

Overview of ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation

Introduction

The ASEAN Plus Three (APT) cooperation process began in December 1997 with the convening of an Informal Summit among the Leaders of ASEAN and China, Japan and the ROK at the sidelines of the Second ASEAN Informal Summit in Malaysia. The APT Summit was institutionalised in 1999 when the Leaders issued a Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation at the Third APT Summit in Manila. The Joint Statement for the first time determined the main objectives, principles and further directions of APT countries cooperation. In the Joint Statement, the APT Leaders resolved to strengthen and deepen East Asia cooperation at various levels and in various areas, particularly in economic and social, political and other fields.

2. Eight years later, at the 11th APT Summit in 2007 in Singapore, the Second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation called “Building on the Foundations of ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation” was adopted. The Statement reaffirmed that the ASEAN Plus Three Process would remain as the main vehicle towards the long-term goal of building an East Asian community, with ASEAN as the driving force. The APT Cooperation Work Plan (2007-2017), formulated to serve as the master plan to enhance APT cooperation in a comprehensive and mutually beneficial manner for the next ten years, was endorsed.

3. Since then the APT framework has become an important element for fostering East Asian regionalism. The APT cooperation has broadened and deepened to cover a wide range of areas of political and security; transnational crime; economic; finance; tourism; agriculture and forestry; energy; minerals; small and medium-sized enterprises; environment; rural development and poverty eradication; social welfare; youth; women; civil service; labour; culture and arts; information and media; education; science, technology, and innovation; and public health. The APT process has also developed into a full-fledged cooperation framework with 67 mechanisms (1 summit, 15 ministerial, 20 Senior Officials, 1 ASEAN CPR Plus Three, 2 Director-General, 23 technical level meetings and 5 other track meetings) coordinating APT cooperation.

4. A mid-term review of the APT Cooperation Work Plan (2007-2017) was conducted in 2013 based on which the APT Cooperation Work Plan was revised with the new timeframe of 2013 – 2017. The revised Work Plan was adopted by the 16th APT Summit held on 10 October 2013 in Bandar Seri Begawan.

5. The current Work Plan (2013-2017) will expire by end-2017, and the new Work Plan is being prepared.

Political-Security Cooperation

6. Against the backdrop of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, at the APT Summit in December 1998, the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) I was launched. East Asian

nations then felt the need to mutually cooperate in overcoming the crisis, which served as a momentum to recognize an East Asian identity.

7. The EAVG I final report titled “East Asia community of Peace, Prosperity and Progress”, which was submitted to the APT Summit in 2001, laid a solid groundwork for the future direction of East Asian regional cooperation. The EAVG I wished to inspire East Asian peoples and governments to work towards building an “East Asian community” that will address the region’s future challenges and advance mutual understanding and trust.

8. One decade after the EAVG submitted its report, the EAVG II was established in 2011 to take stock of the APT cooperation activities and evaluated how these activities have contributed to developing the APT cooperation and community-building in East Asia. Based upon the stocktaking, the EAVG II studied the future direction of the APT cooperation mechanism, and also prepared a new vision for regional cooperation and community building. The EAVG II Report was submitted to the 15th APT Commemorative Summit in Phnom Penh on 19 November 2012.

9. At the 19th APT Summit held on 7 September 2016, the Leaders stressed the importance of APT cooperation in maintaining and promoting peace, stability and development in East Asian region. They also agreed to further strengthen cooperation in both traditional and non-traditional security issues such as terrorism and violent extremism, transnational crime, cyber security, maritime security, climate change, disaster management, sustainable water resource management, food security, energy security, and pandemic diseases and trade-related building.

10. Cooperation on non-traditional security matters is undertaken under the purview of the APT Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC+3) and the APT Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC+3). The SOMTC+3 has been discussing counter-terrorism and transnational crime-related components in the APT Work Plan (2013-2017) as well as joint programmes on capacity building to combat transnational crime within APT countries.

