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Towards Deeper Engagement: Realizing the Potential of Pakistan-ASEAN Relations



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Established in 1973, the Institute of Strategic Studies is an autonomous, non-profit research and analyses organization. It is devoted to provide an in-depth understanding and objective analyses of regional and global strategic issues, affecting international peace and security. The Institute also promotes a broad-based and informed public understanding of vital issues affecting Pakistan and the international community as a whole.

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Chief Editor's Note



In today's interconnected world, economic, cultural and strategic relations between regions are becoming increasingly important. Pakistan's long-standing historical and cultural ties with the ASEAN member states provide a solid foundation. Pakistan's focus on ASEAN region aligns with Pakistan's evolving foreign policy, which places geoeconomics at the core of its national security.

The ASEAN region, marked by its rapid economic rise and its strategic geopolitical positioning, offers Pakistan vast opportunities to deepen bilateral and multilateral relations. However, to reap maximum benefits from the ASEAN region, Pakistan will have to move beyond conventional engagement frameworks to unlock new avenues of cooperation in trade, technology, education, and sustainable development.

This issue of PIVOT magazine delves into the strategies and approaches that Pakistan may adopt to strengthen its ties with ASEAN, enhancing economic growth and regional connectivity. ASEAN's internal cohesion and growing international stature, coupled with Pakistan's ambitions for economic growth, present a unique opportunity for collaboration. Pakistan should optimally use the initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has redefined regional economic cooperation dynamics to forge strategic partnerships with Southeast Asian states for the purpose of regional growth and enhancement of trade and business.

This issue explores the untapped potential in Pakistan-ASEAN relations, offering insights into how Pakistan and ASEAN states can benefit from deeper engagement. Through expert analysis and forward-looking perspectives, this issue highlights the pathways towards a more interconnected and prosperous future for Pakistan and ASEAN.

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CONTENTS

Special Message

- 6 **ASEAN-Pakistan Relations and its Future Directions**

H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn



Analysis

- 8 **Towards Pakistan-ASEAN Partnership for Progress and Prosperity**

Ambassador Sohail Mahmood



- 10 **Towards Deeper Engagement: Realizing the True Potential of Pakistan-ASEAN Relations**

Ambassador Ameer Khurram Rathore

- 12 **Deepening Pakistan-ASEAN Relations: A Perspective from Thailand**

Kamolwan Sriposil

- 16 **Strengthening Pakistan-ASEAN Ties: The Strategic Role of Pakistan-Malaysia Relations**

Muhammad Shafiy bin Mazlan



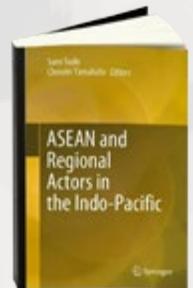
- 18 **Pakistan-Vietnam Relations: Prospects for Cooperation in the "East Asia Vision"**

Pham Cao Cuong, Le Trung Hieu
& Hoang Manh Dung

Book Review

- 20 **ASEAN and Regional Actors in the Indo-Pacific**

Syed Muhammad Saad Zaidi



- 22 **Investing the ASEAN Way: Theories and Practices of Economic Integration in Southeast Asia**

Syed Basim Raza



Viewpoint

- 24 **Unlocking the Potential of Heritage Tourism with ASEAN Countries**

Dr. Rukhsana Khan



- 26 **Boosting Pakistan-ASEAN Trade: A Path to Economic Stability**

Hamid Gilani

- 28 **Assessing Pakistan-ASEAN Economic Relations: Current Trends and Prospects**

Mommen Khan



- 32 **Pakistan-ASEAN Diplomatic Relations: Current State and Future Prospects**

Harsa Kakar

- 34 **Pakistan-Malaysia Relations: A Vision for the Future**
Sher Jan Khan

- 36 **Unlocking Tourism: A New Frontier for Pakistan-ASEAN**
Tayyaba Khurshid



Insight

- 38 **Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Assistance Frameworks: Potential for Pakistan-ASEAN Collaboration**
Hiba Malik



- 40 **ASEAN-Pakistan Relations: A Way Forward**
Dr. Mukesh Kumar Khatwani

- 42 **Pakistan-ASEAN Relations: A Critical Analysis**
Amna Ejaz Rafi



- 44 **ASEAN's Model of Success: A Blueprint for SAARC's Revival**
Mahrukh Mateen



- 46 **Harnessing Economic Synergies: Pakistan's Strategic Engagement with ASEAN**
Saleem Abbas

- 36 **Realizing the Cultural Potential in Strengthening Pakistan-ASEAN Relations**
Farazay Zia

This Issue



ASEAN-Pakistan Relations and its Future Directions

A Message from H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn



In the early 1990s, as ASEAN emerged from the Cold War and championed an open, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture rooted in multilateralism and cooperative security, Pakistan was among the first to actively engage with ASEAN-led initiatives and mechanisms. The foundational milestone was marked by the establishment of ASEAN-Pakistan Sectoral Dialogue Relations in 1993, and further institutionalized with the convening of the inaugural ASEAN-Pakistan Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee (AP-JSCC) meeting in February

1999. The AP-JSCC has met regularly since then, setting the agenda and coordinating the implementation of ASEAN-Pakistan practical cooperation. Pakistan's appointment of its first Ambassador accredited to ASEAN in 2010 provided another focal point to strengthen its relationship with the organisation.

Pakistan's commitment to work with ASEAN to promote regional and international peace, security, and stability is exemplified by its accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) on 2 July 2004. On the same day, Pakistan was

admitted as the 24th participant of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), showcasing Islamabad's dedication to contribute to the collective efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. To further cooperation in the security sphere, ASEAN and Pakistan signed the Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat Terrorism on 29 July 2005, in Vientiane, Lao PDR. Following the signing, the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) held consultations with their Pakistani counterpart to discuss the implementation of the Joint Declaration.

The foundational milestone was marked by the establishment of ASEAN-Pakistan Sectoral Dialogue Relations in 1993, and further institutionalized with the convening of the inaugural ASEAN-Pakistan Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee (AP-JSCC) meeting in February 1999

In the economic sector, two-way trade between ASEAN and Pakistan reached USD10.6 million in 2022 - a modest figure compared to other major trading partners. This underscores the need for greater efforts on both sides to enhance economic exchanges. Foreign direct investment (FDI) flows from Pakistan to ASEAN amounted to USD59.32 million in 2023. Encouragingly, tourism has rebounded from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with Pakistani tourist arrivals in ASEAN increasing from 131,677 in 2022 to 216,788 in 2023.

In development cooperation, various cooperation projects have been carried out with funding support from the ASEAN-Pakistan Cooperation Fund since 2000. These projects spanned different areas, including science, technology and innovation; culture and information; trade and investment; people-to-people contacts; as well as digital payment and financial inclusion. Over the past three years, Pakistan has proposed a number of joint projects in the areas of cyber security, business, material science and media. Additionally, Pakistan has contributed to ASEAN

human resources development by offering scholarships and training courses in information technology, banking, engineering and medicine for students from ASEAN Member States.

With a view to further strengthening ASEAN-Pakistan relations, we encourage Pakistan to further expand tangible cooperation with ASEAN, in line with the ASEAN-Pakistan Sectoral Dialogue Partnership: Practical Cooperation Areas (2024 - 2028).

On the political front, we encourage Pakistan's active participation in the ARF, including through enhanced collaboration on combating terrorism, violent extremism, radicalisation and transnational crimes. In addition, we encourage Pakistan to support and undertake practical cooperation with ASEAN in the four key areas of cooperation outlined in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), namely maritime cooperation, connectivity, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030, as well as economic and other possible areas of cooperation.

In the economic sector, we look forward to intensifying cooperation in trade and investment, digital economy, public-private and business-to-business networking and linkages, food security, tourism, transport, science and technology, information and communication technology, and customs, among others. We encourage Pakistani businesses to tap into the immense potential that ASEAN offers as a dynamic market of more than 670 million people, representing the world's fifth-largest economy and a hub of multiple free trade agreements (FTAs) within the Asia-Pacific. Our region is also driving forward

digital transformation and green transition, presenting a dynamic frontier for global investments in the digital economy and innovation-driven sectors.

On the socio-cultural front, we advocate for the establishment of an ASEAN-Pakistan scholarship scheme to underscore the significance of the ASEAN-Pakistan partnership. We also encourage Pakistan to deepen people-to-people connections and cultural collaboration through active exchanges, networking opportunities, and cultural programme. These initiatives should involve multiple stakeholders, including students, youth, media professionals, think tanks, musicians, artists, and academicians, fostering mutual understanding and enriching our shared heritage.

Pakistan has contributed to ASEAN human resources development by offering scholarships and training courses in information technology, banking, engineering and medicine for students from ASEAN Member States

Finally, we wish to highlight the crucial role of the ASEAN Committee in Islamabad in promoting mutually beneficial relations between ASEAN and Pakistan. We encourage the Committee to work closely with the Pakistan Government to elevate ASEAN's profile and promote closer partnership with Pakistan.



H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn,
Secretary-General ASEAN

Towards Pakistan-ASEAN Partnership for Progress and Prosperity

By Ambassador Sohail Mahmood



Since its inception in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has traveled a long way and evolved into a formidable bloc of 10-members (soon to be 11) for regional cooperation. With an overall GDP of \$3.67 trillion, ASEAN is now the 5th largest economy in the world and on-track to become the 4th largest by 2050. ASEAN is also the leading destination for foreign direct investment, and the most successful regional economic integration initiative in the developing world. More importantly, despite the global economic slowdown induced by Covid-19, and geo-strategic headwinds manifested in growing major-power competition, ASEAN has managed to keep its growth trajectory and maintain steadfast commitment to its core tenet of 'ASEAN centrality' in the regional architecture.

One of the key factors that has greatly contributed to ASEAN's success as a regional bloc has

been its firm commitment to economic integration, particularly through key initiatives such as the creation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992 and the establishment of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2020.

Pakistan's desire to forge a closer relationship with ASEAN is embedded in its 'Vision East Asia' policy. This vision is inspired by a clear recognition of the ASEAN 'miracle' that has contributed immensely to peace, regional integration, and prosperity through effective regional cooperation in Southeast Asia

The RCEP, which comprises of ASEAN members and five Asia-Pacific countries -- including Australia, China, Japan, South

Korea, and New Zealand -- constitutes the largest trade bloc of the world, accounting for nearly half of the world's population, 30 percent of global GDP, and more than 25 percent of world exports. The RCEP will not only increase trade and investment within ASEAN but also, more importantly, solidify ASEAN's position as one of the most influential players in the global economy.

Fully cognizant of its global salience, Pakistan has consistently sought to forge a deeper, multi-faceted partnership with ASEAN - both on the regional institutional plane as well as bilaterally with individual ASEAN member states. Pakistan has commonality of faith with several ASEAN members, and it shares ancient Buddhist heritage with the others. Since medieval times, our lands have been connected through the sea. This maritime connectivity was part of the larger enterprise of bringing West Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia together

with the East in a web of linkages in trade, commerce, culture, and people-to-people contacts. This connectivity helped the exchange of big ideas and enabled Islam and other religious traditions including Buddhism to traverse the regions.

Pakistan's desire to forge a closer relationship with ASEAN is embedded in its 'Vision East Asia' policy. This vision is inspired by a clear recognition of the ASEAN 'miracle' that has contributed immensely to peace, regional integration, and prosperity through effective regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, given Pakistan's endeavours to diversify its foreign policy and re-orient it towards a more geo-economics-centric approach, ASEAN figures as a natural partner.

The formal Pakistan-ASEAN relationship began in 1993 when the two sides agreed to commence a Sectoral Dialogue. By this token, Pakistan is ASEAN's oldest Sectoral Dialogue Partner. The association was institutionalized through the establishment of the ASEAN-Pakistan Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee (APJSCC). Over time, the scope of sectoral dialogue has been expanded and many new layers of collaboration added to the edifice. Pakistan acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2004 and also became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) at the same time.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's diplomatic footprint in ASEAN has grown more distinct; Pakistan-ASEAN trade and investment has expanded; counter-terrorism and security cooperation has increased; several development and capacity-building projects have been completed with the support of ASEAN-Pakistan Cooperation Fund; and people-to-people exchanges have deepened. Yet, it is distinctly felt on both sides

that a vast potential still remains to be tapped across all these domains.

In the past few years, the overall engagement between Pakistan and ASEAN has been significantly enhanced. Not only relations amongst Pakistan and ASEAN members have strengthened, but also Pakistan's relationship with the ASEAN Secretariat has solidified.

In a nutshell, the enduring friendship between Pakistan and ASEAN member states and their growing mutual collaboration provide a solid foundation for promoting the shared objectives of regional stability, economic growth, and peace and harmony. Further deepening this process and taking it to a new level would be to the mutual benefit of Pakistan and ASEAN and serve as a catalyst for greater regional integration as well as shared progress and prosperity

The 7th round of APJSCC was held in Jakarta last year, and the new 'Practical Cooperation Areas' (PCA) were adopted. There have been several other notable activities in 2023 -- including Training on Digital Payment Landscape; ASEAN-Pakistan Business Opportunities Conference; and second leg of Training Program for ASEAN Diplomats at the Foreign Service Academy, Islamabad. In addition, initiatives such as the first ASEAN-Pakistan Trade Development Conference (to be held in Jakarta); second ASEAN-Pakistan Business Opportunities Conference; the ASEAN-Pakistan Technological

Research Collaboration Program; and fourth ASEAN-Pakistan Conference on Material Sciences, are in the pipeline.

For its part, Pakistan remains determined to upscale its across-the-board engagement with ASEAN members, at both the institutional and bilateral levels. There are myriads of ways through which to enhance the 'hard' and 'soft' connectivity between the two sides. As ASEAN Secretary General recently emphasized, the priority focus has to be on implementation of the mutually-agreed 'Practical Cooperation Areas' through projects and activities to substantiate and strengthen the ASEAN-Pakistan partnership. Furthermore, exploring the potential of RCEP and establishing creative linkages with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), especially its special economic zones (SEZs), is vitally important. Through enhanced interface between the business communities on both sides on these ventures, Pakistan and ASEAN can unlock vast new opportunities for trade and investment. Overall, upgrading the relationship to the level of Full Dialogue Partnership (FDP) continues to be a distinct objective for Pakistan.

In a nutshell, the enduring friendship between Pakistan and ASEAN member states and their growing mutual collaboration provide a solid foundation for promoting the shared objectives of regional stability, economic growth, and peace and harmony. Further deepening this process and taking it to a new level would be to the mutual benefit of Pakistan and ASEAN and serve as a catalyst for greater regional integration as well as shared progress and prosperity.



Ambassador Sohail Mahmood,
Director General, Institute of
Strategic Studies Islamabad

Towards Deeper Engagement: Realizing the True Potential of Pakistan-ASEAN Relations

By Ambassador Ameer Khurram Rathore



The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.

Over time, ASEAN's membership expanded to ten states, after inclusion of Brunei Darussalam (7 January 1984), Viet Nam (28 July 1995), Lao PDR and Myanmar (23 July 1997), and Cambodia (30 April 1999). Timor Leste's application for ASEAN membership was accepted in principle, and it was granted observer status in November 2022 during the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits.

Established as a common platform in Southeast Asia, founded on the principles of cooperation, amity, and non-interference, ASEAN has made remarkable strides over the last 57 years. It has transformed into an increasingly integrated and vibrant economic community. The political significance of ASEAN has also grown exponentially, driven by the strategic interests of great powers in the Asia-Pacific region.

