

Overview of ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation

The ASEAN Plus Three (APT) cooperation process began in December 1997 with the convening of an Informal Summit among the Leaders of ASEAN and China, Japan and the ROK at the sidelines of the 2nd ASEAN Informal Summit in Malaysia. The APT Summit was institutionalised in 1999 when the Leaders issued a Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation at the 3rd APT Summit in Manila. The Joint Statement for the first time determined the main objectives, principles and further directions of APT countries cooperation. In the Joint Statement, the APT Leaders resolved to strengthen and deepen East Asia cooperation at various levels and in various areas, particularly in economic and social, political and other fields.

2. Eight years later, at the 11th APT Summit in 2007 in Singapore, the 2nd Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation called “Building on the Foundations of ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation” was adopted. The Statement reaffirmed that the APT process would remain as a main vehicle towards the long-term goal of building an East Asian community, with ASEAN as the driving force. The APT Cooperation Work Plan (2007-2017) was accordingly endorsed to serve as the master plan to enhance APT cooperation for a period of ten years. The succeeding Work Plan covering the period 2018 – 2022 was adopted on 7 August 2017 in Manila by the 18th APT Foreign Ministers Meeting.

3. Since then the APT framework has become an important element for fostering East Asian regionalism. The APT cooperation has broadened and deepened to cover a wide range of areas of political and security; transnational crime ;trade and investment; finance; tourism; agriculture and forestry; energy; minerals; micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; science, technology and innovation; environment; rural development and poverty alleviation; social welfare; active ageing; youth; women; civil service; labour; culture and arts; information and media; education; disaster management; public health; and connectivity. The APT process has also developed into a full-fledged cooperation framework with 65 mechanisms (1 summit, 16 ministerial, 20 Senior Officials, 1 CPR Plus Three, 2 Director-General, 20 technical level meetings and 5 other track meetings) coordinating APT cooperation.

4. At the 20th APT Commemorative Summit in November 2017 in Manila, the APT Leaders issued the Manila Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of APT Cooperation, which marked a new chapter in APT cooperation.

Political-Security Cooperation

5. Against the backdrop of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, at the APT Summit in December 1998, the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) I was launched. The EAVG I final report titled “East Asia community of Peace, Prosperity and Progress”, which was submitted to the APT Summit in 2001, laid a solid groundwork for the future direction of East Asian regional cooperation. The EAVG I wished to inspire East Asian peoples and governments to work towards building an “East Asian community” that would address the region’s future challenges and advance mutual understanding and trust.

6. One decade after the EAVG submitted its report, the EAVG II was established in 2011 to take stock of the APT cooperation activities and studied the future direction of the APT cooperation. The EAVG II Report, which recommended the realisation of an East Asia Economic Community by 2020, was submitted to the 15th APT Commemorative Summit in Phnom Penh on 19 November 2012.

7. Cooperation on non-tradition security matters is undertaken under the purview of the APT Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC+3) and the APT Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC+3). The 10th AMMTC+3 Consultation held in Bangkok on 28 November 2019 reaffirmed the APT commitment to further strengthening the APT cooperation in preventing and combating transnational crime as well as addressing non-traditional security issues such as trafficking in persons, cybercrime, terrorism and violent extremism and illicit drug trafficking that continue to threaten our region, in order to ensure peace and stability.

8. In the area of illicit drug trafficking, the SOMTC+3 Working Groups on Narcotics, under the ambit of ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters (ASOD), continues to serve as the platform for drug enforcement officials to exchange best practices in combating the scourge of illicit drugs.

Economic and Finance Cooperation

9. ASEAN's trade with the Plus Three Countries retained its momentum despite challenges derived from uncertainties in the global economy. In 2018, trade between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries increased by 6.8 percent to USD 869.1 billion or 31.0 per cent of ASEAN's total merchandise trade. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows from the Plus Three countries into ASEAN were valued at USD 37.9 billion in 2018, accounting for 24.5 per cent of total FDI inflows to ASEAN which increased by 9.9 percent from the previous year.

