

39TH ASEAN ROUNDTABLE

SURVIVING MULTIPOLARITY: DOES ASEAN HAVE A STRATEGY?

28 October 2024

Grand Ballroom, Level 3
Singapore Marriott Tang Plaza Hotel
320 Orchard Road, Singapore 238865

ABOUT THE 39TH ASEAN ROUNDTABLE

The world is facing challenges of a magnitude and at an unprecedented speed not seen since the end of the Cold War. These challenges are manifested in conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas conflict, and tensions over the Taiwan Strait, the Korean Peninsula, festering disputes in the South China Sea, now accompanied by a rising China unafraid to confront an increasingly inward-looking United States and threatening to unravel the international legal order. The geopolitical situation is exacerbated by emerging forces of change including signs of retreat from globalisation and heightened insular attitudes driven by liberalism, protectionism, and authoritarianism.

Southeast Asia has benefitted from a functioning multilateral order that has delivered peace, stability, and security for close to six decades.

Over this period, ASEAN has been able to conceive of itself as a collective grouping, constitutionalise itself by way of a Charter, and dream of regional economic integration. Yet, if the current multilateral system were to malfunction, it could undermine ASEAN's progress and jeopardise its future aspirations for further integration.

ASEAN has often come under intense criticism for its inability to prove its effectiveness to the world, or even to its members. The 39th ASEAN Roundtable will discuss how ASEAN might re-think its agency in the face of global challenges.

The annual ASEAN Roundtable is a platform for leading scholars and commentators to examine key issues and challenges affecting ASEAN as a region and as an institution. The event is supported by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

Supported by



Timings in Singapore time

8.15 am

Registration

9.00 am - 9.10 am

WELCOME REMARKS

Mr CHOI Shing Kwok
Director and Chief Executive Officer
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

9.10 am - 10.00 am

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Forces of Multipolarity and Impact on ASEAN Unity

H.E. Prof. Bundit Sapheacha Dr SOK Siphana
Senior Minister in charge of Special Missions (Multilateral Trade and Economic Affairs)
Royal Government of Cambodia

Followed by Q&A

Moderator: *Mr CHOI Shing Kwok*
Director and Chief Executive Officer
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

10.00 am - 10.30 am

Photo-taking and Coffee / Tea Break

10.30 am - 11.45 am

SESSION I: WHO MOVED ASEAN'S CHEESE?

In “Who Moved My Cheese?”, a popular self-help book, the mice have to deal with profound changes to attain what they want in life. Profound and rapid changes are threatening to mess up the comfortable maze that ASEAN has been operating in to attain what it wants – peace, stability, economic and social development. What are these changes and how can ASEAN mitigate these challenges? Is ASEAN still relevant to its own members?

Moderator: *Ms Sharon SEAH*
Senior Fellow and Coordinator
ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Panellists: **Forces of Change in Southeast Asia**
Ambassador Barry DESKER
Distinguished Fellow, the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University

Destabilising Effects of Fragmented Politics on ASEAN

Mr Ben BLAND
Director, Asia-Pacific Programme, Chatham House

Rising Global Protectionism

Dr Mari PANGESTU
Indonesia’s Special Envoy on Trade

11.45 am - 1.00 pm

SESSION II: CAN MIDDLE POWERS STAND IN THE GAP WITH ASEAN?

According to the *State of Southeast Asia 2024 Survey*, the region's preferred and trusted third parties to hedge with are Japan, the EU, and India, but can these middle powers stand in the gap? This panel examines the implications on Southeast Asia as a result of the churn of events in the immediate neighbourhoods of Japan, the EU, and India. In Northeast Asia, what does the détente between China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) mean for Southeast Asia? How has China's rising aggression in the Taiwan Strait changed the strategic calculus for Japan? In Europe, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war is distracting Europe from its global agenda including the Global Gateway Initiative, its Indo-Pacific strategy, and the spectre of a Trump 2.0 is unimaginable for the EU. On the South Asian continent, India's unresolved border disputes with China and the Indian economy's dependency on China may hold certain implications for ASEAN.

Moderator: *Ms LEE Sue-Ann*
Senior Fellow and Coordinator
Regional Strategic and Political Studies
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Panellists: **Japan**
Prof Tomoo KIKUCHI
Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies
Waseda University

EU

Dr YEO Lay Hwee
Director, European Union Centre in Singapore and
Senior Fellow, Singapore Institute of International
Affairs

India

Dr Karthik NACHIAPPAN
Research Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies
National University of Singapore

1.00 pm - 2.15 pm

Lunch

2.15 pm - 3.30 pm

SESSION III: CHECKING THE PULSE OF THE ASEAN ECONOMY – FULL OF PROMISE OR CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

ASEAN economies have exhibited notable resilience having bounced back from the COVID-19 pandemic. Are these tailwinds likely to change course into potential headwinds if risks and uncertainties emanating from both internal and external sources gain traction? This session aims to examine the relative health of ASEAN's economies from the perspective of debt and fiscal sustainability as well as their competitiveness in the current global industrial landscape amid evolving geopolitical risks. Finally, what new strategies can ASEAN employ to maintain its economic relevance in this dynamic and ambiguous global economic reality?