ASEAN has established Dialogue Partnerships with 11 countries, including Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US) (with the UK becoming a Dialogue Partner

in 2021). Additionally, ASEAN has Sectoral Dialogue Partnerships with 8 countries, including Pakistan, and Development Partnerships with 5 countries. ASEAN has also initiated regional cooperation mechanisms such as ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit. Given the potential and centrality of ASEAN, several countries, including Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Ukraine, have acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC).

ASEAN's primary objective is to uphold and strengthen peace, security, and stability in the region. Over the years, it has not only achieved these goals but also elevated the living standards of its 661 million people and increased the combined GDP to \$3.6 trillion in 2022, making ASEAN the fifth largest economy in the world. Projections indicate that ASEAN's GDP could reach an estimated \$4.5 trillion by 2030, positioning it as the world's fourth-largest economy.

Beyond economic benefits, ASEAN has brought significant political advantages to the region. Due to its strategic importance, ASEAN is involved in most major international events, including the G-7 and G-20. World leaders regularly attend ASEAN summits and other meetings to discuss global issues.

Pakistan's Engagement with ASEAN

Pakistan's formal association with ASEAN began in 1993 when it was granted Sectoral Dialogue Partner (SDP) status. The ASEAN-Pakistan Sectoral Dialogue Relations were institutionalized through the first meeting of the ASEAN-Pakistan Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee (APJSCC) on 5 February 1999 in Bali. To date, seven APJSCC meetings have been held, with the most recent in Jakarta on 18 September 2023.

During the latest APJSCC meeting in September 2023, both sides reviewed ASEAN-Pakistan Sectoral Dialogue Relations and approved a new draft of the ASEAN-Pakistan Sectoral Dialogue Partnership: Practical Cooperation Areas (PCA) for 2024-2028, succeeding the previous PCA that expired on 31 December 2023.

ASEAN-Pakistan Cooperation Fund

Pakistan established the ASEAN-Pakistan Cooperation Fund (APCF) with an initial amount of \$1 million, under which 14 projects have been carried out to date. Recent projects include a “Short Diplomatic Course for ASEAN Diplomats,” a “Training Program on Digital Payment Landscape and Financial Inclusion in Emerging Markets” for ASEAN central bank officials, and the “ASEAN Pakistan Business Opportunities Conference.”

This year, four new project proposals have been submitted for ASEAN’s approval under the APCF. These include the 2nd ASEAN-Pakistan Business Opportunities Conference, the 4th ASEAN-Pakistan Conference on Materials Science, the ASEAN-Pakistan Technological Research Collaborations Program, and a Media Workshop/Visit for prominent ASEAN journalists.

ASEAN-Pakistan Trade Relations

ASEAN is one of Pakistan’s major trading partners, with trade volume reaching an all-time high of \$11.8 billion in 2022. However, the balance of trade is heavily tilted in favor of ASEAN countries. Pakistan’s exports to ASEAN amount to \$3 billion, while imports stand at \$8.8 billion. Ninety percent of Pakistan’s trade with ASEAN is concentrated in five countries: Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

Pakistan has a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Malaysia and a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Indonesia. FTA negotiations with Thailand are in the final stages, and discussions on a PTA with Vietnam are ongoing. However, the preferential market access negotiated with existing FTA/PTA partners has not significantly boosted Pakistan’s exports, while imports have grown substantially.

Future Prospects: Realizing the True Potential of Pakistan-ASEAN Relations

To realize the potential of ASEAN-Pakistan relations and deepen future engagement, the following priorities should be addressed:

1. Implementing the Vision East Asia policy in its true spirit.
2. Robust cooperation with ASEAN under the Practical Cooperation Areas (2024-2028), focusing on connectivity, disaster preparedness, climate change, and digital economy.
3. Senior leadership exchanges with ASEAN member states, both bilaterally and multilaterally, to enhance visibility and reach in the region.
4. Promoting economic cooperation by identifying potential projects and reducing bureaucratic delays.
5. Fostering a meaningful partnership with ASEAN, connecting through the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025.
6. Exploring cooperation in mutually beneficial projects in sustainable infrastructure, digital innovation, climate change, and people mobility.
7. Enhancing people-to-

people contacts through educational collaboration, student exchanges, and tourism promotion.

8. Upgrading the partnership from Sectoral Dialogue Partner (SDP) to Full Dialogue Partnership (FDP), given the longstanding and shared interests.

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The relationship between Pakistan and ASEAN has yet to realize its full potential. Despite Pakistan’s internal and regional challenges, it is crucial not to overlook the importance of strong ties with ASEAN. Pakistan should adopt an integrated approach to foster genuine cooperation, coordination, and collaboration with ASEAN. Working closely with the ASEAN Secretariat and the annual chair, while engaging in extensive consultations with all ten member states, will be key to moving towards deeper engagement. By focusing on areas where it has expertise and comparative advantage, Pakistan can enhance ASEAN-Pakistan connectivity, support business communities, promote tourism, advance cooperation in science and technology, and deepen cultural exchanges, thereby realizing the true potential of this important partnership.



Ambassador Ameer Khurram Rathore, Pakistan’s Ambassador to Indonesia and ASEAN



Deepening Pakistan-ASEAN Relations: A Perspective from Thailand

By Kamolwan Sriposil

The evolving dynamics of the global geopolitical and economic landscape emphasize the need for deeper regional and trans-regional cooperation and strategic partnerships. Pakistan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can realize full potential for collaboration, particularly in the context of relations between ASEAN, Pakistan and Thailand. Since Pakistan attained the status of a Sectoral Dialogue Partner with ASEAN in 1993, a series of engagements and activities have characterized the partnership. Recently, the endorsement of the ASEAN-Pakistan Practical Cooperation Areas (PCA) 2024-2028 document marks a renewed commitment to deepening cooperation.

Thailand, a founding member of ASEAN and one of the key regional players, views a strong

partnership between ASEAN and Pakistan as highly beneficial. By leveraging existing frameworks and exploring new avenues for collaboration, Pakistan, ASEAN, and Thailand can forge a more resilient and dynamic relationship, fostering peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

Thailand recognizes and commends Pakistan's efforts to deepen its engagement with ASEAN. Over recent years, Pakistan has undertaken various initiatives to strengthen its ties with ASEAN countries. Noteworthy among these are the digital financing workshop and training programs for ASEAN diplomats, as well as the establishment of the ASEAN Corner at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI). These initiatives demonstrate Pakistan's commitment to fostering closer relations and enhancing mutual understanding.

The Royal Thai Embassy in Islamabad has played and will continue to play a role in promoting ASEAN-Pakistan relations through its participation in the ASEAN Committee in Islamabad (ACI). The ACI works to strengthen ASEAN's presence and initiatives within Pakistan, coordinating diplomatic exchanges, economic cooperation, and cultural programs. The Embassy's efforts include organizing and participating in various events to promote mutual understanding and partnership between ASEAN and Pakistan.

Thailand-Pakistan Bilateral Relations

Thailand and Pakistan have established diplomatic relations for more than seven decades. The relationship between Thailand and Pakistan is fruitful and currently in an excellent state. For Thailand, this year marks a special occasion with the Celebration on the Auspicious Occasion of His

Majesty the King's 6th Cycle Birthday Anniversary on 28th July 2024. His Majesty the King of Thailand has visited Pakistan 3 times when His Majesty was the Crown Prince. During one of the visits, His Majesty brought with him relief assistance for the earthquake victims in Pakistan. During the severe flood in 2022, His Majesty also sent a Royal Condolence Message to those affected by the flood.

On the political front, the visit of H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, to Islamabad for the 48th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation highlighted the commitment to political dialogue and cooperation and support to Pakistan as the host country. Additionally, the participation of Thai military personnel in the Pakistan Army Team Spirits (PATS) exercise for the second consecutive year underscores the growing defense collaboration between the two countries.

With a population of more than 230 million, Thailand sees Pakistan and its strategic location as a large potential consumer market and gateway towards Central Asia and Middle East. Likewise, Thailand's strategic location being in the center of Southeast Asia provides quick access to both domestic and international markets in ASEAN and beyond. Thailand has major trade routes from Australia and New Zealand to ASEAN and South China shores. Thailand can certainly link with western trade route through Pakistan. Such connectivity will help reach Middle East, Central Asia and Southwest China. Two-way trade has been remarkable,

touching more than \$1 billion but much more can be done. Top Thai exports to Pakistan include automobile parts and accessories, chemical products, threads and synthetic fiber, plastic pellets, rubber, rubber products, herbs, spices and agricultural seeds. Top Pakistan exports to Thailand include fresh aquatic animals, chilled frozen processed aquatic animals, ready-made garments and fabrics, textiles, steel mineral water and soft drinks, and sports equipment. Remarkably, Pakistan manufactures footballs of international standard using rubber imported from Thailand.

With a population of more than 230 million, Thailand sees Pakistan and its strategic location as a large potential consumer market and gateway towards Central Asia and Middle East. Likewise, Thailand's strategic location being in the center of Southeast Asia provides quick access to both domestic and international markets in ASEAN and beyond. Thailand has major trade routes from Australia and New Zealand to ASEAN and South China shores. Thailand can certainly link with western trade route through Pakistan. Such connectivity will help reach Middle East, Central Asia and Southwest China

The early conclusion of the Thailand-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement remains crucial for boosting trade relations, reducing

barriers, and facilitating increased commerce. Thailand looks forward to progress in this area, which would create a new trade dynamic for our mutual benefits.

Thai investments in Pakistan have expanded with significant participation in major sectors such as the agro-industry and shrimp feed, led by large Thai conglomerates like Charoen Pokphand and AMG-Thai Union Feed Mill. These two companies not only make investments in Pakistan but also make valuable contribution to local communities and employment opportunities. Pakistan is vibrant and full of wonderful resources. Encouraging joint investments in diverse sectors, including gems and jewelry, fruit processing and fisheries, can further strengthen economic relations.

The Thai Embassy has been proactive in promoting economic ties, notably by taking businessmen from major Chambers of Commerce and Industries to THAIFEX in Bangkok, one of Asia's largest food and beverage trade fairs. The Thai Festival in Lahore, which attracted over 10,000 attendees, further showcased the potential for economic and cultural exchange. In 2024, the Embassy also plans to bring press and businessmen to World Halal Product Exhibition (HAPEX) in Hat Yai, a province in Southern Thailand. Other notable trade fairs in Thailand include Bangkok Gems and Jewelry Fair, Style Bangkok Fair (furniture), THAIFEX-Anuga Asia (food and beverages), Thailand Auto Parts and Accessories, TILOG-LOGISTIX, and Med Lab Asia and Asia Health, to name a few.

Thailand is also working towards strengthening engagements between Organization of Islamic Cooperation Standing Committee

on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH) and relevant Thai agencies. This would enhance bilateral science and technological cooperation and open up venues of collaborations such as academic research and exchanges. Sharing best practices in technology and innovation, fostering joint initiatives in research and development, and utilizing Pakistan's IT personnel for Thai tech companies are steps towards mutual growth.

Enhancing People-to-People Engagements

Culture, arts, music, dance, sports and food can be key elements to create understanding and unity as they are appreciated by everyone. The Royal Thai Embassy and the Royal Thai Consulate-General in Karachi have been organizing various cultural events over the years and bringing Thai elements to the people of Pakistan. We firmly believe that people-to-people connections are a cornerstone of our excellent bilateral relationship.

Thai Airways flights from Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi post-COVID-19, along with an increase in the Bangkok-Lahore route from five to six weekly flights, signify the growing business, travel and tourism links. Approximately 70,000 Pakistani tourists visit Thailand annually, and there is a notable increase in Thai tourists exploring Pakistan.

In supporting the government of Pakistan's effort on Gandhara Tourism, Most Venerable Anil Sakya, honorary rector of World Buddhist University Thailand had visited Pakistan twice as a main speaker at two Gandhara Symposiums organized by Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad in 2023 and by Foreign Office in May 2024. Efforts are

also underway to preserve the historical sites of the Gandhara Civilization, promoting heritage preservation and tourism development.

Pakistan is an important country in the region. Both Thailand and Pakistan can further enhance cooperation in areas that Pakistan has strength in, such as counter terrorism and intelligence sharing. Under ASEAN, the PCA 2024-2028 will serve as a framework and practical guideline in achieving shared goals in political-security, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation

The healthcare and education sectors present significant opportunities for collaboration. Thailand's world-class healthcare, wellness and medical services, and educational institutions are areas that both countries can benefit. Muay Thai, which is martial arts of Thailand, is popular in Pakistan. With Pakistani boxers participating in boxing competition in Thailand and Muay Thai Associations training youth in Rawalpindi, Lahore, this can be further enhanced and promoted together.

We, therefore, look to welcoming more people from Pakistan in various fields. Partnerships between universities, research institutes and cultural institutions will promote collaborative research and academic opportunities. Thailand looks to enhance the networks and reach between various academic, research institutes and think tanks from Thailand with Pakistan such

as with the ISSI.

Believing in giving back to communities, the Royal Thai Embassy has collaborated with UN Women to organize training for home-based chefs in cooking Thai food. They also organized a business seminar on women's economic empowerment by bringing successful Thai businesswomen to share stories and inspire. Such initiatives highlight the shared commitment to addressing global challenges and empowering marginalized communities. The Thai Embassy also organized "Let's Cook Thai Food," a culinary and hospitality workshop with College of Tourism and Hotel Management (COTHM), imparting knowledge on Thai culture and food to young energetic students, which we hope will inspire them to learn more about Thailand.

In difficult times, the Thai government, people and various civil society organizations also donated around 130 million rupees for the flood relief in Pakistan in 2022.

To conclude, Pakistan is an important country in the region. Both Thailand and Pakistan can further enhance cooperation in areas that Pakistan has strength in, such as counter terrorism and intelligence sharing. Under ASEAN, the PCA 2024-2028 will serve as a framework and practical guideline in achieving shared goals in political-security, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation. This includes combating transnational crimes, promoting investment and tourism, and enhancing health and disaster management.



Kamolwan Sriposil, Minister-Counsellor, Royal Thai Embassy Islamabad

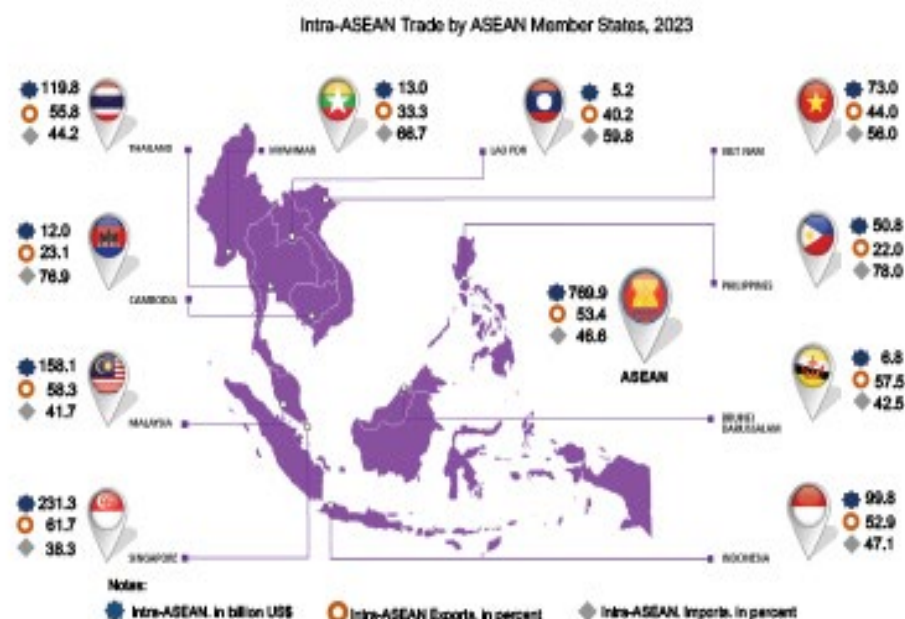
EXPLORING INTRA-ASEAN MERCHANDISE TRADE DYNAMICS

During the period of 2003–2023, total ASEAN trade in goods with both internal and external partners, experienced significant growth. In 2003, total ASEAN trade was valued at US\$ 871.8 billion. This figure increased to US\$ 2,533.1 billion in 2013, and to US\$ 3,560.1 billion in 2023. Intra-ASEAN trade accounted for approximately 22% of the total ASEAN trade during this period. The average annual growth rate was 8.0% for total ASEAN trade, 8.2% for extra-ASEAN, and 7.4% for intra-ASEAN. Notably, the growth rate of intra-ASEAN trade was lower than that of extra-ASEAN for both exports and imports.