10. In order to strengthen economic cooperation among the APT countries, the East Asia Business Council (EABC) which was established in April 2004 in Kuala Lumpur continues to strengthen cooperation among the private sector and entrepreneurs of the East Asia countries. The EABC shared with the 22nd AEM Plus Three Meeting held on 10 September 2019 in Bangkok the results of the Business Outlook and Trade Facilitation Measures Survey. The Outlook provides numerical data reflecting the impact of the existing trade facilitation measures to the business sectors, as well as the Compiled Best Practices on the Improvement of Supply Chain Connectivity in ASEAN Plus Three.

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

12. AMRO was established as an international organisation on 9 February 2016. The APT countries have also reiterated their commitment to further strengthening the CMIM as an essential part of the regional financial safety net, AMRO as the regional macroeconomic and financial surveillance unit, ABMI as for developing local currency

bond markets across the region; and the agreement on the “Yokohama Vision”, as guiding principles for a more resilient and integrated APT.

13. The APT countries saw robust cooperation in food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector under the APT Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF+3). The APT strategic areas of cooperation have been focusing on strengthening food security, biomass energy development, sustainable forest management, climate change mitigation and adaptation, animal and plant health disease control, strengthening of information and knowledge network and exchange, research and development, and other cross-cutting issues. The APT Cooperation Strategy on Food, Agriculture and Forestry (APTCS) 2016 – 2025 is aimed to contribute to the realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and to advance APT collaboration in the priority areas of agriculture, fisheries, livestock and forestry sectors.

14. The key element of APT cooperation in food security is the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR). APTERR was established under the APTERR Agreement signed by the Ministers of the Agriculture and Forestry of the ASEAN Plus Three at their 11th Meeting on 7 October 2011 in Jakarta. The main objectives of APTERR is to strengthen food security, poverty alleviation, and malnourishment eradication among its members without distorting normal trade. The Protocol to Amend APTERR which aims to extend the annual contributions to the operational cost of APTERR for the period of 2018-2022 was signed by AMAF+3 Ministers on 11 October 2018 in Viet Nam.

15. The APT cooperation in tourism has also been enhanced. The APT countries signed a memorandum of cooperation (MOC) on APT Tourism Cooperation on 22 January 2016 in Manila, which serves as the key instrument for more action-oriented cooperation, encouraging APT countries to enhance facilitation of travel and tourist visits, development of quality tourism and strengthening linkages and cooperation among education and training institutions. To implement the MOC, the APT Tourism Cooperation Work Plan 2018-2020 was adopted at the 17th APT Tourism Ministers Meeting (M-ATM+3) on 26 January 2018 in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

16. On energy cooperation, a wide range of projects and activities have been regularly carried out, including the APT forum on oil market and natural gas; the APT forum on energy security; the APT forum on new and renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation. At the annual Senior Officials Meeting on Energy Plus Three (SOME+3) and the ASEAN Ministers on Energy Plus Three (AMEM+3), the APT countries exchanged views on energy security, oil market and natural gas, and energy efficiency and renewable energy promotion and deployment. AMEM+3 have agreed to support the implementation of the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC) 2016-2025.

17. Cooperation in minerals, which is undertaken under the APT Senior Officials Meeting on Minerals (ASOMM+3), covers areas such as cross-border geological correlations, geological mapping, mineral resources database and information system, and mineral conservation. The 9th ASOMM+3 Consultations held on 10 November 2016 adopted the ASOMM+3 Minerals Cooperation Work Plan 2016-2020 which focuses on supporting the four strategic areas of the ASEAN Mineral Cooperation Action Plan (AMCAP)-III in order to enhance trade and investment and

strengthen cooperation and capacity building for sustainable minerals development in the APT region.

