

Overview of ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation

Introduction

The ASEAN Plus Three (APT) cooperation process began in December 1997 with the convening of an Informal Summit among the Leaders of ASEAN and China, Japan and the ROK at the sidelines of the 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 ASEAN Plus Three Process would remain as the main vehicle towards the long-term goal of building an East Asian community, with ASEAN as the driving force. The APT Cooperation Work Plan (2007-2017), formulated to serve as the master plan to enhance APT cooperation in a comprehensive and mutually beneficial manner for the next ten years, was endorsed. 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, 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. East Asian nations then felt the need to mutually cooperate in overcoming the crisis, which served as a momentum to recognize an East Asian identity.

6. 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.

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

8. 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). Nine AMMTC+3 have been held thus far. The 9th AMMTC+3 Consultation was held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, on 1 November 2018 noted some areas that could be strengthened, including counter-terrorism, border control, trafficking in persons, cybercrime and asset recovery.

9. 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

10. ASEAN’s trade with the Plus Three Countries retained its momentum despite challenges derived from uncertainties in the global economy. Total trade between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries in 2017 amounted to USD 813.5 billion which accounted for 31.6 per cent of ASEAN’s total trade. In the same year, the total foreign direct investment (FDI) flows from the Plus Three countries into ASEAN reached USD 29.9 billion, accounting for 21,8 per cent of total FDI inflow to ASEAN.¹

11. In order to strengthen economic cooperation among the APT countries, the East Asia Business Council (EABC) which was established in April 2004 in Kuala Lumpur continues to strengthen cooperation among the private sector and entrepreneurs of the East Asia countries. The EABC launched the East Asia Business Exchange (EABEX) Portal at the 5th East Asia Business Forum on 18 June 2013 in Tianjin, China.

12. 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

¹ ASEAN Trade Statistics Database; ASEAN FDI Database; ASEAN Macroeconomic Database and IMF World Bank Outlook Database.

Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO) and the Asian Bond Market Initiative (ABMI) being in the centre of the cooperation.

13. 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.

14. At the 21st APT Summit on 15 November 2018 in Singapore, the Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing economic cooperation and encouraged closer collaboration on ASEAN’s priorities and projects through the APT Economic Cooperation Work Programme 2019-2020.

15. The APT recognised the importance of tourism as an instrument for promoting people-to-people connectivity. 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 further 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. The 18th M-ATM+3 was held on 18 January 2019 in Ha Long City, Viet Nam. The Ministers looked forward to the implementation of the APT Tourism Cooperation Work Plan 2018-2020, including the ASEAN Plus Three Workshop on Environmental Management Standard for Sustainable Tourism Development, the ASEAN-Japan Tourism Investment Seminar 2019, and the 1st ASEAN Plus Three Regional Conference on Facilitation and Simplification of Travel and Visa.

16. The APT countries saw robust cooperation in food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector under the ASEAN Plus Three Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF+3). The APT strategic areas of cooperation have been focusing on strengthening food security, biomass energy development, sustainable forest management, climate change mitigation and adaptation, animal and plant health disease control, strengthening of information and knowledge network and exchange, research and development, and other cross-cutting issues. AMAF+3 adopted on 29 September 2017 the APT Cooperation Strategy on Food, Agriculture and Forestry (APTCS) 2016 – 2025. The APTCS is envisioned 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.

17. Thailand has granted the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) Secretariat legal personality and privileges to support its role in enhancing food security. The Protocol to Amend APTERR which aims to extend the annual contributions to the operational cost of APTERR for the next five-year period (2018-2022) was signed by AMAF+3 Ministers in the 18th AMAF+3 on 11 October 2018 in Viet Nam. The APT countries also continue to strengthen the ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS).

18. A wide range of projects and activities on energy cooperation under the APT framework have been regularly carried out, which include, among others, the APT forum on oil market and natural gas; the APT forum on energy security; the APT forum on new and renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation. At the annual Senior Officials Meeting on Energy Plus Three (SOME+3) and the ASEAN Ministers on Energy Plus Three (AMEM+3), the APT countries exchanged views on energy security, oil market and natural gas, and energy efficiency and renewable energy promotion and deployment. The 15th AMEM+3 held on 29 October 2018 in Singapore agreed to continue to support the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC) and looked forward to the preparation of APAEC Phase 2: 2021-2025 which would commence in 2019. The 1st ASEAN+3 Clean Energy Roundtable Dialogue was held on 26 June 2018 in Singapore.