Following the COVID-19 pandemic, intra-ASEAN trade grew faster than extra-ASEAN. Intra-ASEAN trade grew by 25.5% and 20.3% in 2021 and 2022, respectively, surpassing the growth of extra-ASEAN, which was 25.3% and 13.5% respectively. However, in 2023, total ASEAN trade, amounting to US\$ 3.6 trillion, decreased by 7.4% from the previous year. Intra-ASEAN trade declined by 10.1% to US\$ 769.9 billion, while extra-ASEAN trade declined by 6.7% to US\$ 2,790.2 billion. This decline can be attributed to various factors, including global economic conditions, regional trade dynamics, and internal challenges within each of ASEAN Member States (AMS).

From a country perspective, the value of intra-ASEAN trade of AMS in 2023 ranged from US\$ 5.2 billion (Lao PDR) to US\$ 231.3 billion (Singapore). The value of intra-ASEAN exports ranged from US\$ 2.1 billion (Lao PDR) to US\$ 142.6 billion (Singapore), while intra-ASEAN imports from US\$ 2.9 billion (Brunei Darussalam) to US\$ 88.7 billion (Singapore). During the period, Singapore exports to the ASEAN region, representing 61.7% of its total Singapore intra-ASEAN trade. The main commodity was [HS85] electrical machinery and equipment which amounted to US\$ 53.5 billion or 37.5% of total Singapore intra-ASEAN exports. The next biggest intra-ASEAN exporter was Malaysia with US\$ 92.2 billion (58.3%). Malaysia's main commodity exported within the region was also [HS85] electrical machinery and equipment, amounting to US\$ 33.0 billion or 35.8% of its total Malaysia intra-ASEAN exports.



Meanwhile, in the same year, the Singapore purchased US\$ 88.7 billion (38.3%) of their import commodities from other AMS, with the largest product imported was [HS85] electrical machinery and equipment accounted for US\$ 38.8 billion, or 37.0% of the total Singapore intra-ASEAN trade. Malaysia was the second largest intra-ASEAN importer where US\$ 65.9 billion (41.7%) of their total imports came from other AMS, with the main product was [HS85] electrical machinery and equipment, accounted for US\$ 15.6 billion (23.6%).

Strengthening Pakistan-ASEAN Ties: The Strategic Role of Pakistan-Malaysia Relations

By Muhammad Shafiy bin Mazlan



Prospects and the Way Forward

The relationship between Pakistan and ASEAN is steadily developing in light of the interconnectedness of the world, inter-regional connectivity, and the economic significance of the two entities. While Pakistan is actively involved in the region, enhancing Pakistan-ASEAN relations requires establishment of strong bilateral ties with ASEAN member states, such as Malaysia.

Diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Malaysia, established sixty years ago, have entered a novel realm.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formed on August 8, 1967, following the approval of the Bangkok Declaration. This regional organization comprises 10 member states, including Malaysia. Its primary goals are to enhance peace, security, and stability in the region. In addition to other regional organizations, the intergovernmental framework within the organization maintains the consensus principle, which ensures uniformity and respect for the non-interference in member states' affairs. The 'ASEAN Way' refers to the decision-making process and diplomatic method used to handle regional issues, resolve disagreements, and prevent armed crises. With a population of 671.7 million and a combined GDP of US\$3.6 trillion, ASEAN is emerging as the fifth largest global economic

power. Consequently, Pakistan has shown increasing interest in actively collaborating with ASEAN member states in recent years.

Pakistan has been engaged with ASEAN countries since before ASEAN was established. After its creation, Pakistan has shown significant interest in ASEAN, evident from its participation in many ASEAN initiatives. For instance, Pakistan became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner in 1993, signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and later joined the ASEAN Regional Forum in 2004. Pakistan has a significant economic partnership with ASEAN, with trade amounting to US\$11 billion. This demonstrates the significance of both bilateral relationships and highlights potential for further strengthening Pakistan-ASEAN relations, especially through key member states like Malaysia.

The Malaysia-Pakistan Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (MPCEPA) aims to strengthen their strategic economic collaboration, confirming both parties' commitments to enhancing bilateral cooperation in economics and security

The projected value of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) in 2020 was approximately US\$900 million. Both nations consider each other economically significant, with

Malaysia viewing Pakistan as a vital market for expanding investment opportunities in the South and Central Asia, particularly in the palm oil business. Furthermore, the Malaysia-Pakistan Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (MPCEPA) aims to strengthen their strategic economic collaboration, confirming both parties' commitments to enhancing bilateral cooperation in economics and security.

Pakistan and Malaysia's close bilateral connections are seen as a valuable and have the potential to enhance involvement with ASEAN. Furthermore, Malaysia is set to assume the position of ASEAN Chairman in the coming year i.e., 2025. This development will serve as a catalyst for Pakistan to uphold strategic cooperation and foster strong ties with other ASEAN member states. Pakistan's participation in regional organizations like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) allows it to contribute to ASEAN's vision and benefit from Malaysia's efforts to maintain regional stability. These shared concerns align with Pakistan's main interests in relation to ASEAN. Pakistan and Malaysia have mutual political and economic needs, highlighting the importance of promoting inter-state and inter-regional integration, which brings significant economic advantages to both countries.

Pakistan's large workforce and strategic linkages present opportunities for ASEAN member nations to invest. Conversely, ASEAN is vital for regional stability and offers significant potential for strategic collaboration in diverse fields. Collaboration is crucial for bolstering economic expansion and ensuring political

steadiness, as exemplified by the notion of interdependence. Political scientist Ernst B. Haas's Neo-functionalism thesis emphasizes the importance of interdependency between states and other fields of human activities. Economic interdependency facilitates the exchange of technology and expertise between economically interconnected states.

Malaysia's upcoming ASEAN chairmanship presents a unique opportunity to elevate Pakistan's standing within the bloc. By replicating this success with other ASEAN members, Pakistan can foster economic and social progress

The MPCEPA implemented in 2008, has yielded numerous beneficial effects on both nations. This agreement aims to facilitate and promote export-import activity between both countries by reducing and eliminating duties, thereby enabling the free movement of commodities. Additionally, it seeks to foster collaboration in research and technology. This platform has significantly contributed to the development of bilateral trade volume between Pakistan and Malaysia during the past two decades. Pakistan's exports to Malaysia have reached an estimated value of US\$ 232.78 million, with the total trade of both nations reaching US\$ 1.8 billion in 2023. The concept of the 'unity of ummah' highlights the emphasis on peace and humanity in the interactions between Pakistan and Malaysia. This relationship is regarded as an exemplary model

for other Muslim ASEAN member states, such as Indonesia and Brunei.

In 2020, the former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Malaysia. During the World Economic Forum (WEF) in April of this year, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and his counterpart, Shehbaz Sharif, met. These events indicate a new level of commitment to strengthening the relationship between the two countries, as well as Pakistan's dedication to ASEAN.

In conclusion, despite the difficulties posed by globalization, the relationship between Pakistan and ASEAN countries is steadily expanding. ASEAN's pivotal role in regional security is a strategic asset for Pakistan, enhancing investment prospects. Conversely, P Pakistan's strategic location facilitates market access in South and Central Asia, offering mutual economic benefits. This symbiotic relationship underscores the importance of the Pakistan-ASEAN Strategic Partnership, particularly exemplified by the Pakistan-Malaysia bilateral tie. To capitalize this momentum, Pakistan must prioritize its relations with Malaysia by consistent high-level engagements, reciprocal visits, and enhancing cooperation across all sectors. Malaysia's upcoming ASEAN chairmanship presents a unique opportunity to elevate Pakistan's standing within the bloc. By replicating this success with other ASEAN members, Pakistan can foster economic and social progress.



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Pakistan-Vietnam Relations: Prospects for Cooperation in the “East Asia Vision”

By Pham Cao Cuong, Le Trung Hieu and Hoang Manh Dung

Vietnam and Pakistan have maintained diplomatic relations since November 8, 1972, marking a longstanding partnership between the two nations. Historically shaped by external pressures and shifting alliances, the ties between these two nations have gradually strengthened, particularly over the last two decades. As both countries navigate the complexities of regional power dynamics, the potential for deeper collaboration under the umbrella of Pakistan’s “East Asia Vision” becomes increasingly significant.

In 1980, Pakistan closed its diplomatic mission in Vietnam, a move influenced by external factors such as major powers contestation. However, relations between Vietnam and Pakistan began to improve in the early 2000s when Pakistan reopened its embassy in Hanoi in October

2000. Vietnam reciprocated by reopening its embassy in Islamabad and its commercial office in Karachi in November 2005. High-level visits followed, including President Pervez Musharraf’s visit to Vietnam in May 2001 and President Tran Duc Luong’s visit to Pakistan in March 2004. Former Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung also visited Pakistan in March 2012. Despite these efforts to enhance economic and military ties, several obstacles still hinder the broader and more effective promotion of their relations.

Pakistan views Vietnam as a crucial element in its strategic vision for East Asia, while Vietnam consistently places importance on its relationship with Pakistan, viewing it as a significant partner in South Asia. However, while Vietnam-India relations have seen significant improvement, with India being a comprehensive strategic

partner, the relationship between Vietnam and Pakistan remains relatively limited, with bilateral trade is still below \$1 billion.

Pakistan views Vietnam as a crucial element in its strategic vision for East Asia, while Vietnam consistently places importance on its relationship with Pakistan, viewing it as a significant partner in South Asia

Furthermore, Pakistan’s volatile internal situation poses a significant challenge in formulating a comprehensive policy to enhance relations with Southeast Asian nations. Similarly, Vietnam’s ties with Pakistan are shaped by its relationships with China, India, and the US. This challenge is evident in the absence of robust networks facilitating meaningful collaboration between Pakistan and ASEAN

countries. Pakistan's strategy to strengthen relations with East Asia is influenced by the actions of major powers, with Vietnam playing a significant role in its "East Asia Vision."

Pakistan's strategy to strengthen relations with East Asia is influenced by the actions of major powers, with Vietnam playing a significant role in its "East Asia Vision"

In 2022, the trade volume between Pakistan and ASEAN reached an impressive \$11.8 billion, solidifying their status as significant trading partners. Pakistan's exports to ASEAN countries amounted to \$3 billion, while imports reached \$8.8 billion, with most of Pakistan's trade conducted with five ASEAN countries: Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Pakistan aims to foster deeper collaboration with East Asia, recognizing ASEAN's pivotal position. Pakistan acknowledges the significance of ASEAN as a crucial regional entity, comprising ten member states with a GDP of \$3.67 trillion. Pakistan is actively working to enhance its participation within the ASEAN framework. In 1997, Pakistan established a "Sectoral Dialogue Partner" (SDP) status with ASEAN in eight areas: trade, investment, industry, environment, human resource development, science and technology, drug control, and tourism.

Given the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region, the relationship between Vietnam and Pakistan is likely to be influenced by various internal and external factors. However, these factors are expected to contribute

positively to further enhance bilateral cooperation. The intensifying strategic competition between China, the US, and India presents numerous opportunities for collaboration between Vietnam and Pakistan. Pakistan can successfully integrate into Southeast Asia, while Vietnam can strengthen its ties with South Asia through cooperation mechanisms. These efforts will enhance trade, investment, and tourism between the two countries.

The Vietnamese market presents a highly appealing destination for Pakistani businesses, with immense potential to develop bilateral economic and trade collaboration. In March 2004, President Tran Duc Luong's visit to Pakistan marked a significant step forward, resulting in several agreements, including the Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation, the Agreement on Science and Technology Cooperation, and the Agreement on Cooperation between the Two State Banks. Both countries also agreed to establish the Pakistan-Vietnam Business Forum to boost trade exchanges and enhance business cooperation between the two nations. Moreover, both states are considering waiving visa requirements for citizens holding diplomatic and official passports, laying the foundation for a solid legal framework for future relations.

Both states have engaged in exchanges of high-level delegations to enhance bilateral relations. For instance, during the "Belt and Road" International Cooperation Summit Forum in Beijing, China, in May 2017, President Tran Dai Quang of Vietnam met with Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. During the meeting, President Quang emphasized Vietnam's

appreciation for its collaborative ties with Pakistan and suggested enhancing the efficiency of bilateral cooperation mechanisms. He also highlighted the importance of concluding agreements in culture, sports, and tourism to establish a favorable legal framework for collaboration in tourism, aviation, and maritime transport. President Quang expressed confidence that bilateral trade turnover would reach \$1 billion by 2020.

Enhancing cooperation, particularly in economics and trade, is imperative to fostering further progress. Bilateral trade cooperation has already yielded positive outcomes

Pakistan deeply values Vietnam's development achievements and recognizes the immense potential for collaboration between the two nations. Enhancing cooperation, particularly in economics and trade, is imperative to fostering further progress. Bilateral trade cooperation has already yielded positive outcomes. Pakistan holds significant value as an export market for Vietnam, ranking second only to India in South Asia. These developments indicate a promising future for Pakistan-Vietnam relations, provided both nations continue to build on their existing cooperation and explore new avenues for collaboration.



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ASEAN and Regional Actors in the Indo-Pacific

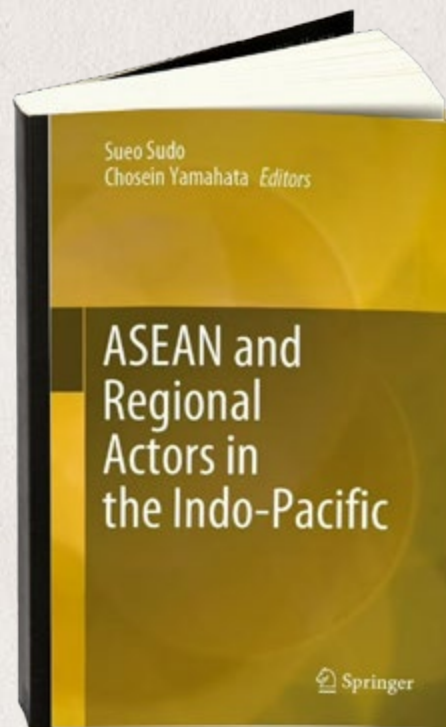
By Syed Muhammad Saad Zaidi

ASEAN and Regional Actors in the Indo-Pacific, edited by Sueo Sudo and Chosein Yamahata, is a timely and essential examination of the geopolitical and economic dynamics shaping the Indo-Pacific region. This book explores how ASEAN, amidst rising tensions between major powers, seeks to maintain its centrality while adapting to new security and economic realities. The book's thesis asserts that ASEAN, as a critical regional player, faces both opportunities and challenges in navigating the Indo-Pacific's shifting power dynamics, primarily shaped by the US-China rivalry.

