

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. 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, which was then revised with the APT Work Plan (2013-2017). 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 and welcomed the succeeding Work Plan for APT cooperation for the period 2018-2022. Subsequently, the next Work Plan for the period 2023 – 2027 was adopted on 4 August 2022 in Phnom Penh at the 23rd APT Foreign Ministers Meeting.

3. Since its establishment, 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 cooperation, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation. The APT process has also developed into a full-fledged cooperation framework with 59 mechanisms coordinating APT cooperation.

Political-Security Cooperation

4. 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 15th APT Commemorative Summit in Phnom Penh on 19 November 2012.

5. The APT continues to deepen political and security dialogue through the annual APT Summit and high-level consultations. The 26th APT Summit held on 6 September 2023 in Jakarta reaffirmed the APT commitment to strengthen APT 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.

6. A Special APT Summit on COVID-19 was held via videoconference on 14 April 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.

7. Cooperation on non-traditional security matters is undertaken under the purview of the APT Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC+3) and the APT Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC+3). The 13th AMMTC+3 Consultation which held in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia on 22 August 2023 welcomed the adoption of the first SOMTC+3 Work Plan on Cooperation to Combat Transnational Crime (2024-2027) at the 20th SOMTC+3 Consultation, to complement the APT Cooperation Work Plan 2023-2027.

8. Following the adoption of the Concept Note on the Establishment of the ASEAN Directors General of Immigration Departments and Heads of Consular Affairs Divisions of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs Meeting Plus Three Consultation (DGICM+3) by the 24th DGICM in August 2021, the inaugural DGICM+3 Consultation was held in Singapore on 25 August 2022. The Consultation exchanged views on possible areas of cooperation in the aspect of immigration, consular affairs and border management to be conducted under the DGICM+3 framework. The 2nd DGICM+3 Consultation was held in Phuket, Thailand on 10 August 2023 where the Consultation welcomed the adoption of the DGICM+3 Work Programme.

9. In the area of illicit drug trafficking, the APT Senior Officials' Meeting on Drugs Matters (ASOD+3), 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 2022, trade between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries recorded an increase of 10.2 percent reaching a total value of USD 1,213 trillion. Meanwhile, total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows from the Plus

Three Countries into ASEAN were valued at USD 54.8 billion in 2022, accounting for 24.3 percent of total FDI inflows into ASEAN.

12. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 23rd AEM Plus Three Consultations, held on 28 August 2020, endorsed the APT Plan of Action (APT POA) on Mitigating the Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Following on, the 23rd 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 26th AEM+3 Consultations held in Semarang, Indonesia on 22 August 2023, the APT noted the progress in the implementation of the APT Economic Cooperation Work Programme 2023-2024 and the positive outcomes of economic cooperation under twelve areas, among others, MSME development, private sector engagement and stakeholders' dialogue, trade facilitation, digital economy, and green economy.

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. The 26th AEM+3 Consultation appreciated the initiative of the EABC in promoting the utilisation of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, supporting ASEAN's decarbonisation agenda and promoting digital initiatives in the region, particularly on e-payments. The Meeting also welcomed the outcome of the 2023 EABC – JETRO Business Outlook Survey and noted that the market remains confident with ASEAN's potential with 60% of companies keen to expand their businesses in the region, in the near term.

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 26th meeting held on 2 May 2023 in Incheon, Republic of Korea to exchange view on the 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 recognized that the ASEAN+3 financial cooperation had played an increasingly essential role in supporting regional economies to address risks and challenges and further agreed to strengthen regional financial cooperation through the initiatives under the Regional Financing Arrangements (RFA) Future

Direction, CMIM, AMRO, ABMI, Disaster Risk Financing (DRF), and ASEAN+3 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 in 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.

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. 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 22nd M-ATM+3 Meeting held on 4 February 2023 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, the Ministers was pleased to note that based on the preliminary figures in 2022, ASEAN Plus Three countries saw a year-on-year growth in international visitor arrivals by approximately 79.36%. The 23rd Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers Plus Three (23rd M-ATM Plus Three) held on 26 January 2024, noted that 24 activities or 61.5% of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Tourism Cooperation Work Plan 2021-2025 had been implemented. The Meeting also noted that a new APT Tourism Cooperation Work Plan post-2025 would be developed for endorsement at the 25th M-ATM Plus Three in 2026, and tasked the APT NTOs to review the implementation of the APT Tourism Cooperation Work Plan 2021-2025 and identify the post2025 priorities in line with the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (ATSP) post-2025.

