. The basis for an enduring relationship between ASEAN and India requires interaction between material power, interests and ideas. Generation and development of contemporary (political, economic and socio-cultural) ideas and further in-depth work and actions are required for India to gain a firm footing in the Southeast Asian region. This ideational interaction is one of the new frontiers for ASEAN-India partnership and should be driven by demands in the market place (private sector and civil society), not just government initiatives. Some avenues to explore for the generation of ideas include the utilization of educational institutions of excellence targeting scientific and technological needs, joint centers of excellence for development of political and economic ideas, emulation of successful institutions, patterns and models, harnessing the film world, print and digital media and the private sector.

12. The economic center of gravity is now moving to Asia and there are ample opportunities not to be missed. In the current competitive dynamics of power politics where major powers' partnerships are evolving and each country is embarked on a struggle for economic leadership of the dawning Asian century, India can play a more positive role, taking into account issues of concern of partners. In the midst of this evolving environment, there is strong need to strengthen institutions in the region with think-tanks performing the role as an early warning system to see how things are shaping or moving in order to inform governments or regional institutions so as to avoid mistakes. In terms of connectivity and partnership where funding for infrastructure projects is an issue, ASEAN and Indian governments could look into the possibility of establishing a regional infrastructure bank or fund with collaboration under the ASEAN-India strategic partnership utilizing India's financial expertise to ensure that available resources to carry out infrastructure projects are not tied to other major powers or international financial institutions.

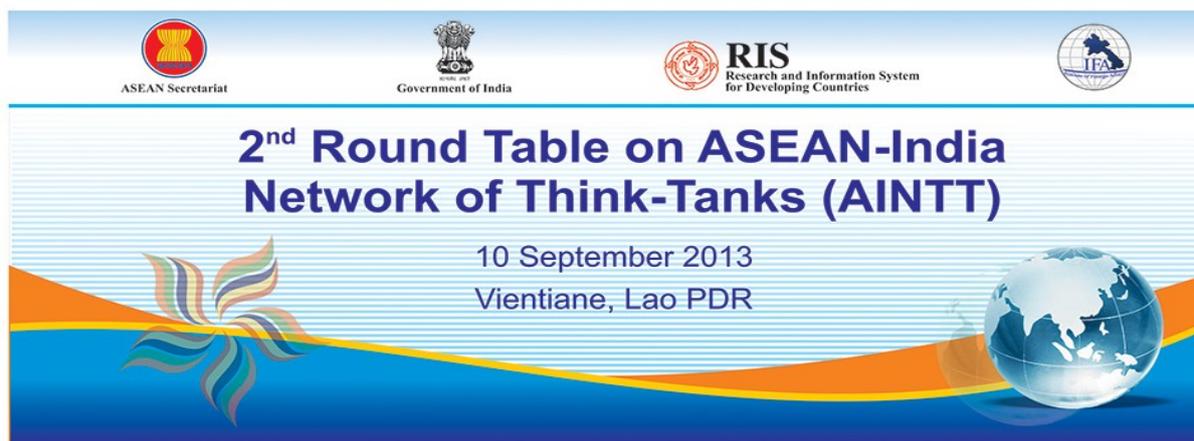
13. Challenges to ASEAN-India strategic partnership can be looked at from three angles: (i) from Indian side, (ii) from ASEAN side, and (iii) from the great power rivalry perspective. From the Indian side, limited economic integration with Southeast Asia, too much focus on its domestic politics at the cost of foreign politics, different levels of openness in the economies of India and ASEAN, limited policies to attract foreign direct investment, and limited strategic role in the regional security architecture have put a limitation on ASEAN-India relationship. From ASEAN side, the issue of ASEAN's unity and cohesion, institutional constraints in producing more timely practical cooperation, limitation in policy coordination, balancing increased great power rivalries, and intra-ASEAN disputes, conflicts and tensions were identified as challenges that limit ASEAN's role. At the same time, ongoing power shift in the region triggered by the rise of China and rivalry between great powers (US-China, China-Japan, India-China) making ASEAN highly dependent on regional dynamics and putting ASEAN in an uncomfortable position, forced to choose sides when relations among the major powers deteriorate. Despite India's growing economy and role in international affairs, it was pointed out that India has not asserted its weight enough yet, trailing behind China's economic development and growing political influence. Given the increasing degree of maritime rivalry between India and China, Southeast Asia as the entry point for Chinese shipping into the Indian Ocean and Indian shipping into the Western Pacific, is potentially one of the regional focus points of strategic considerations of the two great powers.

14. Some of the suggestions as way forward are as follows:

- India's continued economic reforms in terms of loosening its tariff barriers and expanding trade cooperation for deeper economic integration.
- Strengthening India's Look East Policy and role in the regional security architecture are also important.