The book is divided into two parts: "Navigating Power Shifts" and "Anxieties, Choices, and Relations." Each section comprises of chapters that present diverse perspectives on ASEAN's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region, its internal challenges, and its interactions with key external actors.

This book explores how ASEAN, amidst rising tensions between major powers, seeks to maintain its centrality while adapting to new security and economic realities

The first part, "Navigating Power Shifts," lays the groundwork for understanding the Indo-Pacific's growing significance. The first chapter traces the historical and geopolitical emergence of the Indo-Pacific concept, framing the subsequent discussions. It notes



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that while the term "Indo-Pacific" was initially popularized by countries like Japan, India, and the United States (US), ASEAN's adoption of its ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019 signals its intent to shape the regional narrative. This chapter emphasizes the importance of regional connectivity, with ASEAN acting as a bridge between competing visions of the Indo-Pacific led by the US and China.

The chapter "Japan's Indo-Pacific Strategy and ASEAN: Collaboration or Containment?"

examines Japan's evolving strategic relationship with ASEAN, situating it within Japan's broader "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) vision. While Japan promotes infrastructure development and trade partnerships under FOIP, there are underlying concerns about how this vision contrasts with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Japan's role as a counterbalance to China in ASEAN's economic and security sectors is thoroughly explored, highlighting ASEAN's delicate position in maintaining neutrality while benefiting from both powers.

The second part, "Anxieties, Choices, and Relations," focuses on specific security concerns and how different ASEAN member states navigate their relations with both China and the US. The chapter, "Alignment Choices in an Era of US-China Competition," presents case studies to explore how economic dependencies on China and security alignments with the US create conflicting pressures for ASEAN states, further complicating their foreign policy choices.

The book excels in its comprehensive coverage of the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical landscape, offering valuable insights into ASEAN's strategic maneuvering in a region where the balance of power is rapidly shifting.

One of the book's most significant contributions is its analysis of ASEAN's evolving centrality in the Indo-Pacific. By leveraging its centrality, ASEAN is expanding its influence in regional security dialogues. The book highlights how ASEAN-led frameworks like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS) provide platforms for ASEAN to guide discussions on critical security issues such as maritime security and territorial disputes. As mentioned in the book, ASEAN's capacity to maintain diplomatic channels between the US and China on security matters

underscores its importance as a regional stabilizer.

Another strength of the book is its focus on non-traditional security threats, such as energy transition and environmental challenges. The chapter, "Energy Transition in Thailand and Southeast Asia Through China's Energy Diplomacy," discusses how China's Green Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has impacted ASEAN's energy policies. It offers a holistic view of how Chinese investments in renewable energy projects offer economic opportunities for ASEAN member states.

While the term "Indo-Pacific" was initially popularized by countries like Japan, India, and the United States (US), ASEAN's adoption of its ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019 signals its intent to shape the regional narrative

Overall, ASEAN and Regional Actors in the Indo-Pacific is an essential read for scholars, policymakers, and anyone interested in the Indo-Pacific's evolving geopolitical landscape. It provides a nuanced understanding of ASEAN's centrality, balancing a range of issues from security to economics and sustainability. The editors have curated a book that captures the region's complexities and the challenges ASEAN faces as it navigates an increasingly multipolar world.



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Investing the ASEAN Way: Theories and Practices of Economic Integration in Southeast Asia

By Syed Basim Raza

The book written by Sungjoon Cho and Jürgen Kurtz is undoubtedly a great addition to the discourse on regional economic integration, particularly as it relates to Southeast Asia. Both distinguished professors combine their expertise to give a novel sociological and legal perspective vis-à-vis the Association of Southeast Asian (ASEAN) investment regimes. Published in 2023, the book builds upon ASEAN's historical trajectory and engages deeply with the unique frameworks governing foreign investment in the region, blending a mixture of Western legal principles and Southeast Asian norms. Their analysis provides significant insights into the functioning of the ASEAN Investment Regime (AIR), emphasizing a constructivist view that focuses on cultural elements rather than just legal and economic structures.

Cho and Kurtz argue that ASEAN's approach to economic integration, though often compared to that of the European Union (EU), follows a distinctly different trajectory, informed by cultural values, historical experiences, and a particular preference for informality over rigid legal frameworks. Furthermore, ASEAN's investment regime cannot be understood purely through a lens of economic liberalization. Instead, it is a reflection of the region's political and cultural heterogeneity, influenced by the principle of non-interference and consensus-building - hallmarks of the "ASEAN Way."

Cho and Kurtz structure the book in a way that guides the reader through the theoretical underpinnings, practical implementations, and critiques of ASEAN's investment agreements. In the early chapters the authors explain how the 1987 ASEAN Agreement for Promotion and Protection of Investments and subsequent



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frameworks, including the 1998 ASEAN Investment Area (AIA) and the 2009 ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA), reflect a complex balancing act between investment liberalization and maintaining state sovereignty. The authors are of the view that while these agreements exhibit a commitment to attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), they also demonstrate ASEAN's cautious approach to adopting Western legal frameworks, as seen in the selective application of investment protection measures.

A major strength of the book lies in its use of empirical data to support its arguments. Nonetheless, the authors do not shy away from critiquing ASEAN's legal frameworks. They argue that ASEAN's preference for informality and consensus, while effective in

maintaining political stability, often hinders deeper economic integration. They also contrast ASEAN's approach to that of the EU, noting that ASEAN lacks the strong judicial and regulatory frameworks that underpin the EU's economic union.

Cho and Kurtz's constructivist approach – emphasizing ASEAN's cultural and historical context – adds depth to the discourse on economic regionalism in Southeast Asia. By positioning ASEAN's investment framework as a unique blend of formal and informal mechanisms, the authors successfully challenge the idea that Western models of economic integration, such as the EU, are universally applicable or desirable

Cho and Kurtz's constructivist approach - emphasizing ASEAN's cultural and historical context - adds depth to the discourse on economic regionalism in Southeast Asia. By positioning ASEAN's investment framework as a unique blend of formal and informal mechanisms, the authors successfully challenge the idea that Western models of economic integration, such as the EU, are universally applicable or desirable.

One of the book's most compelling arguments is the concept of "de-legalization," where ASEAN intentionally limits the scope of legal formalism to preserve state sovereignty and accommodate cultural norms. For instance, the authors explain how the lack of investor-state arbitration mechanisms in ASEAN's agreements, a notable deviation from Western bilateral investment treaties, reflects a deliberate strategy to avoid disputes that might challenge national sovereignty. This contrasts sharply with the more legalized frameworks of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the EU, where dispute resolution mechanisms play a central role.

The authors discuss the differences between wealthier, more developed ASEAN members like Singapore and less developed ones like Myanmar or Laos but do not delve deeply into how these internal disparities affect the implementation of investment agreements. Another point of critique is the book's limited discussion of the environmental and social impacts of ASEAN's investment policies. While Cho and Kurtz acknowledge the importance of sustainable development in their discussion of ASEAN's future goals, they do not extensively explore how ASEAN's investment regime addresses issues like labor rights, environmental degradation, or corporate social responsibility.

That said, the book's critical evaluation of ASEAN's investment agreements, particularly its comparison with global investment law, is well-supported and persuasive. The authors' ability to contextualize ASEAN's cautious approach to economic integration within broader global trends - such as the rise of China, the United States-China trade war, and the COVID-19 pandemic - demonstrates the relevance of their work to contemporary discussions on regionalism and globalization.

Overall, *Investing the ASEAN Way* offers a compelling and comprehensive analysis of ASEAN's investment regime, making it a valuable resource for scholars and policymakers interested in regional economic integration, international law, and Southeast Asian studies. Cho and Kurtz's constructivist approach provides a fresh perspective on ASEAN's development, emphasizing the region's cultural and historical specificities in shaping its economic policies.



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Unlocking the Potential of Heritage Tourism with ASEAN Countries

By Dr. Rukhsana Khan



The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) boasts rich cultural heritage sites that offer immense opportunities for tourism collaboration.

By focusing on heritage tourism with ASEAN countries, Pakistan can foster regional unity, showcase unique cultural identities, and promote sustainable tourism practices. This approach will ultimately enhance ASEAN's global tourism competitiveness.

The Taxila World Heritage Site played a pivotal role in spreading Buddhism to Southeast Asian countries. Buddhist monks and missionaries traveled along routes that have now evolved into modern highways, including the Karakoram Highway (KKH), Grand Trunk Road, Indus Highway (N-55), and Hunza Gilgit Road (N-35)

Pakistan, particularly the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab, have deep historical connections with Southeast Asia through the spread of Buddhism. The Gandhara Civilization (6th century BCE-11th century CE) played a significant role in this cultural exchange, serving as a hub from which Buddhism spread to present-day ASEAN countries. The key heritage sites in this context include:

- Taxila University (6th century-5th century BCE), a renowned center of Buddhist learning
- Buddhist monasteries and stupa ruins in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab
- Ancient trade stops along the Silk Road, such as Peshawar, Bunner, Naran, and Gilgit Baltistan
- Sharda, an ancient center of learning in Neelum Valley, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK)
- Buddhist rock edicts in Mansehra, located in Ghari Habibullah, KP

The Taxila World Heritage Site played a pivotal role in spreading Buddhism to Southeast Asian countries. Buddhist monks and missionaries traveled along routes that have now evolved

into modern highways, including the Karakoram Highway (KKH), Grand Trunk Road, Indus Highway (N-55), and Hunza Gilgit Road (N-35). This ancient search for religious sanctity, trade, and travel is still evident today through the region's archaeological remains and ethnological artifacts, extending from the plains of Punjab to the remote towns of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the far-flung valleys of Kashmir.

Remains of historical Silk Road caravan stopovers can be found at Taxila, Punjab, and Buddhist sites in KP, including Peshawar (a hub of trade), Buner (an ancient Buddhist site), Naran Mansehra (an ancient trade stop), Gilgit Baltistan (a strategic trade hub), and Sharda, an ancient center of learning in Neelum Valley, AJK. The Buddhist rock edicts of Mansehra, located a few kilometers from Muzaffarabad, authenticate these historical Buddhist travel routes. The significant historical and cultural connections from Ghari Habibullah, Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Muzaffarabad, and from the Neelum to Jhelum Valleys are also mentioned in the travelogues of Buddhist monks. For instance, the Chinese pilgrim Huien Tsang took the Jhelum Valley route to visit sacred sites in Gandhara and the Valley of Kashmir around 759 CE. Later, this same route was used by other Chinese and Korean monks, who left their marks in the form of rock inscriptions along the Karakoram Highway.

AJK, located in the southwest of Pakistan, is confined by Tibet in the east and Xinjiang, China, in the north, with a small stretch of Afghanistan to the west. Historically, Kashmir was part of the greater Gandhara region, which connected various locations along the Silk Road. The revival of the ancient Silk Route offers opportunities for the adjacent regions and underdeveloped areas of AJK. Pakistan's rich Buddhist heritage can serve as a bridge to strengthen ties with ASEAN nations, particularly those with significant Buddhist populations. The untapped Buddhist heritage of Pakistan has the potential to launch a new era of cultural and religious initiatives with ASEAN countries. By highlighting the cultural and religious significance of these heritage sites, Pakistan can build stronger connections with ASEAN nations, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, which have sizable Buddhist communities.

Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Indonesia was influenced by Gandhara traditions, reflecting historical ties to Buddhist centers in Pakistan's KP and Punjab provinces. From an archaeological perspective,

inscriptions, building structures, and stone sculptures in Sumatra and Java, Indonesia, from the 6th to the 14th century CE demonstrate Gandhara's influence on Southeast Asian traditions. Mahayana Buddhism in Vietnam similarly carries historical connections to Chinese and Gandhara cultural traits, primarily reflected in sculpture, art, and architecture. Fortunately, Pakistan is home to this wealth of historical Buddhist artifacts. Preservation, recreation, and digitalization of these treasures can attract diverse groups from ASEAN countries.

Pakistan's rich Buddhist heritage can serve as a bridge to strengthen ties with ASEAN nations, particularly those with significant Buddhist populations. The untapped Buddhist heritage of Pakistan has the potential to launch a new era of cultural and religious initiatives with ASEAN countries

There is a need to realign tourism strategies with a focus on cultural exchange programs for youth, university partnerships, creative cultural and archaeological study centers, and departments of art and architecture. Joint research initiatives, particularly in the exploration of ancient travel routes and excavations, will help establish a sustainable, long-term policy with Buddhist populations in ASEAN countries.

The development and promotion of Buddhist heritage sites such as Taxila Monasteries and ancient travel routes can attract pilgrims and tourists from South and Southeast Asia. By embracing Buddhist tourism, Pakistan can unlock new opportunities for regional cooperation, economic growth, and cultural exchange with ASEAN countries. This strategic approach will not only showcase Pakistan's rich cultural heritage but also foster greater understanding and collaboration between nations. Moreover, it will align the country's planning initiatives with emerging regional development opportunities.



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Boosting Pakistan-ASEAN Trade: A Path to Economic Stability

By Hamid Gilani



The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a political and economic union of 10 states in Southeast Asia. Pakistan was awarded the Sectoral Dialogue status in 1993, with the first formal meeting taking place in 1997, resulting in agreements on cooperation in trade, industry, investment, and other bilateral matters. According to the ASEAN statistical database, trade between Pakistan and ASEAN countries increased from \$10.22 billion in 2010 to \$10.62 billion in 2021. This increase in bilateral trade is significant, but it is crucial to delve deeper into the details to understand the current trade connectivity between Pakistan and ASEAN. It is also important to understand how focusing on this region could contribute positively in Pakistan's current economic conditions.

Pakistan faces considerable trade and connectivity challenges with its

neighboring countries. Despite a three-year-long ceasefire between India and Pakistan, trade has dwindled, and the relationship remains strained. On the western front, increasing trade or signing agreements with Iran could provoke the United States (US), a situation Pakistan cannot afford. Additionally, security issues, especially with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), have negatively affected bilateral trade with Afghanistan. These circumstances push Pakistan to seek trade opportunities with more distant countries like the ASEAN members.

Unfortunately, Pakistan's foreign policy has historically predominantly focused on security, particularly after the war on terror began. East Asia has remained a region of lesser relevance from this perspective. Despite numerous efforts, including the "Vision East Asia" strategy in 2003-2004 and a feasibility study for a free trade agreement in 2009, few policy

initiatives have materialized. With a focus on geo-economics, there was hope that Pakistan's foreign policy would shift towards trade and connectivity, but significant success has yet to be seen.

Pakistan needs to conduct a comprehensive market analysis of ASEAN countries to understand what products are in demand that Pakistan can easily export. Identifying these products and services will help devise an industrial policy to improve productive capacity and export capabilities

Pakistan currently has a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Malaysia and a Preferential Trade Agreement

(PTA) with Indonesia. Although a PTA with Vietnam is underway and an FTA with Thailand is in the final stages of negotiations, these agreements have not yet resulted in substantial export growth. Conversely, trade has increased significantly between Pakistan and ASEAN countries. In 2022, Pakistan's exports to ASEAN were \$3.3 billion, while imports were \$8.83 billion.