21. 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.

22. The 20th AMEM+3 held on 24 August 2023 adopted the Joint Declaration on Sustainable Energy Security through Interconnectivity. Subsequently, the 26th APT Summit adopted the ASEAN Plus Three Leaders' Statement on Developing of Electric Vehicle Ecosystem where APT countries agreed to explore cooperation and collaboration on the development of the electric vehicle ecosystem in the region.

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 9th 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 has been adopted by ad-referendum in April 2022.

24. On science and technology, since its establishment in 2006, the ASEAN Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation Plus Three (COSTI+3) has met regularly 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 22nd Summit held on 4 November 2019, stressed the importance of developing links and synergies between MPAC 2025 and key connectivity initiatives in the region. In this regard, the 22nd 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. APT social-cultural cooperation covers a wide range of areas, including health, sustainable development, environment, poverty alleviation, social welfare, women, youth, labour, civil service matters, culture, information, and education.

27. 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 9th 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 9th ASEAN Plus Three Health Ministers Meeting.

28. The 21st 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.

29. 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, commitment was made in coordinating real-time information and data sharing, and technical exchanges on COVID-19; enhancing bilateral and multilateral 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.

30. 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 24th APT Summit adopted the APT Leaders' Statement on Cooperation on Mental Health Amongst Adolescents and Young Children.

31. Sustainable development is also an important area of APT cooperation. The 19th 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.

32. The issue of marine debris was 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. 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).

33. 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 16th SOMRDPE+3 held on 21

November 2023, noted the progress of cooperation between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries, particularly on the delivery of social protection in the rural areas and in alleviating poverty.

34. 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 10th ASEAN+3 Village Leaders Exchange Program was held on 25 August 2022 via videoconference.

35. 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 7th AMMSWD+3 Meeting held on 25 May 2023, via videoconference with the theme “Accelerating the Implementation of ASEAN’s Commitments for Gender Equality through Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion”. The Meeting reaffirmed the APT commitment to promoting gender equality through gender mainstreaming and social inclusion in the ASEAN region.

36. 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 rights-based programmes on poverty reduction among women and other approaches in reducing the feminisation of poverty. So far, the ACW+3 has met fifteen times with the last one held on 20 September 2023.

37. 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). AMMY+3 has adopted the ASEAN Plus Three Work Plan on Youth 2021-2025 through ad-referendum on 18 July 2022. This Work Plan forms 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 2023-2027.

38. 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.

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

40. 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 (SOMCA+3), and the APT Cultural Cooperation Network (APTCCN). The APT Work Plan on Cooperation in Culture and the Arts 2022-2025 was endorsed by SOMCA+3 in 2021.

41. 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. The 7th AMRI+3 was held on 23 September 2023 in Da Nang, Viet Nam, in conjunction with the 16th Conference of AMRI, carrying the theme, "Media: From Information to Knowledge for a Resilient and Responsive ASEAN" The Meeting exchanged views on the progress of ASEAN cooperation with the Plus Three countries in the field of information and media. The Meeting welcomed the extension of the Work Plan on Enhancing APT Cooperation through Information and Media to 2025.

42. Cooperation in education was strengthened with the convening of the First APT Education Ministers Meeting (APTEMM) on 4 July 2012 in Yogyakarta 2012. The APT Plan of Action on Education (2018-2025) was adopted through ad-referendum in 2018.

43. 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, including by formulating a guide for availability of online information to promote mobility, while envisioning harmonization of higher education community in Asia. The 4th 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.

44. 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.

Track 1.5 and Track 2 Cooperation

45. 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, including but not limited to energy and food security, economic cooperation, social and cultural cooperation, narrowing development gaps in rural and urban communities, connectivity and non-traditional security cooperation. The 21st EAF was hosted by China on 29-30 October 2023 with the theme of *‘Joining Hands to Create New Development Opportunities for Shared Peace and Prosperity in East Asia.*

46. 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. The 37th and 38th NEAT Country Coordinators Meeting (CCM) were held on 31 March 2023 and 17 July 2023, respectively.