18. On science and technology, since its establishment in 2006, the ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology Plus Three (COST+3) has met eight times to discuss recent developments on cooperation in science, technology and innovation as well as note updates on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policies of the Plus Three countries. Regular activities under COST+3 include the APT Junior Science Odyssey, ASEAN+3 Centre for the Gifted in Science Board of Directors Meeting and ASEAN+3 Teachers' Workshop and Students' Camp for the Gifted in Science.

Socio-Cultural Cooperation

19. Cooperation on environment continues to progress under the mechanisms of the APT Senior Officials Meeting on Environment and the APT Environment Ministers Meeting. A number of key projects have been implemented with funding from the APT Cooperation Fund, such as the APT Youth Environment Forum (AYEF), which has been held five times since 2010. The fifth AYEF was held on 8-13 September 2019 in Thailand, under the theme 'Clean up our Sea, Change our Future'.

20. Sustainable development is considered an important area for cooperation by the APT countries. The 19th APT Summit in September 2016 adopted the APT Leaders' Statement on Promoting Sustainable Development Cooperation, which aims to advance the complementarity between the implementation of UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 to uplift the living standards of people in ASEAN and Plus Three countries over the next decades.

21. The issue of marine debris was also highlighted at the 21st APT Summit held in November 2018, which welcomed the APT Marine Plastic Debris Cooperative Action Initiative to enhance cooperation on combatting marine plastic debris.

22. Cooperation in poverty alleviation is pursued under the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Plus Three (SOMRDPE+3), which serves as a platform for policy exchange and sharing of good practices and programme innovations to reduce poverty. One of the APT key projects on poverty alleviation is the exchange programmes to empower village leaders, which have been organised since 2013 as an effort to facilitate direct exchange of knowledge, expertise and learnings at the community/village level.

23. In the area of social welfare and development, the APT countries continue to exchange views and experiences at the annual Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development Plus Three (SOMSWD+3) and at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting for Social Welfare and Development Plus Three (AMMSWD+3), which is held once every three years. The APT have been commitment to working together to promote and enhance the accessibility of social protection measures that cater to the needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, which include persons with disabilities and multiple disabilities, older persons, and children living in areas that are most at risk from natural and human-induced disasters, among others.

24. Concerning the issue of ageing, the 19th APT Summit held in September 2016 adopted an APT Statement on Active Ageing, which promotes greater inclusion for active aging in national policy making and action plans, including active employment policies, social protection, welfare and healthcare services, as well as mainstreaming those policies and action plans across government sectors.

25. The APT cooperation on gender issues was institutionalised with the convening of the Inaugural Meeting of the APT Committee on Women (ACW+3) in November 2009. Since then, the ACW+3 Meeting has been held annually to exchange views on best practices on right-based programmes on poverty reduction among women and other approaches in reducing the feminisation of poverty. The 10th ACW+3 Meeting was held on 24 October 2018 in Ha Noi.

26. In the area of youth, the APT cooperation has two mechanisms for sharing information and discussing cooperation on youth, namely the APT Ministerial Meeting on Youth (AMMY+3) and the APT Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY+3). The 8th SOMY+3 held on 4 May 2018, Jakarta, focused on the review of the programmes and projects implemented by China, Japan, and Republic of Korea with ASEAN.

27. In the area of civil service, cooperation is undertaken under the purview of the APT Conference on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM+3). The Inaugural ACCSM+3, held on 29 October 2010 in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, adopted the Luang Prabang Joint Declaration on APT Civil Service Cooperation. Subsequently, four APT Heads of Civil Service Meeting have been held; the Third Meeting held on 17 November 2016 in Manila, adopted the ACCSM+3 Work Plan 2016-2020 and the Rules of Procedure of the Senior Officials Meeting for the APT Cooperation on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM+3 SOM). The Fourth Meeting held on 23 October 2018 in Singapore noted that the implementation of the ACCSM+3 Work Plan 2016-2020 was on track with about 50 per cent of 18 projects being completed or on-going.