Ninety percent of Pakistan's trade is with five countries: Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines. To truly understand the dynamics of bilateral trade, it is necessary to examine the products being traded. For instance, Pakistan's imports are far higher than exports with Malaysia. According to State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), from January 2023 to April 2024, Pakistan imported around \$1.26 billion worth of goods from Malaysia and exported \$661 million worth of goods. This trade imbalance clearly depicts that even though Pakistan has an FTA with Malaysia, it has not maximized the gains from this agreement.

A closer look at the products we are exporting highlights the severity of the matter. Pakistan's top five exports to Malaysia are rice, maize (corn), potatoes, onions, and bed linen. From January 2023 to April 2024, Pakistan exported \$341 million worth of rice, \$67 million worth of maize, \$46 million worth of onions, and potatoes worth of \$27 million. All these products are agricultural and low in the value chain, fetching minimal returns. Bed linen, a processed product from the textile industry, faced numerous bottlenecks and barriers, with only \$26 million worth exported to Malaysia.

Conversely, Pakistan imports high-value goods from Malaysia, which puts pressure on its current

account balance. One major import is palm oil, with Pakistan importing \$685 million worth of palm oil from January 2023 to April 2024, surpassing the total value of its exports to Malaysia during the same period. Other imports include petroleum oil worth \$88 million, automatic data processing machines worth \$27 million, margarine worth \$17 million, and malt extracts worth \$15 million. These products are higher up in the value chain, fetching more dollars per unit.

It is crucial for Pakistan's policymakers to recognize the need for a paradigm shift in foreign policy. It is high time that Pakistan stop's viewing foreign policy solely through a security lens and adopt a geo-economic perspective. Prioritizing economic interests in developing foreign policies is essential

Pakistan needs to devise different policies to improve trade ties with ASEAN countries. The focus should be on increasing trade with other ASEAN members and devising industrial policies tailored to their specific demands. Economic policy should incorporate insights from different governmental departments to create a coherent trade and industrial policy that promotes exports to ASEAN countries.

Pakistan needs to conduct a comprehensive market analysis of ASEAN countries to understand what products are in demand that Pakistan can easily export.

Identifying these products and services will help devise an industrial policy to improve productive capacity and export capabilities. Secondly, Pakistan should shift towards exporting intermediate and finished goods, which generates higher returns compared to agricultural products. If Pakistan has a comparative advantage in agricultural goods, it should focus on finished or processed goods to maximize economic gains. Thirdly, Pakistan needs to focus on import substitution for essential products like palm oil to reduce its imports; thus, relieving pressure on the current account. Lastly, Pakistan must improve its business environment to attract investment and encourage joint ventures with ASEAN countries. By optimizing its FTA with Malaysia, Pakistan can enhance trade connections and create more balanced economic relationships.

In conclusion, it is crucial for Pakistan's policymakers to recognize the need for a paradigm shift in foreign policy. It is high time that Pakistan stop's viewing foreign policy solely through a security lens and adopt a geo-economic perspective. Prioritizing economic interests in developing foreign policies is essential. Identifying countries that can help improve trade, such as ASEAN states, is vital. Additionally, developing an economic policy that complements trade, capital flows, and business environment is necessary. Without well-coordinated policies, Pakistan will struggle to realize the potential gains from partnerships with countries like the ASEAN members.



Hamid Gilani,
Independent Economist

Assessing Pakistan-ASEAN Economic Relations: *Current Trends and Prospects*

By Mommen Khan



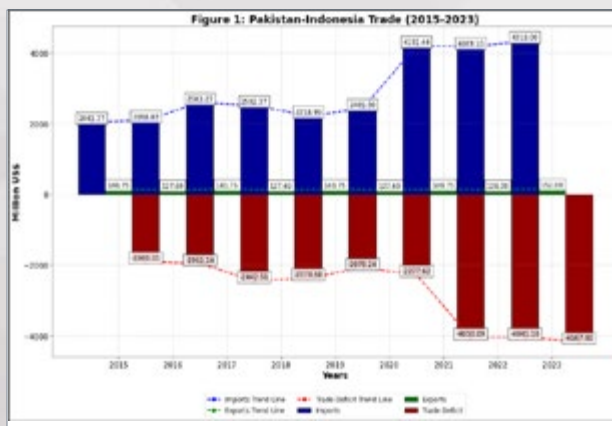
Trade is a cornerstone of any thriving economy's development and diplomatic relations. It drives growth, fosters innovation, and promotes competitiveness, allowing countries to capitalize on their comparative advantage. For Pakistan, trade with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) offers a wide range of opportunities given the bloc's immense economic potential and strategic location as a pivotal nexus between East and West of Asia. However, in the past five years, Pakistan's trade with ASEAN countries has fluctuated, declining to \$8.6 billion in 2023 after a peak of \$11 billion in 2022. Ninety percent of Pakistan's trade is with five major countries: Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, and Indonesia. Unfortunately, this trade is mostly in favor of ASEAN countries, resulting in a persistent trade deficit for Pakistan. The low trade volumes with Vietnam and the Philippines further underscore the need to analyze current trends and explore prospects for improvement in bilateral trade.

Pakistan has several bilateral trade agreements with ASEAN, including a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Malaysia and a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Indonesia. In addition, negotiations are taking place for a PTA with Vietnam and for a FTA with Thailand. Despite these agreements, Pakistan's exports have not increased

significantly, while imports have increased. Moreover, bilateral investment between Pakistan and ASEAN remains minimal, with Pakistan rarely attracting investments from ASEAN members. Although there is room for substantial potential for developmental investment, little progress has been made.

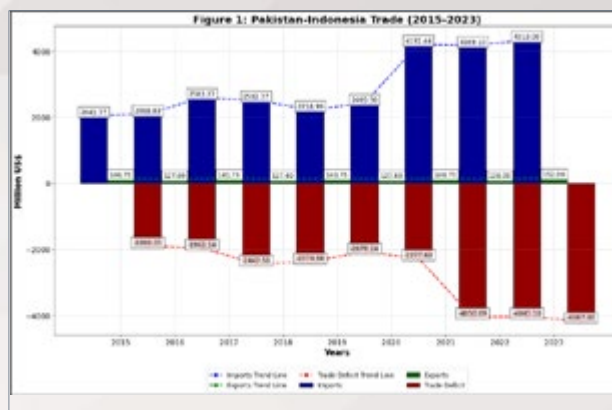
Trade between Pakistan and Singapore has remained in favor of Singapore since 2021. Pakistan primarily imports mechanical appliances, electrical machinery, and mineral fuels from Singapore, while its exports mainly consist of apparel, textile products, pharmaceutical products, and mineral fuels. In FY 2020, Pakistan imported goods worth \$630.77 million from Singapore, with imports increasing slightly to \$965 million in FY 2023. Exports remained stagnant, with Pakistan exporting goods worth \$82 million in FY 2021 and \$81 million in FY 2022

Over the past five years, bilateral trade between Pakistan and Southeast Asian countries has experienced several fluctuations. In 2023, trade with major ASEAN countries reached \$8.6 billion. Indonesia has been Pakistan's significant trade partner, with key exports including rice, alcohol, and citrus, while imports have primarily consisted of palm oil, coal, and unprocessed staple fiber. The trade volume between Pakistan and Indonesia increased from \$2.15 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 to \$4.47 billion in FY2023. However, out of the \$4.47 billion, imports from Indonesia to Pakistan accounted for \$4.61 billion; resulting in a widening trade deficit. Nonetheless, the PTA between these two countries has significantly increased their cooperation. (See Figure 1 for Trends in Bilateral Trade and Deficit).



Source: World Integrated Trade Solutions, Author's Compilation of Data

There is a lack of a comprehensive trade regime between Pakistan and Thailand, resulting in notably lower trade between the two countries as compared to Pakistan's trade with Indonesia. Pakistan's exports to Thailand increased from \$153.2 million in FY2020 to \$912.80 million in FY2023, while imports grew from \$846.78 million in FY2020 to \$1.01 billion in FY2023. The trend reflects a substantial increase in exports and a more moderate rise in imports, leading to a reduction in the trade deficit in FY2023. (See Figure 2 for Trends in Bilateral Trade and Deficit)



Source: World Integrated Trade Solutions, Author's Compilation of Data

Malaysia is another significant trade partner for Pakistan within ASEAN. Despite similarities in history, culture, religion, and society, the trade relationship remains imbalanced. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed on November 6, 2007, and the Malaysia-Pakistan Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (MPCEPA) signed on November 8, 2007, aimed to improve cooperation and liberalize trade and investment regimes. However, Pakistan's major exports to Malaysia, including rice, corn, and house linens, are low-value goods, while imports, such as palm oil, petroleum gas, and margarine, are high-value items. This results in a significant trade deficit. Pakistan's exports to Malaysia increased from \$269.5 million in FY 2020 to \$369 million in FY2023, while imports declined from \$943.2 million in FY2020 to \$890 million in FY2023, leading to a reduction in the trade deficit. (See Figure 3 for Trends in Bilateral Trade and Deficit)

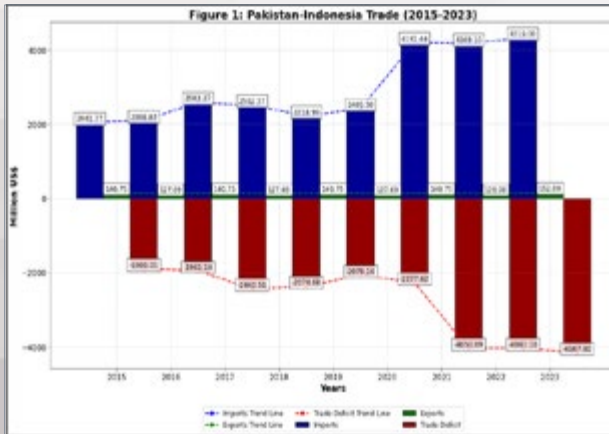


Source: World Integrated Trade Solutions, Author's Compilation of Data

Indonesia has been Pakistan's significant trade partner, with key exports including rice and citrus, while imports have primarily consisted of palm oil, coal, and unprocessed staple fiber. The trade volume between Pakistan and Indonesia increased from \$2.15 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 to \$4.47 billion in FY2023

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\$965 million in FY 2023. Exports remained stagnant, with Pakistan exporting goods worth \$82 million in FY 2021 and \$81 million in FY 2022. These exports included crude oil, refined petroleum, and high-alcohol-content alcohol, while imports from Singapore included scent blends and anti-knocking chemicals. (See Figure 4 for the Trend in Trade and Deficit).



Source: World Integrated Trade Solutions, Author's Compilation of Data

Overall, bilateral trade with major ASEAN countries continues to grow. However, trade is primarily in favor of Southeast Asian countries, with Pakistan running a significant trade deficit that contributes little to its economic growth. Pakistan's total bilateral trade with these countries stands at \$8.3 billion, which pales in comparison to India's \$200 billion and China's \$731 billion bilateral trade with Southeast Asian countries.

Under its East Asia Policy and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, Pakistan is committed to deepening collaboration with ASEAN, offering high potential for future trade engagements. The shift from geopolitics to geo-economics in 2021 has increased the chances for bilateral cooperation. Pakistan's strategic location at the crossroads of regional connectivity presents an opportunity for ASEAN to

access China, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Pakistan can play a vital role in regional connectivity, being the only South Asian country that belongs to three major regional organizations—SAARC, ECO, and SCO—positioning it well for inter-regional connectivity by linking Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East.

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The performance of Pakistan's IT sector is also encouraging. Considering the high demand for IT services in ASEAN, Pakistan can tap into this market by exporting its IT services. In recent years, Pakistan's youth have become active participants in the gig economy through tech-based education, allowing the country to emerge as a leader in the gig economy. Collaborating with ASEAN to enhance the services sector could increase Pakistan's exports to untapped markets. Amidst the influence of the digital economy, learning platforms with ASEAN can play a vital role in further strengthening progress. To achieve this, materializing bilateral agreements is essential.



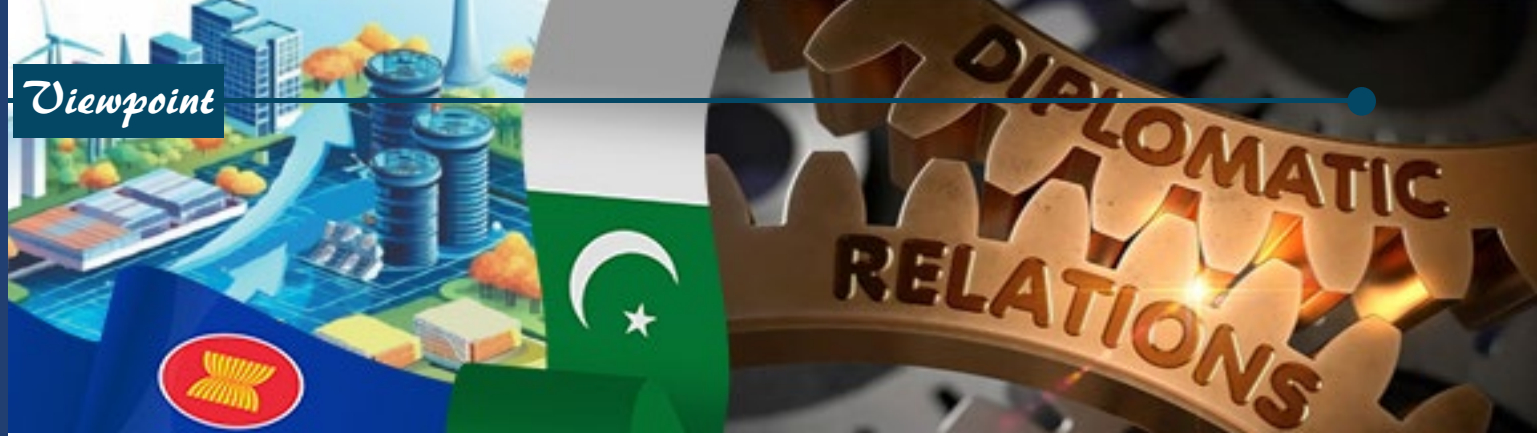
Mommen Khan, Research Officer, Balochistan Think Tank Network

Foreign Direct Investment in Southeast Asia, 2023

Total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows in 2023

Million USD

1		Singapore	159,670
2		Indonesia	21,628
3		Vietnam	18,500
4		Malaysia	8,653
5		Philippines	6,210
6		Thailand	4,548
7		Cambodia	3,959
8		Laos	1,668
9		Myanmar	1,520
10		Timor-Leste	13
11		Brunei	-51



Pakistan-ASEAN Diplomatic Relations: Current State and Future Prospects

By Harsa Kakar

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has emerged as a symbol of peace, security, and stability across Asia. Pakistan has maintained cordial relations with this regional organization for over three decades, which reflects the success of Pakistan's "Vision East Asia" policy. Sharing various common interests, cooperative agreements, and strong diplomatic exchanges, Pakistan-ASEAN relations with each passing day are growing. Pakistan became its Sectoral Dialogue Partner in 1993. A year later, in 1994, the Pakistan-ASEAN Cooperation Fund (APCF) was established with \$ 1 million as its initial amount. The dialogue partnership was further institutionalized with the first official meeting of the ASEAN-Pakistan Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee (APJSCC) on February 05, 1999. In recent years, relations between Pakistan and ASEAN have been elevated by expanding cooperation in areas such as violent extremism, cross-border crimes, counterterrorism, food and agriculture, information technology, tourism, and disaster management. Moreover, to further solidify ties with ASEAN members, Pakistan offers 13 seats annually to students belonging to ASEAN

states in medical and engineering fields, under the Pakistan Technical Assistance Program.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is a key platform for security dialogue in Asia, complementing various bilateral alliances and dialogues formed under the Treaty of Amity of 1976. Established in 1994, the ARF aims to discuss security issues and measures, develop cooperation through confidence-building measures, and engage in preventive diplomacy to strengthen peace and security in Southeast Asia. On July 02, 2004, Pakistan endorsed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and joined the ARF as its 24th member. Pakistan is notably the only ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partner that is also a member of ARF and has actively participated from the outset. Pakistan also hosted a gathering of all ASEAN defense universities in 2021, further cementing its expanding relationships with the region.

