

FPCI Virtual Public Forum
“Assessing the Present and Envisioning the Future of ASEAN-China Relations”

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Panellist

1. Dr. Kin Phea, Director General, International Relations Institute of Cambodia (IRIC)
2. Dr. Jayant Menon, Visiting Senior Fellow, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore
3. Dr. Ha Anh Tuan, Executive Director, Foundation for East Sea (SCS) Studies, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV)

Moderator

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Key Takeaways

1. **The preliminary result of FPCI’s ASEAN-China Survey** shows that most people in the region view the relationship between ASEAN and China as mutually beneficial. However, there are several sensitive issues between them concerning peace and stability in the region. Therefore, ASEAN should focus on economic issues rather than sensitive issues. Regarding the rivalry between the US and China, the survey suggests that ASEAN should not take sides as they have their own relationship with both the US and China.
2. **ASEAN is the most resilient grouping amongst developing countries in the world.** ASEAN has survived more than 50 years and we have been able to overcome all the challenges then. ASEAN has much opportunity to be heard together as whole, rather than voicing it individually, especially in negotiating sensitive issues with China.
3. **ASEAN should uphold multilateralism** even though unilateralism increases the challenges in the country. ASEAN unity is important so that is why we have to stick to the basic law of ASEAN. ASEAN and China should coordinate the strategic plan, cultivating the new growth of new relations especially the people-to-people relationship.
4. **China-ASEAN relations are very important for both China and ASEAN.** China and Southeast Asia countries are closed and linked to each other. In order to build substantial relations between ASEAN-China, ASEAN needs to be united. ASEAN will have a strong position if the member countries are united. Without a united and strong voice, it would be difficult for ASEAN to set goals and pursue it.
5. **ASEAN countries have different interests when engaging with China.** ASEAN should have the common interest to engage with China so ASEAN-China could preserve long-term relationship.



6. **ASEAN unity has a very strong foundation to continue.** On the other hand, unity might be tested such as the South China Sea issue. Nevertheless, it is the wake-up call for ASEAN to be more united with one another. ASEAN needs to have a common position to deal with the issues in the world now in order to improve the negotiation process with China.
7. **ASEAN's role in preserving the relations with China is very limited.** ASEAN is not designed for the type of process to engage in the sensitive issue. Non-interference policy is designed for preserving the peace. What ASEAN can do is try not to take sides amid the great rivalries by not fuelling flames.
8. **The ground of ASEAN-China relations should be based on international law.** ASEAN-China relations should focus more on less sensitive issues, until mutual trust is built and instead, try to better our economic cooperation. The economic issues and the sensitive issue should be discussed as balanced as possible because ASEAN & China cannot grow its economic relations if the geopolitical issues become overbearing.
9. **China is a critical partner for ASEAN in the economic field.** There is no confusion for the mutual benefits in the economic front. The economic cooperation between ASEAN and China is going stronger. Even in the time of crisis, the economy between ASEAN and China remains resilient and even growing stronger. The economic agenda is a latecomer for ASEAN since the first issue ASEAN discusses is peace. However, China somehow will realize the significance of ASEAN as economic partners.
10. **ASEAN member states need to be more engaged in regional affairs** even though, at times, individual member states do not desire to be involved in regional issues. ASEAN member states & China should accelerate cooperation on regional maritime sector to handle the South China Sea issue.