Moderator: *Dr Jayant MENON*
Visiting Senior Fellow
Regional Economic Studies Programme
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Panellists: **A Much-Needed Health Check for ASEAN Economies**

Prof Shiro ARMSTRONG
Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University

Brushing Off Geopolitical Headwinds – Can ASEAN Economies Really Thrive in the Middle?

Mr Alex HOLMES
Regional Director for Asia, Economist Intelligence Unit

ASEAN's Game Plan – What Role Can It Play Now?

Prof Fukunari KIMURA
President IDE-JETRO and Senior Research Fellow,
Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)

3.30 pm - 4.00 pm

Coffee / Tea Break

4.00 pm - 5.15 pm

SESSION IV: CHARTING ASEAN'S ADAPTATION PLAYBOOK

ASEAN's role and relevance as a multilateral institution are under significant scrutiny. The world is at an inflection point, marked by polarised elections, international instability, the rise of nationalism, receding rule of law, and eroding democracies. These dynamics often compel member countries to adapt their diplomacy and pivot individually if needed, seemingly leaving ASEAN's collective efforts behind. ASEAN's consensus-building modus operandi has been criticised for prolonging decision-making, hindering coherent responses, and lacking the agility to address emerging crises effectively. Is there still an opportunity for ASEAN to chart its own adaptation playbook in coping with global crises? This session explores ways to re-energise ASEAN-led fora like the East Asia Summit (EAS) and economic integration initiatives, and also discusses how the regional institution can remain resilient amid fierce competition from emerging minilateralism like the QUAD and BRICS.

Moderator: *Ms Joanne LIN*
Senior Fellow and Co-Coordinator
ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Panellists: **Emerging Minilateralism: Competing or Complementing ASEAN's Initiatives?**

Dr Aries ARUGAY

Visiting Senior Fellow and Coordinator
Philippines Studies Programme
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Adapting to Goeconomic Changes

Mr Roland RAJAH

Lead Economist, Director
Indo-Pacific Development Centre, Lowy Institute

Reinvigorating ASEAN-driven Cooperative Mechanisms

Ambassador Sihasak Phuangketkeow

Former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
and Secretary-General of the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council

5.15 pm

End of Roundtable

WELCOME REMARKS



Mr Choi Shing Kwok is Director and Chief Executive Officer of the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute and Head of the ASEAN Studies Centre at the Institute. Previously, he was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources from 2012 to 2017, and Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Transport from 2005 to 2012. Prior to that, he held senior appointments in the Ministry of Defence and the Singapore Armed Forces. Mr Choi was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal in 2000 for his contributions to the Singapore Public Service.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS



In August 2023, **Dr SOK Siphana** was appointed as a Senior Minister in charge of Special Missions (Multilateral Trade and Economic Affairs) as well as the Chairman of Trade Policy Advisory Board. From 1999 to 2005, he served as Secretary of State at the Ministry of Commerce, where he acted as the lead negotiator in Cambodia's accession to the WTO. From 2005 to 2009, he served as Director at the International Trade Center (ITC), a joint technical agency of UNCTAD and WTO in Geneva, Switzerland. Career wise at the service of Cambodian diplomacy, he was attached since 2011 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation where he served, among other advisory functions, the following: during Cambodia's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2012, as Member of the ASEAN Task Force on Substantive Issues, ASEAN India Eminent Person Group Co-Chair, Cambodian Sherpa to G20. For Cambodia's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2022, he served as Chair of the National Sub-Committee on Substances and Documentation and a G20 Sherpa.

He is holder of a Juris Doctor (J.D.) from Widener University School of Law in Delaware, United States (1992), a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) from Bond University School of Law in Queensland, Australia (2009), and a "Docteur en Droit" from the Université de Paris II Panthéon-Assas, Paris, France (2022). In 2022, His Majesty The King has bestowed him a lifetime Royal Title of "Bundit Sapheacha" (Academician) at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, as well as a full Professorship in 2023.

SESSION I: WHO MOVED ASEAN'S CHEESE?



Ms Sharon Seah is Senior Fellow and concurrent Coordinator of ASEAN Studies Centre and the Climate Change in Southeast Asia Programme at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. Prior to academia, Ms Seah spent 15 years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore and the National Environment Agency. Her research interests are in ASEAN, multilateralism, rule of law, and climate change. Ms Seah graduated with a Master in Public and International Law from the University of Melbourne in 2018. She is co-editor of *50 Years of ASEAN and Singapore* (World Scientific: 2017) and editor of *Building a New Legal Order for the Oceans* (NUS Press: 2019) for Tommy Koh. She is also the lead author of *The State of Southeast Asia Survey Report* and the *Southeast Asia Climate Outlook Survey*.