Pakistan's Diplomatic Relations with ASEAN Countries

1. Malaysia

Following Malaysia's independence, diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Malaysia were established in 1957. Despite some tense moments during the Indo-Pakistan conflict in 1965, ties between the two

states improved partly due to the Iranian diplomacy. In the 2000s, the Malaysia and Pakistan Closer Economic Engagement Agreement was concluded, initiating bilateral discussions that helped uncover mutually beneficial collaborations as well as led to Malaysia supporting greater engagement between Pakistan and ASEAN members. Moreover, both nations are the members of Commonwealth of Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). These platforms not only help strengthen the bond between the two states but also provide avenues to foster collaboration. Pakistan should focus on improving its economic ties with Malaysia, as it will help create "absolute gains" creating a win-win situation.

2. Indonesia

Indonesia and Pakistan have long maintained diplomatic relations with a focus on multifaceted cooperation, commercial partnerships, and tourism. In 2005, the two countries ratified an extensive economic alliance, including the Indonesia-Pakistan Preferential Trade Agreement (IPPTA). They have also conducted bilateral consultations to strengthen relations and encourage exchanges in politics, economy, defense, and security. In 2022, both states hosted a third round

of discussions on Palestine and Kashmir, showcasing their shared commitment to addressing global issues of mutual concern.

3. Singapore

Pakistan and Singapore established diplomatic ties in 1968, based on shared views on regional and global concerns. Both countries provide mutual support in multilateral forums such as the United Nations (UN), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Commonwealth, and G-7. However, there have been few significant bilateral leadership visits since 2004. A key moment in bilateral relations were the meeting between the two Prime Minister's in January 2020, where both states decided enhancing economic cooperation and exploring new avenues for trade and investment.

4. Vietnam

Pakistan and Vietnam have maintained cordial diplomatic relations since 1972. There here have been several high-level meetings and visits between the two countries, including a visit by President of Pakistan to Vietnam in 2001. During the 29th ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial Conference held in Phnom Penh, both nations reviewed their bilateral relations and expressed satisfaction with the progress, while emphasizing the potential for further development and cooperation in various sectors.

5. Thailand

Since 1951, Pakistan and Thailand have maintained diplomatic ties with an emphasis on mutual economic and cultural understanding. Thailand's "Look West Policy" and Pakistan's "Vision East Asia Policy" complement each other, strengthening their relations. Broad communication exists between the two nations, with 600 Thai students studying in Pakistan and 75,000 Pakistani tourists visiting Thailand annually.

6. Philippines

Pakistan and the Philippines have

enjoyed cordial relations since 1949, marking 75 years of collaboration. They have established a framework for Policy Consultations Talks and have exchanged high-level visits. The two countries have 25 cooperative agreements and are both members of the ARF, ASEAN, and UN.

7. Myanmar

Pakistan and Myanmar have maintained diplomatic relations since 1948, exchanging high-level visits and engaging in economic transactions. Under its CLMV Program and Technical Assistance Programme (PTAP), Pakistan exports electronic equipment to Myanmar. Both nations recently engaged at the 29th AFR and committed to further strengthen their ties.

On July 02, 2004, Pakistan endorsed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and joined the ARF as its 24th member. Pakistan is notably the only ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partner that is also a member of ARF and has actively participated from the outset. Pakistan also hosted a gathering of all ASEAN defense universities in 2021, further cementing its expanding relationships with the region

8. Cambodia

Since 1952, Pakistan and Cambodia have maintained diplomatic relations, with a \$40 million trade surplus under their CLMV and PTAP Assistance Programs. Both states recently met at the 29th ARF summit to reinforce their diplomatic ties for mutual benefit.

9. Brunei Darussalam

Since Brunei's independence in 1984, both states have enjoyed cordial relations. They have established institutional frameworks such as the Pakistan-Brunei Joint Economic Commission

and the Pakistan-Brunei Joint Working Committee on Defence Cooperation to further solidify their ties.

10. Lao PDR

Pakistan and Lao PDR established diplomatic relations in 1965, engaging in bilateral political consultations and trade. In 2021, the bilateral trade between the two countries reached \$948,734, with key exports including electronics and medical supplies.

Recommendations to Improve Relations with ASEAN Countries

1. Under the "Vision East Policy," Pakistan should focus diplomatically on this region, recognizing its true geo-economic and geopolitical potential.
2. Pakistan should prioritize increasing its trade with rapidly growing ASEAN economies, especially with Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia.
3. Pakistan should increase security and strategic agreements within the ASEAN forum to enhance the fight against terrorism.
4. Both ASEAN countries and Pakistan should expand their relations by prioritizing cultural exchanges and educational programs, such as semester exchange programs and scholarships.

In a nutshell, Pakistan must build on its relations with ASEAN members to further strengthen its ties with the bloc. Deepening these relationships can provide Pakistan with valuable opportunities for economic growth, trade diversification, and regional cooperation.



Harsa Kakar, Research Assistant, Balochistan Think Tank Network



Pakistan-Malaysia Relations: A Vision for the Future

By Sher Jan Khan

Pakistan and Malaysia share a history of cordial relations, marked by mutual respect, shared values, and a commitment to maintain regional and global peace and security. Bilateral relations between the two states were first established shortly after Malaysia gained independence in 1957. These two nations have long recognized the importance of trade, diplomacy and strategic partnerships in promoting peace and prosperity. In recent years, their relationship has evolved to reflect changing geopolitical dynamics, growing economic ambitions, and shared interests in regional cooperation, especially within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Over the decades, both countries developed a relationship rooted in shared religious and cultural ties and common positions on international issues. The relations between Pakistan and Malaysia

rapidly developed in the 1980s and 1990s, as both states focused on strengthening trade ties. In the post-9/11 era, cooperation between the two states intensified, focusing on counterterrorism, multilateral diplomacy, and economic collaboration. Several high-level visits from both sides took place, including Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's, the then Malaysian Prime Minister, trip to Pakistan in 2019, reaffirming the commitment to enhance bilateral relations.

Trade and economic relations between Pakistan and Malaysia have seen significant growth. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, bilateral trade between the two nations reached approximately \$1.6 billion in 2023, marking a steady increase from \$1.19 billion in 2017. However, there exists a huge imbalance when it comes to Pakistan and Malaysia trade relations, where the latter holds a favorable position, evident from the fact that in 2023,

the bilateral trade between Malaysia and Pakistan was \$1.42 billion, with Pakistan's exports to Malaysia accounting for \$461.9 million. Pakistan's major imports from Malaysia include palm oil, electronics, rubber products, machinery, chemicals, wood and timber products, and automobiles and parts while Pakistan's exports to Malaysia include textiles, leather goods, rice, fruits and vegetables, medicinal products, sports goods, and seafood. Nonetheless, both countries acknowledge the need to diversify their trade relations, exploring new sectors such as IT services, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural technology which offer promising dividends in the longer run.

Malaysia has become a leading global center for halal products, offering halal cuisine at major international gatherings like the Olympics. Pakistan can work with Malaysia to develop and export halal foods and halal cosmetics.

Partnerships in this field have the potential to boost bilateral trade and establish both nations as the leaders in the halal market.

Trade and economic relations between Pakistan and Malaysia have seen significant growth. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, bilateral trade between the two nations reached approximately \$1.6 billion in 2023, marking a steady increase from \$1.19 billion in 2017

Pakistan is one of the top countries sending students to Malaysia for higher education, with over 5,000 Pakistani students currently enrolled in Malaysian universities. This educational exchange can be further strengthened through joint research initiatives and scholarship programs. Furthermore, Malaysia's Technical Vocational and Educational Training (TVET) program offers a model for Pakistan to adopt, emphasizing skill development to meet the demands of the modern workforce. In addition, Malaysia's emergence as a hub for computer chip production presents an opportunity for collaboration in IT production and manufacturing. Pakistan, with its growing IT industry, can partner with Malaysia to develop "Made in Pakistan" IT products.

The political and diplomatic relationship between Pakistan and Malaysia is characterized by close cooperation on multilateral platforms. Both countries share a commitment to advancing Muslim solidarity, peace, and development. While Pakistan is not a member of ASEAN, it has actively sought to deepen ties with the bloc, particularly through its status as a Sectoral Dialogue Partner since 1993. Malaysia, as

a founding member of ASEAN, can play a pivotal role in vis-à-vis Pakistan's pending request to get Full Dialogue Partner status, especially as it will be assuming the ASEAN Chair in 2025. Moreover, Pakistan and Malaysia have consistently supported each other on international platforms, particularly within the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Malaysia has repeatedly advocated for peaceful resolutions to regional conflicts, aligning closely with Pakistan's stance vis-à-vis resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

Malaysia can also facilitate Pakistan's engagement with ASEAN's economic and political structures. ASEAN's commitment to regional economic integration aligns with Pakistan's aspirations to diversify its trade and investment partnerships, offering opportunities for Pakistani businesses to access Southeast Asian markets. The bloc's experience in fostering dialogue and cooperation among diverse nations could serve as a model for Pakistan's engagement with its own neighbors, promoting regional peace and stability.

In the last few decades, defense collaboration Pakistan and Malaysia has substantially increased. In 2018, Pakistan and Malaysia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Defense Cooperation, which aims to promote collaboration in defense technologies, training, and capacity building. In October 2023, joint military exercises were held of the two militaries in Malaysia. Moreover, there exists a significant potential for increased collaboration between the two states in areas such as cybersecurity, intelligence sharing, and counter-terrorism operations. The changing geopolitical

landscape in the Indo-Pacific region too encourages Pakistan and Malaysia to pursue deeper strategic partnerships, particularly within the larger framework of ASEAN's security initiatives.

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As Pakistan and Malaysia look towards the future, there is immense potential for deepening their bilateral relations. The evolving dynamics of global politics, economic opportunities in Southeast Asia, and the strategic significance of both nations offer a strong foundation for enhanced cooperation. However, there are also challenges that must be addressed. On the economic front, both countries need to work towards reducing trade imbalances and diversifying their economic engagement. Initiatives such as joint ventures in technology, education, and tourism can serve as catalysts for growth. Also, Pakistan must continue to enhance its engagement with ASEAN, using Malaysia as a conduit to strengthen its ties with the broader Southeast Asian region.



Sher Jan Khan, Research Assistant, China Pakistan Study Centre, ISSI



Unlocking Tourism: A New Frontier for Pakistan-ASEAN Relations

By Tayyaba Khurshid

Tourism is considered a vital pillar in elevating inter-state relations, as it plays a key role in fostering people-to-people exchanges, which, in turn, helps develop a positive image of a country. It also significantly contributes to economic growth, as demonstrated by its \$639.3 billion contribution to the collective Southeast Asian economy in 2023. Despite Pakistan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) enjoying longstanding cordial ties, tourism exchanges between them remain limited. Strengthening these ties can open new avenues for collaboration at both the state and societal levels.

Both Pakistan and ASEAN

countries have immense tourism potential, boasting rich historical sites, breathtaking natural landscapes, and vibrant cultural diversity. However, relatively few tourists travel between Pakistan and ASEAN member states. Contributing factors include limited direct flights, low public awareness of available tourist destinations, and visa-related challenges. Also, Pakistan's political instability and media portrayals of it as an unsafe destination have dampened the interest of ASEAN tourists in visiting the country.

In 2022, the travel and tourism sector contributed 5.9% to Pakistan's GDP, underscoring its economic potential. Therefore, the Government of Pakistan

should prioritize developing its tourism industry overall, and in particular, fostering tourism exchanges between Pakistan and ASEAN. This could significantly enhance Pakistan's economic growth. Conversely, ASEAN's tourism sector, which contributes approximately 12% to the region's GDP, would also benefit from increased Pakistani visitors - creating a mutually beneficial situation.

Pakistan's diverse array of tourist attractions makes it an appealing destination for international travelers. From the ancient UNESCO World Heritage sites of Taxila and Mohenjo-Daro to the scenic natural landscapes of Swat, Hunza, and Skardu in the north, Pakistan has much to offer.

The vibrant Mughal architecture of Lahore, the coastal beauty of Karachi, and the unique charm of Gwadar in Baluchistan all add to the country's tourism appeal. Notably, the World Tourism Organization included Pakistan in its list of best-performing destinations in its World Tourism Barometer report. Similarly, ASEAN is home to some of the world's most iconic tourist destinations. Thailand's pristine beaches, Indonesia's Bali Island, and Malaysia's Petronas Towers offer a blend of culture, history, and modernity. Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Long Bay attract millions of global visitors, while Singapore is renowned for its world-class infrastructure and diverse attractions.

In 2022, the travel and tourism sector contributed 5.9% to Pakistan's GDP, underscoring its economic potential. Therefore, the Government of Pakistan should prioritize developing its tourism industry overall, and in particular, fostering tourism exchanges between Pakistan and ASEAN. This could significantly enhance Pakistan's economic growth. Conversely, ASEAN's tourism sector, which contributes approximately 12% to the region's GDP, would also benefit from increased Pakistani visitors – creating a mutually beneficial situation

The tourism potential on both sides presents a significant opportunity to deepen bilateral relations and enhance economic revenues. Promoting tourism could also lead to better cultural understanding

and stronger bilateral ties. Governments should capitalize on this by sponsoring social media campaigns and exchange programs that highlight tourist destinations and foster people-to-people connections.

Tourism, often overlooked as a key sector, can significantly impact bilateral relations. Increased tourism fosters cultural understanding, breaks down stereotypes, and promotes mutual trust. Positive experiences shared by tourists can ignite greater interest, encouraging educational exchanges, employment opportunities, and investment in local products. Closer ties between educational institutions, joint research initiatives, and scholarships can further strengthen collaboration, while people-to-people contact deepens trust and fosters lasting friendships.

The Pakistan-ASEAN Cooperation Fund (PACF), which Pakistan has supported since 1994, could play a key role in financing tourism initiatives. Organizing international tourism fairs, cultural exchange programs, and academic exchanges would further raise awareness and build positive perceptions. Collaboration between provincial tourism departments and Pakistan's Foreign Office could enhance these efforts by hosting seminars and conferences that highlight tourism opportunities. Pakistan can also learn from ASEAN countries about developing its tourism infrastructure, improving security for foreign tourists, and enhancing hospitality services. Public-private partnerships and investments in resorts, transportation, and infrastructure are essential to strengthening Pakistan's tourism sector. By focusing on tourism as a multi-sectoral area of cooperation, both Pakistan and ASEAN can build

a well-integrated and prosperous region, fostering trust and cooperation at deeper levels.

Several steps can be taken to enhance tourism exchanges between Pakistan and ASEAN. Improving air connectivity and offering discounted airfares, particularly through direct flights, would significantly boost tourist flows. Cooperation between airlines and tourism boards could facilitate this process. Simplifying visa processes and promoting tourism through online outreach campaigns would raise awareness of each side's unique attractions.