19. Cooperation in minerals, which is undertaken under the APT Senior Officials Meeting on Minerals (ASOMM+3), covers areas such as cross-border geological correlations, geological mapping, mineral resources database and information system, and mineral conservation. The 9th ASOMM+3 Consultations held on 10 November 2016 adopted the ASOMM+3 Minerals Cooperation Work Plan 2016-2020. The 11th ASOMM+3 Consultation was held on 5 December 2018 in Manila.

20. 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. The 7th APT Junior Science Odyssey was held on 29 July-3 August 2018 in Kuala Lumpur.

Socio-Cultural Cooperation

21. Cooperation on environment continues to progress. The 15th APT Environment Ministers Meeting held on 12 September 2017 in Brunei Darussalam discussed future strategic cooperation in areas of biodiversity, climate change, environmental education, environmental science and technology, and environmentally sustainable cities, amongst others.

22. Several environmental projects have been implemented with funding from the APT Cooperation Fund, such as the Youth Environment Forum (AYEF), which has been held four times since 2010. The fifth AYEF will be held on 8-13 September 2019 in Thailand, under the theme 'Clean up our Sea, Change our Future'. AYEF 2019 aims to enhance awareness on the issue of marine debris and its local and global impacts among youth in APT countries. 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.

23. The APT Leaders' Statement on Promoting Sustainable Development Cooperation was adopted by the APT Leaders at the 19th APT Summit in September 2016. The Statement is aimed to advance the complementarity between the implementation of UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ASEAN

Community Vision 2025 to uplift the living standards of people in ASEAN and Plus Three countries over the next decades.

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

25. 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 5th AMMSWD held on 30 September 2016 in Jakarta reaffirmed the APT 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. An APT Statement on Active Ageing was adopted at the 19th APT Summit in September 2016.

26. 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. Two activities were carried out in June 2019 in Bangkok, namely APT Capacity Building on Implementation of Rights-based/needs-based and Life Cycle Approach on Care of Older Persons and the Regional Conference on “Promoting Decent Work for Older Persons in ASEAN+3”.

27. 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.

28. 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.

29. 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 3rd 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 4th 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.

30. On labour issues, 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. Two activities were conducted in 2018, namely the Seminar on Migrant Workers' Contribution to an East Asia Economic Community Perspectives from ASEAN Plus Three at National and Regional Level held on 6-7 April in Siem Reap, Cambodia; and (ii) the Conference on Sharing Best Practices on Harnessing Industry Involvement in Development of Higher Level Qualifications held on 7-8 November in Manila.

31. The APT countries continue to strengthen their cooperation on culture. At the 7th AMCA+3 held on 25 August 2016 in Bandar Seri Begawan, the Ministers were of the view that there is a potential to further foster long-term partnership between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries by advancing and expanding city-level cultural exchange through joint cultural activities and art festivals under the ASEAN City of Culture and the East Asian Cultural Cities. 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.

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

33. 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 implementation of the Plan of Action has been reported to the APT EMM since then. The 4th APT EMM held on 1 November 2018 in Nay Pyi Taw, noted with satisfaction the achievements made in the implementation of the Plan of Action and welcomed the progress in formulating future directions of cooperation made in the Workshop to Develop the ASEAN Plus Three Plan of Action on Education 2018–2025 held on 10–11 October 2018 in Tokyo.

34. The areas under the APT Plan of Action on Education which witnessed much progress are promotion of higher education cooperation and enhancing quality assurance and recognition. A working group called the APT Working Group on Mobility of Higher Education and Ensuring Quality Assurance of Higher Education was established in October 2013 to promote mobility and quality assurance of higher education. Six meetings of the Working Group have been held since then. The Working Group has produced two important documents, namely the APT Guidelines on Student Exchange and Mobility, approved by the 3rd APT EMM and the APT Guidelines on Transcripts and Supplemental Documents for the Academic Records of Exchange Students, adopted by the 4th APT EMM.

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

36. 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.

37. 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.