- Whereas ASEAN shall play its part in strengthening ASEAN's unity, cohesion, and policy coordination, while also managing intra-ASEAN disputes and tensions and making an effort to balance great power rivalries in the region.
- Furthermore, ASEAN-India combined efforts to strengthen mechanisms for cooperation in all fields as well as formally define the concept and implications of "ASEAN-India strategic partnership" would complement these efforts.
- Participants also felt that ASEAN-India relations are at an interesting juncture. Mere policy initiatives will not be enough without drivers on the ground to support implementation of policies. Think-tanks' contribution in generating ideas is therefore important. Such avenues as the newly established ASEAN-India Centre and the ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks have an important role to play in bringing meaningful, tangible and simple ideas that can be easily understood by policy makers to be able to turn them into policy.
- Also important is the need to prioritize ideas to propose few good ideas to policy makers so as not to overwhelm them with too many ideas.
- Strengthening institutions and good synergy between institutions, market sources and policy makers are also necessary.
- It was also pointed out that practical and action-oriented approach needs to be taken, taking into account the means and resources of both sides and the importance of reducing development gap to proceed with firm steps ahead.

Prabir De; 28 September 2013



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Don Chan Palace, Vientiane, Lao PDR

10 September 2013

### AGENDA

**Day 1: 9 September 2013: Arrival of Participants**

**Day 2: 10 September 2013: AINTT Round Table**

**08:30 - 09:15: Registration**

**09:15 – 09:30:** Welcome by Dr. Siviengphet Phetvorasack, Dy. Director-General, Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vientiane, Lao PDR and Dr. Prabir De, Senior Fellow, RIS, and Coordinator, ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT), ASEAN-India Centre, New Delhi

**09.30 – 11.15: Session I: ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: Economic Cooperation**

*[Focus of the session: Regional trading architecture, RCEP, building production networks, facilitating investment, strengthening financial cooperation and other integration issues.]*

**In chair:** Dr. Biswajit Dhar, Director-General, RIS, New Delhi

**Panelists:**

- 09.30-09.50: Dr. Leeber Leebouapao, Director-General, Macro-Economic Research Division, National Economic Research Institute (NERI), Vientiane
- 09.50-10.10: Mr. Poch Kongchheng, Researcher, Economic Institute of Cambodia (EIC), Phnom Penh
- 10.10-10.30: Mr. Agus Syarip Hidayat, Researcher, Research Center for Economic Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), Jakarta
- 10.30-10.50: Ms. Sanchita Basu Das, Fellow and Lead Researcher, ASEAN Studies Centre, and Coordinator, Singapore APEC Study Centre, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore
- 10:50-11.15: Q&A

**11.15 -11.30: Tea / Coffee Break**

**11.30- 12.30: Inaugural Session**

- 11.45-11.55: Welcome and opening address by H.E. Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR
- 11.55-12.05: Inaugural address by H.E. Mr. Salman Khurshid, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of India
- 12.05-12.10: Release of RIS Volume of *ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: Perspective from the ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks*, Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Round Table of AINTT 2012
- 12.10-12.20: Special address by Dr. A.K.P Mochtan, Dy. Secretary General, Community and Corporate Affairs Department, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta
- 12.20-12.25: Address by Mr. Sayakane Sisouvong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Lao PDR
- 12.25-12.30: Address by Dr. Biswajit Dhar, Director-General, RIS, New Delhi

**12.30 – 13.30: Lunch Break**

**13.30 – 15.00: Session II: ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: Connectivity**

[Focus of the session: To identify the challenges and prospects of ASEAN-India connectivity, role of connectivity in strengthening production network, and building development corridor.]

**In chair:** Dato' Dr Muthiah Alagappa, Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies, Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Kuala Lumpur

**Panelists:**

- 13.30-13.45: Mr. Bounpan Kongnhinsayaseng, Dy. Director-General, Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR, Vientiane
- 13.45-14.00: Dr. Tin Htoo Naing, Visiting Fellow, Yangon Institute of Economics (YIE), Yangon
- 14.00-14.15: Dr. Sinderpal Singh, Research Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), Singapore
- 14.15-14.30: Dr. Marife Magno Ballesteros, Senior Fellow, Philippines Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), Manila
- 14.30-14.45: Dr. Prabir De, RIS, New Delhi

14.45-15.00: Q&A

**15.00 – 15.15: Tea/Coffee Break**

**15.15 – 16.30: Session III: ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: Socio-Cultural and Development Cooperation**

[*Focus of the session:* To identify the new areas of social-cultural and development cooperation, present case studies, discuss challenges and identify the opportunities.]