Pakistan can also learn from ASEAN countries about developing its tourism infrastructure, improving security for foreign tourists, and enhancing hospitality services. Public-private partnerships and investments in resorts, transportation, and infrastructure are essential to strengthening Pakistan's tourism sector

Tourism remains a largely untapped area of cooperation. The recent meeting between ASEAN's Deputy Secretary-General for Political and Security Community and Pakistan's Ambassador to ASEAN in March 2024 highlighted tourism as a priority sector. By focusing on tourism, both sides can unlock new opportunities for collaboration, economic growth, and stronger diplomatic ties.



Tayyaba Khurshid, Research Officer, Center for International Strategic Studies, AJK



Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Assistance Frameworks: Potential for Pakistan-ASEAN Collaboration

By Hiba Malik

The countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) lie at the intersection of several tectonic plates and are bordered by both the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This geographical location makes the region highly vulnerable to natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis. The region has a history of devastating disasters according to the Asia-Pacific Disaster Report by UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the average annual losses (AAL) from natural hazards in Southeast Asia have quadrupled, reaching \$86.5 billion by 2019. Droughts account for 60% of these losses, followed by floods at 22.5% and cyclones at 14%.

Similarly, South Asia, including Pakistan, is among the region's most susceptible to natural hazards globally. The number of natural disasters in the region

rose from 126 in the 1970s to 406 in the 2010s, affecting an estimated 590 million people and causing damages exceeding \$100 billion. South Asia's vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by poor institutional frameworks and weak economic support systems, while Southeast Asia faces transboundary disaster risk hotspots. Given the impact of climate change, the frequency and intensity of natural disasters are expected to increase in both regions. Pakistan and ASEAN share a history of cooperation in trade, security, and education. The growing urgency to mitigate natural disasters presents a critical opportunity for both regions to collaborate on disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Pakistan has faced numerous catastrophic disasters, with the 2005 earthquake and the 2022 floods standing out as the most devastating. The 2005 earthquake claimed between 87,000 and

100,000 lives and left 3.5 million people homeless, damaging 780,000 buildings. Furthermore, Pakistan has experienced 28 major floods since its independence, affecting 616,558 square kilometers and causing economic losses exceeding Rs39 billion. The floods of 2010 and 2022 highlighted critical issues such as the climate-security nexus, the gendered impacts of climate change, and the psychological trauma faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs). Recent climate-induced events, such as heatwaves and droughts, have further underscored Pakistan's vulnerability to disasters.

In response to these challenges, Pakistan established the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in 2007, as part of its efforts to enhance disaster preparedness and response. The NDMA, along with provincial disaster management bodies, developed comprehensive DRR strategies, including early warning systems

and post-disaster recovery plans. Similarly, ASEAN established the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) in 2005, creating a regional framework for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. The AADMER reflects ASEAN's commitment to strengthening community resilience through knowledge and resource sharing, ensuring that member states are better equipped to handle emergencies. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) plays a central role in coordinating disaster response and capacity building across member states.

Both Pakistan and ASEAN were also signatories to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), aimed at crafting a roadmap to disaster-proof development gains. The HFA was later converted into the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), to which both Pakistan and ASEAN are now committed. These shared commitments offer a foundation for collaboration, enabling both parties to pool their knowledge and resources to create a more tailored and focused resilience framework.

Pakistan's extensive experience in managing large-scale disasters makes it a valuable partner for ASEAN in DRR and disaster risk management (DRM). By collaborating on capacity-building initiatives, such as joint training programs and disaster simulations, both regions can enhance their preparedness for future emergencies. Pakistan can contribute its post-disaster recovery expertise, while ASEAN can share its frameworks for community resilience and disaster coordination. Joint capacity-building exercises, including simulations for earthquakes, floods,

and other disasters, would allow disaster management agencies to test their response strategies in real time. These drills would improve coordination between national disaster management authorities, including the NDMA and AHA Centre, and identify areas for improvement in disaster preparedness.

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Given the transnational nature of many natural disasters, a coordinated regional response system is essential. Pakistan and ASEAN could collaborate on streamlining humanitarian aid delivery, improving logistical coordination, and ensuring that resources are mobilized swiftly during emergencies. A formal partnership between the NDMA and AHA Centre would serve as a platform for improving disaster preparedness, providing timely support, and developing more resilient communities.

Both Pakistan and ASEAN face growing threats from climate change-induced disasters, such as floods, droughts, and extreme weather events. By collaborating on research, data sharing, and policy development, both regions can strengthen their resilience to future climate-related disasters. This collaboration could include developing sustainable land-use practices, implementing community-based adaptation measures, and protecting vulnerable populations. Moreover, Pakistan and ASEAN can jointly explore the climate-security nexus and develop strategies to mitigate the social and political consequences of climate-induced displacement. Through such cooperation, both regions can minimize the long-term impacts of climate change on their populations and infrastructure.

Collaboration between Pakistan and ASEAN would not only enhance disaster risk reduction but also boost their humanitarian response capabilities. Pakistan's experience in managing large-scale humanitarian crises, such as those resulting from the 2022 floods, could provide valuable insights for ASEAN in improving its response frameworks. Likewise, ASEAN's well-established regional coordination mechanisms, such as the AHA Centre, could support Pakistan in building more resilient disaster management systems. Formalizing partnerships through agreements and frameworks would establish the necessary infrastructure for long-term collaboration. Such partnerships would also foster regional integration, addressing shared environmental, social, and economic challenges more effectively.



Hiba Malik, Research Fellow, Hanns Seidel Foundation



ASEAN–Pakistan Relations: A Way Forward

By Dr Mukesh Kumar Khatwani



The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), after the European Union, is one of the largest and most influential regional organizations, playing a vital role in the development of its member states. Founded in 1967 by five Southeast Asian nations, ASEAN was established to promote political, economic, and social cooperation in the region. Today, ASEAN is a political and economic union of ten countries, with a population of 673 million and a combined GDP of approximately US\$3.6

trillion, which constitutes around 3.5% of global GDP. The primary objectives of ASEAN include accelerating economic growth, social progress, and cultural development, while also promoting regional peace, security, and stability through adherence to principles of justice and the rule of law.

Pakistan has historical links with Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, with which it shares historical connections dating back to Indonesia's independence movement. Pakistan has

maintained friendly relations with Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and other ASEAN countries, but its progress in strengthening ties with the region has been slow, largely due to Cold War-era political alignments. Pakistan became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner (SDP) of ASEAN in 1993 and acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). In 2004, Pakistan joined the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to enhance regional security cooperation. Despite these diplomatic efforts, Pakistan's economic ties with ASEAN have not kept pace with its political engagement.

In recent years, ASEAN and Pakistan have expanded cooperation beyond diplomacy. Both sides have discussed collaboration in areas such as counterterrorism, agriculture, science and technology, disaster management, and tourism. Pakistan's trade volume with ASEAN reached approximately \$11.8 billion in 2022, which, although an improvement, remains modest compared to India's \$200 billion trade with ASEAN. Despite this, Pakistan sees ASEAN as a vital partner for its economic development, particularly in context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which could be instrumental in promoting trade and investment with ASEAN countries.

As a Sectoral Dialogue Partner, Pakistan can explore further opportunities for cooperation with ASEAN in key areas such as trade, investment, environment, science and technology, tourism, and human resource development. Pakistan has also proposed additional areas of cooperation, including information technology, agricultural research, and transport and communication. More importantly, Pakistan aims to enhance its ties with ASEAN, including the possibility of

upgrading to a Dialogue Partner status, which would allow for deeper engagement across economic, political, and cultural domains.

In recent years, ASEAN and Pakistan have expanded cooperation beyond diplomacy. Both sides have discussed collaboration in areas such as counterterrorism, agriculture, science and technology, disaster management, and tourism

One of the significant challenges for Pakistan in enhancing its relations with ASEAN is India's influence. India enjoys a strategic partnership with ASEAN, with bilateral trade amounting to over \$200 billion, and strong ties with key ASEAN members like Singapore and Indonesia. Singapore remains one of the major investors in India and a key defense partner for ASEAN. Furthermore, India's strategic location reinforces its importance to ASEAN. Another critical challenge is the growing US-China strategic competition in Southeast Asia. As China deepens its economic ties with ASEAN, the US has expressed concerns about Beijing's influence in the region. This rivalry forces ASEAN countries to balance relations between these two major powers, often creating difficult choices. For Pakistan, navigating this complex dynamic requires maintaining strong ties with both China and ASEAN, while avoiding alignment in the broader geopolitical competition.

Measures to Improve Ties with ASEAN Member States

1. Learn from ASEAN's Development: ASEAN's rapid economic development provides valuable lessons for Pakistan, particularly in sectors like agriculture and manufacturing, where Pakistan can collaborate and adopt best practices.
2. Strengthen Diplomatic Ties: Pakistan needs to enhance its diplomatic engagement with ASEAN to increase its influence on regional and global issues. ASEAN's consensus-based approach to diplomacy could help Pakistan counterbalance India's narrative, especially on sensitive issues like Kashmir, where India's relations with ASEAN members play a role.
3. Aim for Dialogue Partner Status: Pakistan should strive to achieve Dialogue Partner status with ASEAN. This would allow Pakistan to engage more deeply with ASEAN on issues of mutual interest, including economic cooperation, security, and cultural exchange.
4. Leverage China's Support: Pakistan, a close ally of China, can work with Beijing to strengthen its relations with ASEAN. China's growing trade with ASEAN, which exceeds \$975 billion, has increased Beijing's influence in the region. Pakistan can benefit from China's support in multilateral forums and enhance its strategic ties with ASEAN countries through collaborative projects.
5. Improve Ties with ASEAN Members: While Pakistan enjoys good relations with countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, it should work to improve its ties with other ASEAN members.

6. Encourage ASEAN Investment: ASEAN countries can be encouraged to invest in Pakistan's CPEC projects. Promoting Pakistan as a destination for ASEAN investments could help drive mutual economic growth.

Leverage China's Support: Pakistan, a close ally of China, can work with Beijing to strengthen its relations with ASEAN. China's growing trade with ASEAN, which exceeds \$975 billion, has increased Beijing's influence in the region. Pakistan can benefit from China's support in multilateral forums and enhance its strategic ties with ASEAN countries through collaborative projects

7. Leverage Youth Potential: ASEAN and Pakistan both have large youth populations. By fostering educational and cultural exchanges, such as scholarship programs, academic partnerships, and youth forums, Pakistan can deepen its cultural ties with ASEAN and build long-term relationships.

By implementing these measures, Pakistan can strengthen its ties with ASEAN, enhancing economic, political, and cultural cooperation for the mutual benefit of both parties. Developing a balanced and proactive approach will be key to deepening engagement with ASEAN and reaping the benefits of this important regional partnership.



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Pakistan-ASEAN Relations: A Critical Analysis

By Amna Ejaz Rafi



Pakistan's relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is often viewed through the lens of its 'Vision East Asia' policy. This policy focuses on strengthening economic ties with Southeast Asian countries. During the initial years of the Vision East Asia policy, frequent visits by Pakistan's political leadership to ASEAN countries helped position Pakistan as an attractive destination for investment. A notable example is former Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's visit to the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok, where he delivered a lecture highlighting Pakistan's vision of progress, peaceful cooperation, and socio-economic development.

Pakistan's consistent engagement with ASEAN countries led to its status as a Sectoral Dialogue Partner (SDP) of ASEAN. Currently, Pakistan-ASEAN trade stands at approximately US\$11 billion. ASEAN countries have invested in various sectors in Pakistan, including energy, construction, telecommunications, and the motor industry. For example, the Proton car in Pakistan is manufactured in collaboration with Malaysia. Malaysia and Indonesia are also the leading suppliers of palm oil to Pakistan. Beyond these areas of cooperation, Pakistan has proposed further collaboration in fields such as agricultural research, information technology, and the digital economy. In partnership with the Asia Pacific

headquarters of Meta (Facebook's parent company) in Singapore, Pakistan has launched the 'Stars Programme,' an initiative aimed at building the capacity of young entrepreneurs in Pakistan. These developments suggest a promising future for Pakistan-ASEAN relations.

However, Pakistan has yet to secure Full Dialogue Partner (FDP) status with ASEAN, primarily due to its declining economic situation. To overcome this hurdle, Pakistan must strengthen its economic foundation, which requires political stability. Furthermore, the perception of Pakistan's security environment poses a significant challenge to improving Pakistan-ASEAN relations. The persistent threat posed by terrorism has undermined investors' confidence

in Pakistan. Nonetheless, Pakistan should convey to the ASEAN business community that terrorism is a global issue that requires a united political approach. Pakistan is continuously playing its role to once and for all eradicate this menace. To attract ASEAN investors, Pakistan can propose investment destinations such as Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Lahore, and Sialkot - cities that are relatively peaceful and offer a conducive environment for investment.

In partnership with the Asia Pacific headquarters of Meta (Facebook's parent company) in Singapore, Pakistan has launched the 'Stars Programme,' an initiative aimed at building the capacity of young entrepreneurs in Pakistan. These developments suggest a promising future for Pakistan-ASEAN relations

With a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$3.6 trillion, ASEAN is the fifth-largest economy in the world. Economic cooperation with ASEAN countries presents an opportunity for Pakistan to not only invest but also learn from the industrialization of nations like Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Pakistan should explore new areas of trade cooperation, such as exporting surgical instruments and sports goods manufactured in Sialkot to the ASEAN market. Improving bilateral trade with individual ASEAN member states will also be instrumental in gaining support for FDP status within ASEAN.

Pakistan's political orientation

toward the ASEAN region, beyond the bilateral domain, is equally important in the regional context. In the backdrop of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), ASEAN countries should be encouraged to invest in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) being developed under the CPEC framework. Regular high-level political interactions with ASEAN leadership should be a priority. Through political and diplomatic channels, Pakistan should promote its narrative of geo-economics.

The message should emphasize that economic development is a strategy to counteract extremist mindsets and reduce adversarial tendencies in the region. The emerging regional dynamics, in which CPEC will connect East Asia with South Asia, will provide ASEAN countries access to South and Central Asia. Maritime connectivity through the Gwadar seaport can facilitate the trade of high-value manufactured goods and technology from ASEAN countries to Central Asia.

Beyond trade, tourism and cultural interaction are equally important in enhancing societal ties between Pakistan and ASEAN countries. The Indus Valley civilization and Buddhist archaeological sites in Pakistan can be significant attractions for tourists from ASEAN countries. Pakistan needs to actively promote its rich heritage to the ASEAN audience. To achieve this, the government should organize cultural exchange programs with ASEAN countries. Pakistani artists and media professionals should be given opportunities to visit ASEAN countries, fostering cultural ties.

Education is another area that can serve as a bridge

for promoting people-to-people interaction between Pakistan and the ASEAN region. The government, in coordination with the education sector, should facilitate schools and universities in establishing connections with academic institutions in ASEAN countries. Some ASEAN countries, like Malaysia, host campuses of European universities, such as the University of Nottingham in England. Pakistani students should be encouraged to explore educational opportunities in ASEAN countries.