Economic and Finance Cooperation

11. ASEAN’s trade with the Plus Three Countries retained its momentum despite challenges derived from uncertainties in the global economy. Total trade between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries in 2015 amounted to USD 708.6 billion which accounted for 31.1 per cent of ASEAN’s total trade. In the same year, the total foreign direct investment (FDI) flows from the Plus Three countries into ASEAN reached USD 31 billion, accounting for 26 per cent of total FDI inflow to ASEAN.¹

12. In order to strengthen economic cooperation among the APT countries, the East Asia Business Council (EABC) which was established in April 2004 in Kuala Lumpur continues to strengthen cooperation among the private sector and entrepreneurs of the East Asia countries. The EABC launched the East Asia

¹ Chairman’s Statement on the 19th APT Summit, 7 September 2016, Vientiane.

Business Exchange (EABEX) Portal at the 5th East Asia Business Forum on 18 June 2013 in Tianjin, China.

13. Progress on finance and monetary cooperation has been steady under the umbrella of ASEAN+3 Finance Ministers' and Central Bank Governors' Meeting (AFMGM+3), with the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation (CMIM), the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO) and the Asian Bond Market Initiative (ABMI) being in the centre of the cooperation.

14. The most recent highlights of the APT cooperation in finance are the establishment of AMRO as an international organisation on 9 February 2016 and the endorsement of a new Medium-term Road Map of ABMI to further foster the development of local currency bond markets in order to promote financial stability and meet the long-term investment needs of the region. The APT countries have also reiterated their commitment to further strengthening the CMIM as an essential part of the regional financial safety net.

15. The APT recognised that tourism is an important instrument for promoting people-to-people connectivity. To strengthen cooperation in tourism industry, ASEAN and the Plus Three countries signed a memorandum of cooperation (MOC) on APT Tourism Cooperation on 22 January 2016 in Manila. The MOC serves as the key instrument for more action-oriented cooperation, encouraging APT countries to enhance facilitation of travel and tourist visits, development of quality tourism and strengthening linkages and cooperation among education and training institutions.

16. The APT countries saw robust cooperation in food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector under the ASEAN Plus Three Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF+3). The APT strategic areas of cooperation have been focusing on strengthening food security, biomass energy development, sustainable forest management, climate change mitigation and adaptation, animal and plant health disease control, strengthening of information and knowledge network and exchange, research and development, and other cross-cutting issues. AMAF+3 adopted on 11 September 2015 the APT Bioenergy and Foods Security Framework 2015-2025 to better assist ASEAN Member States to ensure that sustainable, food-secure and climate-friendly bioenergy contributes to the economic development.

17. Thailand has granted the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) Secretariat legal personality and privileges to support its role in enhancing food security. The implementation of Tier 3 Programme (pre-positioned stockpiled rice system) of the APT Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) was completed with distribution of the total amount of 6,730 MT of rice. The APT countries also continue to strengthen the ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS).

18. A wide range of projects and activities on energy cooperation under the APT framework have been regularly carried out, which include, among others, the APT forum on oil market and natural gas; the APT forum on energy security; the APT forum on new and renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation. At the annual Senior Officials Meeting on Energy Plus Three (SOME+3) and the ASEAN Ministers on Energy Plus Three (AMEM+3), the APT countries exchanged views on

energy security, oil market and natural gas, and energy efficiency and renewable energy promotion and deployment.

19. Cooperation in minerals, which is undertaken under the APT Senior Officials Meeting on Minerals (ASOMM+3), covers areas such as cross-border geological correlations, geological mapping, mineral resources database and information system, and mineral conservation. The 9th ASOMM+3 Consultations held on 10 November 2016 adopted the ASOMM+3 Minerals Cooperation Work Plan which focuses on supporting the four strategic areas of the ASEAN Mineral Cooperation Action Plan (AMCAP)-III in order to enhance trade and investment and strengthen cooperation and capacity building for sustainable minerals development in the APT region.