Ambassador Barry Desker is the Distinguished Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), and Nanyang Professor of Practice, Nanyang Technological University. He is a Member of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights, Singapore and a Member of the Board of Directors of the Lee Kuan Yew Exchange Fellowship. He was the Chair of the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in 2018, the Director of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (2000-2014), founding Dean of RSIS (2007-2014), Chief Executive Officer of the Singapore Trade Development Board (1994-2000), and Singapore's Ambassador to Indonesia (1986-1993). He also served as Singapore's Non-Resident Ambassador to the Holy See and Spain (2007-2020). A President's Scholar, he was educated at the University of Singapore, University of London and Cornell University. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of Warwick in 2012 and Doctor of Laws by the University of Exeter in 2013.



Mr Ben Bland is the Director of the Asia-Pacific programme at Chatham House. His research focuses on the nexus of politics, economics and international relations in Southeast Asia, as well as China's growing role in the broader region and the contours of US-China strategic competition. He was formerly the director of the Southeast Asia programme at the Lowy Institute. Ben is the author of two critically-acclaimed books on Asian politics: *Man of Contradictions: Joko Widodo and the Struggle to Remake Indonesia* (Penguin Random House, 2020) and *Generation HK: Seeking Identity in China's Shadow* (Penguin Random House, 2017), and a frequent contributor to media including the *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg*, *CNN*, the *New York Times*, *Reuters*, and *Nikkei Asia*. He was also an award-winning correspondent for the *Financial Times*. He has an MA in Southeast Asian Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London and an undergraduate degree in history from the University of Cambridge.



Dr Mari Pangestu is Indonesia's Special Envoy on Trade. She was formerly Indonesia's Minister of Trade (2004-2011), Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy (2011-2014), and the World Bank Managing Director of Development Policy and Partnerships (2020-2023). She has over 30 years of experience working in international trade, investment and development in multilateral, regional and national settings. She is currently a Professor of International Economics at the University of Indonesia, honorary professor at the Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, and a Board Member of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Jakarta. She has also served as Senior Fellow at Columbia School of International and Public Affairs, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington D.C., Commissioner for the Low Carbon Development Initiative of Indonesia, Executive Board Member of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), amongst others. Dr Pangestu obtained her bachelor's and master's degree in economics from the Australian National University, and her doctorate in economics from the University of California at Davis.

SESSION II: CAN MIDDLE POWERS STAND IN THE GAP WITH ASEAN?



Ms Lee Sue-Ann is Senior Fellow at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute where she is Coordinator of the Regional Strategic and Political Studies Programme. She also directs the Media, Technology and Society Programme. Sue-Ann graduated from the National University of Singapore with an honours degree in Political Science and from Harvard's Kennedy School with a Master of Public Policy. Her research interests include topics such as the rise of China and its strategic implications, technology as the emerging key arena for big-power competition, and the continued salience of identity politics as a divisive factor in political discourse.



Dr Tomoo Kikuchi is Professor at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, Adjunct Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, and Salzburg Global Fellow. Previously, he was a faculty member at the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, and Korea University. He has published papers in top economics journals such as *Journal of Economic Theory*, *Theoretical Economics*, *Journal of Money, Credit, and Banking*. He is on the editorial board of *Journal of Asian Economics* and *Malaysian Journal of Economics*. He obtained his PhD in economics from Bielefeld University in Germany.



Dr Yeo Lay Hwee is Director of EU Centre, Senior Fellow at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, Vice Chair of ASEANCham-EU, and Adjunct Senior Fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. Her research interest is on Asia-Europe relations and specifically on EU-ASEAN partnership. Some of her most recent publications on EU-ASEAN include *ASEAN and the European Union: The Untold Story* co-edited with Tommy Koh (World Scientific Publishing, 2020); book chapters in *The Elgar Companion to ASEAN* (UK: Edward Elgar, 2023), *The Evolving Architecture of International Economic Agreement* (Springer, 2023), and *The Five Decade Journey of EU-ASEAN Relations – which Path for the Decades to Come* published by Paddy Ashdown Forum and European Liberals Forum (2024).



Dr Karthik Nachiappan is Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore. His research focuses on India's Geoeconomics, how issues like trade, technology, and climate change affect Indian foreign policy and how India's positions on these issues affect Indo-Pacific security dynamics. He is the author of *Does India Negotiate?* (OUP, 2020).

SESSION III: CHECKING THE PULSE OF THE ASEAN ECONOMY – FULL OF PROMISE OR CAUSE FOR CONCERN?