Pakistan's political orientation toward the ASEAN region, beyond the bilateral domain, is equally important in the regional context. In the backdrop of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), ASEAN countries should be encouraged to invest in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) being developed under the CPEC framework. Regular high-level political interactions with ASEAN leadership should be a priority. Through political and diplomatic channels, Pakistan should promote its narrative of geo-economics

Lastly, the Pakistani diaspora in the ASEAN region should be actively engaged to promote Pakistan's image. The Pakistani community in ASEAN countries can play a pivotal role in connecting with local entrepreneurs and encouraging investments in Pakistan.



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ASEAN's Model of Success: A Blueprint for SAARC's Revival

By Mahrukh Mateen

The international system, consisting of various states, requires efficient framework to foster growth, promote regional integration and social harmony. Regional organisations such as the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) were established to ensure stability and cooperation among member states. While SAARC was created to promote peace, cooperation, and stability in the South Asia, political clashes and conflicting interests have hampered its ability to achieve

these goals. In contrast, ASEAN, formed to integrate Southeast Asian states, has successfully transformed into a region characterized by economic cooperation, political stability, and a strong sense of regional identity. By addressing regional conflicts and promoting collaboration, ASEAN has set a precedent for reducing disputes and fostering state integration. While SAARC has made some progress, it can learn valuable lessons from ASEAN's strategies to improve regional integration and dispute resolution.

Both ASEAN and SAARC were formed to address the geopolitical

and socio-economic challenges specific to their regions. ASEAN, established in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, sought political stability and economic cooperation in Southeast Asia during the Cold War. Eighteen years later, in 1985, SAARC was created to promote regional cooperation and development in South Asia, bringing together Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

The nature of disputes in Southeast Asia differs from those in South Asia. At the time of ASEAN's

formation, Indonesia had unresolved territorial disputes with Malaysia and the Philippines over North Borneo (Sabah). However, progress was made during ASEAN's first summit in 1976, resulting in the ASEAN Concord and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). This agreement laid the foundation for a regional security regime, where members agreed to avoid pursuing goals through force.

ASEAN, formed to integrate Southeast Asian states, has successfully transformed into a region characterized by economic cooperation, political stability, and a strong sense of regional identity. By addressing regional conflicts and promoting collaboration, ASEAN has set a precedent for reducing disputes and fostering state integration

In contrast, South Asia's interstate disputes range from full-scale wars and low-intensity conflicts to terrorism and regional tensions. SAARC has played a limited role in managing these conflicts, which has impeded its progress. In 22 years, only 14 SAARC summits have been held. The 19th summit, scheduled for November 2016 in Pakistan, was canceled citing security concerns, whereas in reality it was due to the geopolitical polarization between India and Pakistan. South Asian states lack a cohesive regional identity and show little commitment to regional norms.

ASEAN's focus on economic prosperity, cultural rejuvenation, and regional integration was formalized in 1976. The establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) in 1992 propelled ASEAN's trade volume from \$44.2 billion in 1993 to \$95.2 billion in 2000, demonstrating an annual growth

of 11.6%. This success was driven by effective economic policies supported by regional cooperation. The creation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 further strengthened economic ties, aiming to establish a single market and production base that facilitates the flow of goods, services, and skilled labor.

On the other hand, SAARC has struggled to replicate this success. The South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) was introduced in 1995, followed by the South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2005. While these agreements were intended to enhance cooperation, they have largely remained symbolic, and the ambitions of SAARC have yet to be realized.

Both SAARC and ASEAN hold significant strategic and regional importance. However, SAARC has been ineffective in delivering on its initiatives. To regain its standing and make progress on the international stage, SAARC can draw valuable lessons from ASEAN. ASEAN's success is rooted in the commitment and consensus of its member states, along with a pragmatic approach to collaboration, even in the face of historical or political disputes. For example, Indonesia, despite having the highest GDP in ASEAN \$1.3 trillion, does not seek to dominate other member states and emphasizes mutual consensus. In contrast, India, as the largest economy in SAARC, has been perceived as striving for regional dominance, often creating friction with its neighbors.

Furthermore, ASEAN's structured implementation of initiatives and effective measures have garnered international interest and unity, encapsulated in its motto: "One Vision, One Community, One Identity." SAARC, too, holds

immense potential to unlock opportunities in South Asia by prioritizing economic integration, reducing trade barriers, and enhancing people-to-people connectivity. These efforts can help address the political conflicts, historical grievances, and lack of determination that have hindered SAARC's progress.

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In a nutshell, while both ASEAN and SAARC were formed with similar goals of fostering regional cooperation and stability, ASEAN's pragmatic approach and commitment to collaboration have helped it become a successful model of integration. SAARC, by learning from ASEAN's experiences and adopting similar strategies, can overcome its challenges and build a more integrated, peaceful, and prosperous South Asia.



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Harnessing Economic Synergies: Pakistan's Strategic Engagement with ASEAN

By Saleem Abbas



and human resource development. It also facilitated Pakistan's participation in ASEAN's strategic discussions, particularly on regional security and economic collaboration.

A significant milestone in this partnership was the

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), established on August 8, 1967, has developed into a formidable regional bloc. With ten member states and Timor-Leste set to join by 2025, ASEAN has become a symbol of regional unity under the motto "One Vision, One Identity, One Community." Its strength lies not only in political cohesion but also in its economic vitality. Ranking as the fifth-largest economic bloc globally, ASEAN boasts a population of over 673 million and a combined GDP of \$3.67 trillion. This dynamism presents ASEAN as an attractive

partner for Pakistan, offering significant economic opportunities. Strengthening trade relations with ASEAN could address Pakistan's economic challenges, particularly by tapping into this vast market for its key export sectors, such as agriculture, textiles, and leather.

Pakistan's relationship with ASEAN has evolved considerably since it was granted Sectoral Dialogue Partner status in 1993 during the 26th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting. This status provided Pakistan with a foundation for cooperation in trade, science and technology, environmental sustainability, narcotics control,

establishment of the ASEAN-Pakistan Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee (APJSCC) on February 5, 1999. This committee laid the institutional framework for advancing collaboration across key areas, including counterterrorism, agriculture, information and communication technology (ICT), tourism, and connectivity. The APJSCC remains a cornerstone for strengthening Pakistan-ASEAN ties, fostering dialogue, and driving initiatives that benefit both regions.

Pakistan's engagement with ASEAN has resulted in notable achievements in trade relations,

particularly with Malaysia and Indonesia. The signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Malaysia in 2007 marked a critical step, resulting in bilateral trade reaching \$1.25 billion by 2022. Similarly, the conclusion of a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Indonesia in 2012 contributed to a significant increase in bilateral trade, which reached \$4.47 billion in 2023.

While these agreements underscore ASEAN's growing importance as a trade partner for Pakistan, the overall trade relationship remains imbalanced. Of the total bilateral trade volume of \$8.83 billion in 2022, Pakistan's exports to ASEAN accounted for only \$3.3 billion. An asymmetrical trade relationship is further highlighted by the fact that 90% of Pakistan's trade with ASEAN is concentrated among five member states: Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia. To illustrate this further, Pakistan's trade with Singapore in 2022 totaled \$1.25 billion, with exports amounting to just \$146 million, largely comprising crude petroleum, while imports—dominated by refined petroleum—stood at \$1.07 billion. Similarly, bilateral trade with Indonesia amounted to \$4.47 billion, with palm oil comprising the bulk of Pakistan's imports. These figures underscore the urgent need for Pakistan to diversify its export base and address its trade deficit with ASEAN.

To mitigate this imbalance, Pakistan must prioritize sectors with high export potential. Its agriculture, textile, and leather industries offer significant opportunities for growth within ASEAN markets. In FY 2023-24, Pakistan's agricultural and food product exports surged to

\$8 billion, a 37% increase from the previous year. This growth was driven by exports of sesame seeds, fruits, meat, spices, and mangoes. Similarly, the leather industry exhibited a positive trend, with leather footwear exports rising by 14.07% to \$142 million in 2023. ASEAN represents an ideal market for these sectors. By leveraging its comparative advantages, Pakistan can not only boost exports but also stimulate broader economic growth.

Pakistan must focus on enhancing the competitiveness of its exports, diversifying its export products, and expanding trade agreements within the region. A stronger emphasis on value-added goods, particularly in textiles, agriculture, and leather, could enable Pakistan to capture a larger share of the ASEAN market

The trade agreements with Malaysia and Indonesia exemplify the potential for mutually beneficial collaboration. Moving forward, Pakistan must focus on concluding additional trade agreements with other ASEAN member states, particularly those with whom trade remains underdeveloped, such as Brunei and Laos. Establishing stronger economic ties with these nations would not only increase Pakistan's export base but also attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), providing much-

needed capital for socio-economic development. Additionally, the 7th APJSCC meeting in 2023 reaffirmed the need for deeper collaboration, particularly through the ASEAN-Pakistan business conferences. With over 400 companies participating, these events have laid the foundation for future trade agreements, particularly among micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) from both regions.

Nevertheless, Pakistan's trade with ASEAN remains skewed toward imports, particularly from major ASEAN economies like Indonesia and Singapore. The current trade imbalance poses a significant challenge that necessitates a multifaceted approach. Pakistan must focus on enhancing the competitiveness of its exports, diversifying its export products, and expanding trade agreements within the region. A stronger emphasis on value-added goods, particularly in textiles, agriculture, and leather, could enable Pakistan to capture a larger share of the ASEAN market. Moreover, improving infrastructure, logistics, and connectivity between Pakistan and ASEAN nations could further facilitate trade and strengthen economic ties.

With strategic partnerships and targeted efforts, Pakistan can maximize the benefits of its relationship with ASEAN, improve its trade balance, attract foreign investment, and secure its economic future. As ASEAN continues to play a pivotal role in global trade, Pakistan's engagement with this dynamic bloc will be essential to realizing its economic potential.



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Realizing the Cultural Potential in Strengthening Pakistan-ASEAN Relations

By Farazay Zia

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional organization established on August 8, 1967. It comprises of ten member states: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. While Timor-Leste is on track to become a full member by 2025, marking an expansion of the bloc. ASEAN's primary objectives include promoting socio-economic development, maintaining regional security, and fostering cooperation among its members.

Pakistan's relationship with ASEAN has unlocked numerous opportunities for its political and

socio-economic development. Through various cooperative agreements and diplomatic engagements, Pakistan has contributed to addressing issues such as regional security with the support of ASEAN members. Two key agreements include the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) and the Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat Terrorism, which aim to enhance peace, security, and cultural exchanges between the regions.

Pakistan's journey toward geo-economic engagement has opened new pathways for success across multiple domains. In 1993, Pakistan was granted the prestigious status of Sectoral

Dialogue Partner (SDP) by ASEAN. Over the years, this partnership has facilitated cooperation in many areas including technology, foreign direct investment (FDI), environmental sustainability, human resource development, and tourism.

Tourism has emerged as a key area of focus in Pakistan's engagement with ASEAN, given its potential to boost economies and promote cultural exchange. ASEAN countries have significantly benefited from tourism, with the sector contributing US\$241 billion to ASEAN's GDP in 2022. This demonstrates the substantial role that tourism plays vis-à-vis socio-economic growth and connectivity in the region.

Pakistan, with its rich cultural heritage and breathtaking landscapes, has much to offer in the realm of tourism. For instance, Hunza Valley, located between the Himalayan and Karakoram mountain ranges, is known for its lush farmlands and year-round appeal as a tourist destination. Attabad Lake, formed after a landslide in 2010, is another iconic site that continues to draw visitors with its beauty. Other scenic destinations include Skardu, Deosai Plains, Naran Kaghan,

Swat Valley, and the world-famous Fairy Meadows, leading to K2, the world's second-highest mountain.

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Pakistan is also home to ancient civilizations and historical sites. Taxila, an important archaeological site containing relics from the Persian, Greek, and Central Asian civilizations. It also houses significant Buddhist artifacts, providing an important link to the six ASEAN member states where Buddhism is widely practiced. Mohenjo Daro, built around 2500 BC and discovered in 1921, is another UNESCO World Heritage Site that highlights the greatness of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. Similarly, Takht-i-Bahi, a Buddhist monastery presents an opportunity for deeper cultural connections with ASEAN countries, particularly those with Buddhist populations.

Pakistan's historical and religious heritage offers an appealing platform for ASEAN tourists, and

the potential for cultural exchange is vast. Pakistan should leverage these sites to attract more tourists from ASEAN countries, many of which share a common historical and religious heritage, particularly in Buddhism.

ASEAN states have worked tirelessly to promote tourism, with numerous treaties and initiatives aimed at boosting the sector. Brunei is known for its grand Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque, while Cambodia attracts millions of visitors to its famous Angkor Wat temple, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Indonesia is home to over 17,000 islands, including iconic tourist sites like Komodo National Park, Borobudur Temple, and Mount Bromo. Meanwhile, Malaysia boasts the tropical Mount Kinabalu, the tallest peak in Southeast Asia, and the world-renowned Petronas Towers. Each ASEAN country offers unique attractions that reflect their rich histories and natural beauty.

Laos is famous for its waterfalls and stunning landscapes, while Singapore is known for its remarkable architectural achievements. The Philippines offers tropical islands, and Myanmar is rich in heritage sites, historical forts, and temples. Vietnam, with its vibrant culture and diverse cuisine, also stands out as a tourist hotspot in Southeast Asia.

The essence of Pakistan's partnership with ASEAN, particularly through tourism, lies in fostering harmonious and multilateral relationships. Enhancing tourism between ASEAN and Pakistan will not only boost GDP but also strengthen trade and connectivity. Tourism can serve as a powerful vehicle for promoting cultural exchange,

particularly through educational initiatives such as scholarships and academic partnerships. By fostering these exchanges, students from ASEAN and Pakistan will have the opportunity to enhance their academic skills while immersing themselves in each other's social and cultural environments.

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In a nutshell, promoting tourism between Pakistan and ASEAN offers enormous potential for both economic growth and cultural diplomacy. This partnership can pave the way for expanded trade, deeper diplomatic ties, and greater understanding between the peoples of Pakistan and ASEAN, ultimately strengthening the region's geopolitical and socio-economic landscape. By capitalizing on shared heritage, tourism, and educational initiatives, both ASEAN and Pakistan stand to gain significantly from deeper engagement.



Farazay Zia,
Independent Researcher

Average Age of Population in Southeast Asia, 2023

This statistic depicts the median age of the population in Southeast Asia in 2023. The median age divides the population into two equal groups, indicating that half of the population is younger and the other half is older than this age

		Years			
1	 Timor-Leste	20.9	7	 Malaysia	30.8
2	 Laos	24.4	8	 Vietnam	32.8
3	 Philippines	25.5	9	 Brunei	33.2
4	 Cambodia	27.1	10	 Thailand	40.2
5	 Indonesia	29.4	11	 Singapore	48.2
6	 Myanmar	29.6			



Source: Seasia Stats gathers data from reliable and current sources

How Many Years of Independence ASEAN Countries Celebrate in 2024?

PHILIPPINES

12 June 1898



126
YEARS

INDONESIA

17 Aug 1945



79
YEARS

VIETNAM

2 Sept 1945



79
YEARS

MYANMAR

4 Jan 1948



76
YEARS

CAMBODIA

9 Nov 1953



71
YEARS

MALAYSIA

31 Aug 1957



67
YEARS

SINGAPORE

9 Aug 1965



59
YEARS

LAOS

2 Dec 1975



49
YEARS

BRUNEI

1 Jan 1984



40
YEARS

TIMOR-LESTE

20 May 2002



22
YEARS



Economic Forecast in Southeast Asia, 2028

Based on the Gross Domestic Product, estimates by the IMF in January 2024

In billion USD

