

## 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 11<sup>th</sup> APT Summit in 2007 in Singapore, the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 coordinating APT cooperation.

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

5. A Special APT Summit on COVID-19 was held via videoconference on April 14<sup>th</sup> 2020 with the issuance of a Joint Statement affirming the commitment to strengthen APT cooperation in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic through existing APT mechanisms. The Plus Three countries extended support for ASEAN’s initiatives in mitigating the impacts of the pandemic, including through the reallocation of USD 1 million from the ASEAN+1 Cooperation Fund to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund, as well as support for the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supply, among others.

## **Political-Security Cooperation**

6. Against the backdrop of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, at the APT Summit in December 1998, the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) I was launched. The EAVG I final report entitled “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. One decade later, the EAVG II was established in 2011 to take stock of the APT cooperation activities and studied the future direction of the APT cooperation and the report was submitted to the 15<sup>th</sup> APT Commemorative Summit in Phnom Penh on 19 November 2012.

7. The APT continues to deepen political and security dialogue through the annual APT Summit and high-level consultations. The 24th APT Summit held on 7 October 2021 via videoconference reaffirmed the APT commitment to strengthening dialogue and cooperation in combatting transnational crimes and addressing non-traditional security issues, such as trafficking in persons, cybercrime, countering terrorism and violent extremism and illicit drug trafficking.

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). The 10<sup>th</sup> 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.

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), serves as the platform for drug enforcement officials to exchange best practices in combating the scourge of illicit drugs.

10. The APT countries participate actively in the ASEAN-led mechanisms including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), and East Asia Summit (EAS) with the view to ensuring peace, security and stability in the region.

## **Economic and Finance Cooperation**

11. The APT underlines the importance of trade and investment relations between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries. In 2020, trade between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries recorded a decrease of 1.7 per cent, with reaching a total value of USD 875.1 billion. Despite the decrease in trade value, this represented 32.9 per cent of ASEAN’s total trade last year. Meanwhile, total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows from the Plus Three Countries into ASEAN were valued at USD 22.0 billion in 2020, accounting for 16.7 per cent of total FDI inflows into ASEAN.

12. In view of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the APT emphasises the need to strengthen APT collaboration in advancing the region’s recovery from the adverse

socio-economic effects of the pandemic. The ASEAN Plus Three Plan of Action (APT POA) on Mitigating the Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic was endorsed at the 23<sup>rd</sup> AEM Plus Three Consultations on 28 August 2020, to implement the APT Economic Ministers' Joint Statement on Mitigating the Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic adopted on 4 June 2020. Following on, the 23<sup>rd</sup> APT Summit held on 14 November 2020 adopted the APT Leaders' Statement on Strengthening APT Cooperation for Economic and Financial Resilience in the face of Emerging Challenges to realise the commitment of the APT countries to cooperate and collaborate on overcoming the challenges brought about by COVID-19.

13. At the 24<sup>th</sup> AEM+3 Consultations held in 13 September 2021, the APT endorsed the APT Economic Cooperation Work Programme 2021-2022 and welcomed the inclusion of Development of Digital Economy as a new work area under the Work Programme 2021-2022.

14. 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. During the EABC's consultation at the 23<sup>rd</sup> AEM Plus Three Consultations, the EABC recommended strengthening cooperation in food and agriculture reserve. The EABC also shared the results of its 5th EABC Survey covering businesses' attitude towards digital technology, and updated the Meeting on the publication of the e-Book on East Asia Customs to provide an integrated source of information on customs procedures for businesses, especially MSMEs.

15. APT cooperation in finance and monetary is pursued 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), which was established as an international organisation on 9 February 2016, and the Asian Bond Market Initiative (ABMI) being in the centre of the cooperation.

16. The APT Finance Ministers' and Central Bank Governors met at their 25<sup>th</sup> meeting held on 12 May 2022 via videoconference to exchange view on current developments and the outlook for the global and regional economies, as well as policy response to risks and challenges. In their Joint Statement, the APT Finance Ministers and the Central Bank Governor agreed to further deepen the collaboration in enhancing regional financial cooperation through the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralism (CMIM), AMRO, Asian Bond Market Initiative (ABMI), and Asian Future Initiatives.

17. 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.

18. 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 aimed 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.