20. The APT countries continue to work closely to support the development of SMEs in the region as a primary driving force for regional economic growth. Series of Joint Consultation between the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (ACCMSME) and the SME Agency of Japan were conducted to enhance coordination between ASEAN and Japan as one of the Plus Three countries.

21. APT cooperation have contributed for ASEAN SME development in the areas of promoting productivity technology, and innovation; increasing access to finance; enhancing market access and internationalisation; enhancing policy and regulatory environment; and promoting entrepreneurship and human capital development. These are in line with ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development 2016-2025.

Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainable Development Cooperation

22. Cooperation on environment continues to progress. The annual APT Leadership Programme on Sustainable Production and Consumption, a programme for the private sector to discuss green economy, has been held since 2008. The Ninth Programme held on 25-28 October 2016 in Ha Noi, discussed policy measures, strategies and actions for SCP in value chains in the ASEAN Plus Three region. The Meeting also exchanged views and explored potential opportunities for collaboration, particularly on the issues of certification and standards, green business models, retail operations and consumer issues, as well as end-of-life solutions for products and services.

23. Several environmental projects have been implemented with funding from the APT Cooperation Fund, such as the APT Youth Environment Forum (AYEF) 2016 held on 8-10 April 2016 in Singapore and the Workshop on ASEAN Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) Country Strategy Guidelines held on 2-4 March 2015 in Putrajaya. The Workshop was aimed to guide individual country's IWRM strategies by developing a generic ASEAN IWRM framework that is capable of local adaptation and implementation.

24. The APT Leaders' Statement on Promoting Sustainable Development Cooperation was adopted by the APT Leaders at the 19th APT Summit in September 2016. The Statement is aimed to advance the complementarity between

the implementation of UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 to uplift the living standards of people in ASEAN and Plus Three countries over the next decades.

Socio-Cultural and Development Cooperation

25. Strategies to alleviate poverty are discussed in the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Plus Three (SOMRDPE+3). The SOMRDPE+3 Meeting continues to serve as a platform for policy exchange and sharing of good practices and programme innovations aimed at reducing poverty and ensuring the meaningful involvement of poor populations in the development process. Exchange programmes to empower village leaders have been organized since 2013 as an effort to facilitate direct exchange of knowledge, expertise and learnings at the community/village level.

26. The Ninth APT Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (9th SOMRDPE+3) held on 12 October 2016 in Phnom Penh exchanged views on key priority areas for post-2015 highlighting on the theme of “Public, Private and People Partnerships” (4Ps) for the Post-2015 Sustainable Development in ASEAN. The Meeting also shared experiences in strategies to promote rural development and eradicate poverty.

27. In the area of social welfare and development, the APT countries continue to exchange views and experiences at the annual Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development Plus Three (SOMSWD+3) and at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting for Social Welfare and Development Plus Three (AMMSWD+3), which is held once every three years. Activities to promote the fulfillment of rights and promotion of the welfare of children, older persons, and people with disabilities have been organised within the framework of the SOMSWD+3. An APT Statement on Active Ageing was adopted at the 19th APT Summit in September 2016.

28. The APT cooperation on gender issues was institutionalised with the convening of the Inaugural Meeting of the APT Committee on Women (ACW+3) in November 2009. Since then, the ACW+3 Meeting has been held annually to exchange views on best practices on right-based programmes on poverty reduction among women and other approaches in reducing the feminisation of poverty.

29. In the area of youth, the APT cooperation has three mechanisms for sharing information and discussing cooperation on youth, namely the APT Ministerial Meeting on Youth (AMMY+3) and the APT Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY+3). The Seventh SOMY+3, held on 26 August 2016 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, highlighted the need to continue more focused APT activities on youth to complement and support the ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2016-2020.