Dr Jayant Menon joined the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in 2020 as Senior Fellow to continue his work on trade and development in the Asian region, following a long career at the ADB. His last post at the ADB was Lead Economist in the Office of the Chief Economist. He began work life as an academic in Australia, spending almost a decade at the Centre of Policy Studies at Monash University, one of the leading centres for computable general equilibrium modelling. He has also worked at the University of Melbourne, Victoria University, the American University in Washington, DC and the ADB Institute in Tokyo. He has served as a Board Director of CDRI, Cambodia, and on the Advisory Board of the University of Nottingham, Malaysia. He holds adjunct appointments with the Australian National University, University of Nottingham, UK and IDEAS, Malaysia. He has authored/edited 15 books, 40 chapters in books and 80 articles in peer-reviewed journals.



Dr Shiro Armstrong is Professor of Economics at the Crawford School of Public Policy in the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University. He is Director of the Australia-Japan Research Centre, Editor of the East Asia Forum, and Director of the East Asian Bureau of Economic Research. He is also a Visiting Professor at Keio University, Research Associate at the Center on Japanese Economy and Business at the Columbia Business School, Visiting Lecturer at the University of Tokyo and Non-resident Fellow at the Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry.



Mr Alex Holmes leads EIU's analysis and forecasts for Asia Pacific markets and is based in Singapore. His career to date has been focused on macroeconomic research, both deep country-level analysis and delving into the cross-cutting themes affecting Asia. Being in a region where external trade plays such an oversized role in the economy, Alex takes a particular interest in related issues, including structural supply chain reconfiguration, the global electronics cycle and models of export-led development. Alex regularly appears in the media and has also co-hosted a business video-podcast produced by Bloomberg. Prior to the EIU, Alex was Lead Economist at Oxford Economics, following stints at Capital Economics, ICAP, Barclays Bank and the UK Government Economics Service.



Professor Fukunari Kimura is Senior Research Fellow for Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), Professor Emeritus and Senior Professor, Keio University, and President, Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO). He was born in Tokyo in 1958. He received his Bachelor of Laws from the Faculty of Law, University of Tokyo in 1982. He then received Master of Science and PhD titles from the Department of Economics, University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1990 and 1991, respectively. He worked for the Department of Economics, State University of New York at Albany as Assistant Professor in 1991-1994 and for the Faculty of Economics of Keio University as Associate Professor and Professor in 1994-2024 as well as for ERIA as Chief Economist in 2008-2024. In particular, he has recently been active in writing academic/semi-academic books and articles on international production networks and economic integration in East Asia.

SESSION IV: CHARTING ASEAN'S ADAPTATION PLAYBOOK



Ms Joanne Lin is Senior Fellow and Co-coordinator of the ASEAN Studies Centre at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. She has over 15 years of work experience in the Singapore public sector, regional and international organisations, think tanks, and NGOs. She has previously served at the ASEAN Secretariat from 2015 to 2021 and was the Assistant Director and Head of the External Relations Division under the ASEAN Political-Security Community Department. Her research includes ASEAN institutions and external relations, as well as political-security developments in ASEAN.



Dr Aries A. Arugay is Visiting Senior Fellow and Coordinator of the Philippines Studies Programme of the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. He is also Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Political Science, University of the Philippines Diliman. Aries is Editor-in-Chief of *Asian Politics & Policy*, a Scopus-indexed academic journal published by Wiley-Blackwell and the Policy Studies Organization. His research interests are civil-military relations, comparative democratization, international relations of the Indo-Pacific, and social media. He is co-editor of *Games, Changes, and Fears: The Philippines from Duterte to Marcos Jr.* published by ISEAS in 2024.



Mr Roland Rajah is Director of the Indo-Pacific Development Centre at the Lowy Institute. He also serves as the Institute's Lead Economist. Roland directs the overall work program of the Centre across its key pillars of economics, aid & development, climate change, and geoeconomics. A development economist by background, Roland's work has focused on emerging Asia and the small island developing states of the Pacific for most of the past two decades. He has previously worked for the Asian Development Bank, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), and the Reserve Bank of Australia. Roland holds a master's degree in economics from the Australian National University, where he was awarded the Helen Hughes Prize in International and Development Economics.



Ambassador Sihasak Phuangketkeow is Former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and Secretary-General of the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council. He was previously Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador of Thailand to Tokyo (2015-2016) and Ambassador of Thailand to France (2016-2018). Prior to that, he was Deputy Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs (2006), Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva (2007), and President of the United Nations Human Rights Council (2010-2011). Ambassador Sihasak has also been an active contributor to the work of ASEAN, serving as Thailand's Senior Officials Meeting Leader to ASEAN in 2006-2007 and in 2011, and Chair of the High-Level Panel on an ASEAN Human Rights Body that drafted the Terms of Reference establishing the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.