19. The APT cooperation in tourism was enhanced with the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) on APT Tourism Cooperation on 22 January 2016 in Manila. The MOC serves as the key instrument for more action-oriented cooperation, encouraging APT countries to enhance facilitation of travel and tourist visits, development of quality tourism and strengthening linkages and cooperation among education and training institutions.

20. With regard to the tourism statistics, in 2019 the APT region attracted 244.6 million international visitor arrivals, an increase by 5.8 per cent from 2018. Nevertheless, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, international visitors to the APT region in 2020 had sharply declined by approximately 81.5 per cent when compared to 2019.

21. The APT Tourism Ministers (M-ATM+3) held annually reviews the progress of the APT cooperation in tourism as well as note development of tourism industry in the region. At the 21<sup>st</sup> M-ATM+3 Meeting held on 19 January 2022 in Siem Reap, Kingdom of Cambodia, the Ministers noted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to the international travel to the APT region and discussed ways to prepare the region for the reopening of the tourism sector. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed the endorsement of the APT Tourism Cooperation Work Plan 2021-2025, which focuses on strengthening the APT tourism cooperation in the next 5 years as well as the cooperation among the APT countries in recovery efforts.

22. 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. The 18<sup>th</sup> AMEM+3, held on 16 September 2021, reiterated

support in the implementation of APAEC Phase II: 2021-2025 through various activities, such as knowledge and information exchange, capacity building programmes, joint research and publications and demonstration projects.

23. 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 9<sup>th</sup> ASOMM+3 Consultations held on 10 November 2016 adopted the ASOMM+3 Minerals Cooperation Work Plan 2016-2020. The succeeding ASOMM+3 Work Plan for 2022-2025 is under development.

24. On science and technology, since its establishment in 2006, the ASEAN Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation Plus Three (COSTI+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 COSTI+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.

25. On connectivity, the APT Leaders at their 22<sup>nd</sup> Summit held on 4 November 2019, stressed the importance of developing links and synergies between MPAC 2025 and key connectivity initiatives in the region. They also reaffirmed the need to promote sustainable, highquality infrastructure in line with broadly accepted international principles to facilitate trade, investment and service competitiveness in the region. In this regard, the 22<sup>nd</sup> APT Summit adopted the APT Leaders' Statement on Connecting the Connectivities Initiative to reaffirm the commitment of the APT countries to enhancing regional connectivity.

### **Socio-Cultural Cooperation**

26. Cooperation on environment is pursued 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 (APTCF), 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'.

27. Sustainable development is also an important area of APT cooperation. The 19<sup>th</sup> APT Summit in September 2016 adopted the APT Leaders' Statement on Promoting Sustainable Development Cooperation, which was 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.

28. The issue of marine debris was highlighted at the 21<sup>st</sup> APT Summit held in November 2018, which welcomed the APT Marine Plastic Debris Cooperative Action Initiative to enhance cooperation on combatting marine plastic debris. The APT's contribution to reduce marine debris is being recognized through the APT Marine Plastic Debris Cooperative Action Initiative, and collective effort towards the achievement of Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP).

29. 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. The 13<sup>th</sup> SOMRDPE+3 held on 26 March 2021, exchanged views on national policies and programme on building resilience for rural communities in its collective efforts to eradicate poverty and noted the finalization of the Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025.

30. 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. The 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN+3 Village Leaders Exchange Program was held on 7 September 2021 via videoconference.

31. In the area of social welfare and development, the APT continues 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 commits 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.

32. 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. So far, the ACW+3 has met twelve times with the last one held virtually on 25 November 2020.

33. In the area of youth, the APT cooperation is overseen by the APT Ministerial Meeting on Youth (AMMY+3) and the APT Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY+3). SOMY+3 has endorsed the ASEAN Plus Three Work Plan on Youth 2021-2025 for adoption by the AMMY+3 later this year. This Work Plan will form part of the overall youth work plan addressing issues relevant to the Post-2020 strategic direction of youth development in ASEAN and the APT Cooperation Work Plan 2018-2022.

34. 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, five APT Heads of Civil Service Meeting have been held; the Fifth Meeting held on 18 November 2020 adopted the ACCSM+3 Work Plan 2021-2025.

35. The APT cooperation on labour is pursued under the APT Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM+3). Since it was established in 2001, the ALMM+3 has been convened biennially. The 5-Year Priorities of the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation on Labour 2021-2025, which was adopted by the ALMM+3 on 28 October 2020 is aimed to promote human resources development, inclusive growth, sustainable development as a response to the ASEAN economic integration, social dialogue, and occupational safety and health in the workplace.