30. In the area of civil service, cooperation is undertaken under the purview of the APT Conference on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM+3). The Inaugural ACCSM+3, held on 29 October 2010 in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, adopted the Luang Prabang Joint Declaration on APT Civil Service Cooperation. Subsequently, three APT Heads of Civil Service Meeting have been held; the Third Meeting held

on 17 November 2016 in Manila, adopted the ACCSM+3 Work Plan 2016-2020 and the Rules of Procedure of the Senior Officials Meeting for the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM+3 SOM).

31. The APT cooperation on labour is progressing well. Nine APT Labour Ministers Meetings have been held since it was established in 2001. The Ninth APT Labour Ministers Meeting held on 16 May 2016 exchanged views on transition from informal employment to formal employment towards decent work promotion in ASEAN. The Ministers discussed necessary policy responses at the regional and national levels and encouraged collaboration among the APT countries through sharing of best practices, research and information sharing, strengthening of human resources development policies and programmes, among others.

32. The APT countries continue to strengthen their cooperation on culture. At the Seventh AMCA+3 held on 25 August 2016 in Bandar Seri Begawan, the Ministers noted the adoption of the ASEAN Strategic Plan for Culture and Arts 2016-2025 and encouraged the Plus Three countries to join hands with ASEAN in the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The Ministers were of the view that there is a potential to further foster long-term partnership between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries by advancing and expanding city-level cultural exchange through joint cultural activities and art festivals under the ASEAN City of Culture and the East Asian Cultural Cities.

33. Cooperation in information and media is pursued under the purview of the APT Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI+3). The fourth AMRI+3 held on 17 March 2016 in Cebu, the Philippines, concurred on new deliverables and milestones of the Work Plan on Enhancing APT Cooperation Through Information and Media (2012-2017).

34. The APT cooperation in education strengthens steadily. At the Second APT Education Ministers Meeting (APT EMM) held on 12 September 2014 in Vientiane, the Ministers reaffirmed the general objective of the APT Plan of Action on Education (2010-2017) to encourage APT countries to expand their efforts in implementing the Plan at the national and bilateral levels to the regional level. Under the Plan, four meetings of the Working Group on Mobility of Higher Education and Ensuring Quality Assurance of Higher Education among APT countries have been successfully held since 2013.

35. The APT countries also promote linkages between universities and encourage credit transfers between universities in the APT countries. Through the ASEAN University Network (AUN), annual activities are conducted including the APT Rectors' Conference, APT Educational Forum and Young Speakers Contest, and the APT Youth Cultural Forum. These activities engage academia, faculty members, university students in APT countries. The CAMPUS Asia Programme which was initiated by China, Japan and ROK continues to be implemented and discussion is ongoing for possible expansion.

36. On science and technology, since its establishment in 2006, the ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology Plus Three (COST+3) has met eight times to discuss recent developments on cooperation in science, technology and innovation as well as note updates on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI)

policies of the Plus Three countries. Regular activities under COST+3 include the APT Junior Science Odyssey, ASEAN+3 Centre for the Gifted in Science Board of Directors Meeting and ASEAN+3 Teachers' Workshop and Students' Camp for the Gifted in Science.

37. The APT cooperation in health is also progressing well. The 6th Meeting of APT Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development held on 11 August 2016 in Bandar Seri Begawan, agreed with the priority areas of collaboration for 2016-2017, namely: active ageing, universal health coverage, non-communicable diseases, traditional medicine, anti microbial resistance, human resource development, and food safety.

38. Apart from Track 1 cooperation in various areas outlined above, the APT countries also pursue networking of Track 2 and Track 1.5. Track 1.5 cooperation has been convened through the East Asia Forum (EAF) annually since 2003, covering various topics, such as energy and food security, deepening of economic cooperation, strengthening of social and cultural cooperation, narrowing development gaps in rural and urban communities, enhancing connectivity, and non-traditional security cooperation. Track 2 networking is pursued through the Network of East Asian Think Tanks (NEAT) who has submitted its recommendations to the annual APT Summit for notation.