28. The APT cooperation on labour is progressing well. Ten APT Labour Ministers Meetings have been held since it was established in 2001. At the 10th ALMM+3 on 29 November 2018 in Kuala Lumpur, the Ministers agreed to strengthen partnerships to enhance cooperation in labour sectors and learning from one another in the promotion of green jobs and green skills in the region.

29. The APT countries continue to strengthen their cooperation on culture. At the 7th Meeting of the APT Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA+3) held on 25 August 2016 in Bandar Seri Begawan, the Ministers were of the view that there was a potential to further foster long-term partnership between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries by advancing and expanding city-level cultural exchange through joint cultural activities and art festivals under the ASEAN City of Culture and the East Asian Cultural Cities. The APT Work Plan on Cooperation in Culture and the Arts 2018-2021 was adopted at the 8th AMCA+3 Meeting held on 24 October 2018 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

30. Cooperation in information and media is pursued under the purview of the APT Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI+3). The Work Plan on Enhancing APT Cooperation through Information and Media 2018-2023 was adopted at the 5th AMRI+3 held on 10 May 2018 in Singapore.

31. The APT cooperation in education strengthens steadily. The 1st APT Education Ministers Meeting (APT EMM) held on 4 July 2012 in Yogyakarta 2012 held on 12 September 2014 in Vientiane adopted the APT Plan of Action on Education (2010-2017). The 4th APT EMM held on 1 November 2018 in Nay Pyi Taw, adopted the ASEAN Plus Three Guidelines on Student Exchange and Mobility, and APT Guidelines on Transcripts and Supplemental Documents for Academic Records of Exchange Students. The APT countries also promote student mobility in higher education with quality assurance in the APT countries.

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

33. The APT cooperation in health is progressing well. Efforts have been made to implement areas of APT health cooperation, which include universal health coverage, utilising ICT for healthcare, non-communicable diseases, traditional and complementary medicine, active ageing, human resources for health, responding to communicable and emerging health threats and food safety, as well as issues related to antimicrobial resistance, ending all forms of malnutrition, and disaster health management. The 21st APT Summit in November 2018 adopted the APT Leaders' Statement on Cooperation against Antimicrobial Resistance.

34. At their 8th Meeting held on 30 August 2019 in Siem Reap, APT Health Ministers were committed to continuing efforts on the implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR), Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies (APSED III) to enhance ASEAN Member States and Plus Three countries' capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to public health threats. They agreed to strengthen joint efforts in advocating, facilitating and implementing relevant social and economic interventions in addressing non-communicable diseases and its risk factors. They also reaffirmed commitments to the United Nations SDGs to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by 2030 which includes financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

35. At the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak in our region, the APT health sector was the first cooperative mechanism to come up with a response in January 2020. Utilising the established ASEAN Plus Three health mechanisms, health counterparts from China, Japan and the Republic of Korea have been in regular communication and consultation with ASEAN Member States on technical exchanges, resources mobilisation and technical assistance, and disseminating accurate information and countering fake news and misinformation.

36. A Special ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit on COVID-19 was held via video conference on 14 February 2020. The APT Leaders adopted a Joint Statement reaffirming the importance of solidarity and working collectively together in the fight against COVID-19, and the commitment to strengthening cooperation through the

APT framework to contain the pandemic and protect the people. They also reaffirmed commitment to ensure macroeconomic and financial stability, by keeping markets open for trade and investment, and ensuring supply chain particularly for the flow of essential goods such as medical supplies, medicines and food.

37. Apart from Track 1 cooperation in various areas outlined above, the APT countries also pursue networking of Track 2 and Track 1.5. Track 1.5 cooperation has been convened through the East Asia Forum (EAF) annually since 2003, covering various topics, such as energy and food security, deepening of economic cooperation, strengthening of social and cultural cooperation, narrowing development gaps in rural and urban communities, enhancing connectivity, non-traditional security cooperation, and industry 4.0. Track 2 networking is pursued through the Network of East Asian Think Tanks (NEAT) which submits its recommendations to the annual APT Summit for notation.