***In chair:*** Mr. Sayakane Sisouvong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Lao PDR

***Panelists:***

15.15-15.30: Dr. Piti Srisangnam, Director, Academic Affairs, ASEAN Studies Centre, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

15.30-15.45: Prof. Do Thu Ha, Head of Department of Indology (Philology and History) and Dean, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi

15.45-16.00: Mr. A. Ibrahim Almuttaqi, The ASEAN Studies Program Officer, The Habibie Center, Jakarta

16.00-16.15: Dr. Aniceto C. Orbeta Jr., Senior Fellow, Philippines Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), Manila

16.15-16.30: Q&A

**16.30 – 17.30: Panel Discussion: ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership: New Frontiers**

[*Focus of the session:* To identify the new challenges to ASEAN – India relations, suggest way forward, and the blue print for the partnership.]

***In chair:*** Dr. Sok Siphana, Sok Siphana & Associates, Phnom Penh, and Member, ASEAN-India Eminent Persons' Group.

***Panelists:***

16.30-16.45: Dato' Dr. Muthiah Alagappa, Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies, Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Kuala Lumpur

16.45-17.00: Dr. Khin Zaw Win, Director, Tampadia Institute, Yangon

17.00-17.15: Prof. Ngo Xuan Binh, Director-General, Institute of Indian & Southwest Asian Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), Hanoi

17.15-17.30: Dr. Biswajit Dhar, Director-General, RIS, New Delhi

**17.30 – 17.45: Concluding Session and Vote of Thanks**

17.30-17.35: Dr. Prabir De, RIS, New Delhi,

17.35-17.45: Mr. Sayakane Sisouvong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Lao PDR

**18.30: Dinner: Venue - Don Chan Palace**

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Round Table on ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT) 10<sup>th</sup> September 2013, Vientiane, Lao PDR**

### **List of Participants**

#### **Brunei**

- Ms. Noor Fadlina Haji Damit, Second Secretary, The Embassy of Brunei in Lao PDR, Vientiane

#### **Cambodia**

- Mr. Poch Kongchheng, Researcher, Economic Institute of Cambodia (EIC), Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- Dr. Sok Siphana, Sok Siphana & Associates, Phnom Penh, and Member, ASEAN-India Eminent Persons' Group, Cambodia

#### **India**

- Dr. Biswajit Dhar, Director-General, RIS, New Delhi
- Dr. Prabir De, Senior Fellow, RIS, and Coordinator, ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT), ASEAN-India Centre, New Delhi

#### **Indonesia**

- Mr. Agus Syarip Hidayat, Researcher, Research Center for Economic Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), Jakarta, Indonesia
- Mr. A. Ibrahim Almuttaqi, The ASEAN Studies Program Officer, The Habibie Center, Jakarta, Indonesia

#### **Lao PDR**

- Mr. Sayakane Sisouvong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Vientiane, Lao PDR
- Mrs. Viengngeun Khaykhamphithoune Dy. Director-General, IFA, MoFA, Vientiane, Lao PDR
- Mr. Bounpan Kongnhinsayaseng, Dy. Director-General, Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR, Vientiane, Lao PDR
- Dr. Leeber Leebouapao, Director-General, Macro-Economic Research Division, National Economic Research Institute (NERI), Vientiane, Lao PDR
- Dr. Siviengphet Phetvorasack, Dy. Director-General, Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vientiane, Lao PDR

### **Malaysia**

- Dato' Dr. Muthiah Alagappa, Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies, Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

### **Myanmar**

- Dr. Khin Zaw Win, Director, Tampadia Institute, Yangon, Myanmar
- Dr. Tin Htoo Naing, Visiting Fellow, Yangon Institute of Economics (YIE), Yangon, Myanmar

### **Philippines**

- Dr. Aniceto C. Orbeta Jr., Senior Fellow, Philippines Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), Manila, Philippines
- Dr. Marife Magno Ballesteros, Senior Fellow, Philippines Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), Manila, Philippines

### **Singapore**

- Ms. Sanchita Basu Das, Fellow and Lead Researcher, ASEAN Studies Centre, and Coordinator, Singapore APEC Study Centre, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore
- Dr. Sinderpal Singh, Research Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), Singapore

### **Thailand**

- Dr. Piti Srisangnam, Director, Academic Affairs, ASEAN Studies Centre, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

### **Vietnam**

- Prof. Do Thu Ha, Head of Department of Indology (Philology and History) and Dean, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam
- Prof. Ngo Xuan Binh, Director-General, Institute of Indian & Southwest Asian Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), Hanoi, Vietnam

### **ASEAN Secretariat**

- Dr. A.K.P Mochtan, Dy. Secretary General, Community and Corporate Affairs Department, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, Indonesia
- Mr. Phanthaly Chantharathip, Senior Officer, External Relations Division 1, ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Department, The ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, Indonesia

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