36. The APT cooperation on culture is strengthened through the APT Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA+3), APT Senior Officials on Culture and Arts, and the APT Cultural Cooperation Network (APTCCN). The APT Work Plan on Cooperation in Culture and the Arts 2018-2021 was adopted at the 8<sup>th</sup> AMCA+3 Meeting held on 24 October 2018 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

37. 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 5<sup>th</sup> AMRI+3 held on 10 May 2018 in Singapore.

38. Cooperation in education was strengthened with the convening of the First APT Education Ministers Meeting (APTEMM) on 4 July 2012 in Yogyakarta 2012. The Second APTEMM held on 12 September 2014 in Vientiane adopted the APT Plan of Action on Education (2010-2017).

39. The APT promotes student mobility in higher education with quality assurance through the continued efforts of the Working Group on Student Mobility and Quality Assurance of Higher Education among ASEAN Plus Three Countries (APTWG), including by formulating a guide for availability of online information to promote mobility, while envisioning harmonization of higher education community in Asia. The 4<sup>th</sup> APTEMM held on 1 November 2018 in Nay Pyi Taw, adopted the APT Guidelines on Student Exchange and Mobility, and APT Guidelines on Transcripts and Supplemental Documents for Academic Records of Exchange Students.

40. The APT also promotes 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.

41. On disaster management and emergency response cooperation, the APT continues to contribute to the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme for 2021-2025, through various cooperation projects. The APT resolves to support the realisation of the ASEAN Vision 2025 on Disaster Management and the ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN, One Response: ASEAN Responding to Disasters as One in the Region and Outside the Region, and the implementation of ASEAN Joint Disaster Response Plan through the support to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre).

42. On health, efforts have been made to implement areas of APT health cooperation under the purview of the APT Health Ministers Meeting (AHMM+3) and APT Senior Officials Meeting (SOMHD+3). The areas of cooperation 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 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Plus Three Health Ministers Meeting held in Bali on 1 May in 2022 reaffirmed the APT commitment to optimising the mobilization of essential health resource in responding to public health crisis. The Ministers issued the Joint Statement of the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Plus Three Health Ministers Meeting.

43. The 21<sup>st</sup> APT Summit in November 2018 adopted the APT Leaders' Statement on Cooperation against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). Following the adoption, the endorsed ASEAN Strategic Framework to Combat AMR through One Health Approach (2019-2030) is currently being implemented.

44. At the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak in the region, the APT health sector was the first cooperative mechanism to come up with a response in January 2020. The APT Health Ministers had a Special Video Conference in Enhancing Cooperation on COVID-19 Response on 7 April 2020. Through their Joint Statement, further commitment was made in coordinating real-time information and data sharing, and technical exchanges on COVID-19; enhancing bilateral and multi-lateral collaboration on prevention, detection and response measures; conducting research and development on vaccine and medicines; utilising digital technology for efficient access information; utilising social media platforms to address misinformation; and, accessing resources for technical assistance and medical supplies, and revitalising health systems. The APT also contributed to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund from the APTCF.

45. Recognising the importance of mental health as a critical public health issue which has been exacerbated by disasters and public health emergencies and other emerging and unprecedented crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the 24<sup>th</sup> APT

Summit adopted the APT Leaders' Statement on Cooperation on Mental Health Amongst Adolescents and Young Children. The Summit looked forward to the conduct of a regional workshop on the sharing of best practices on mental health promotion in school settings amongst APT countries in the first quarter of 2022.

### **Track 1.5 and Track 2 Cooperation**

46. 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. The 18th EAF was held on 10 December 2020 under the theme of "Strengthening the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation for Economic Resilience in Face of Emerging Challenges". The 19<sup>th</sup> EAF is scheduled for 7 December 2021 with the theme of '*Working towards an inclusive and resilience recovery from COVID-19 in East Asia*'.

47. 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. This year the 33<sup>rd</sup> NEAT Country Coordinators Meeting (NEAT-CCM) and the 34<sup>th</sup> NEAT-CCM were held on 20 April and 1 September, respectively. Five NEAT working group meetings on various topics were also held this year, which advocated for regional preparedness and resilience in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on helping MSMEs and working towards sustainable development in the region.

-----