

# ASEAN special

(Promotional content)



Under the theme of “Building Bridges,” the ASEAN Pavilion at the Osaka Expo showcases the multifaceted work of the group across the region. ASEAN SECRETARIAT

## Southeast Asian group members see Japan as long-standing ally

CARL FREIRE  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In the 58 years since its founding in 1967, the Association of Southeast Nations has grown from a five-member bloc comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand into a 10-member one that brings together many of the nations in the region.

As was written at the time of ASEAN’s 30th anniversary, the organization’s foundational aims and purposes were about “cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, technical, educational and other fields, and in the promotion of regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.”

This all took place against the backdrop of the conflict in what was then referred to as Indochina. There were also other intraregional conflicts, and the founding members came to share an awareness that developing a regional organization would be to everyone’s benefit. ASEAN was born as a result of the shared goal of “building a community of and for all Southeast Asian nations.”

Five more members have been added to ASEAN over the decades since. In the process, the organization has evolved into a dynamic regional bloc promoting peace, economic integration and cooperation.

This year, Malaysia assumed the rotating chairmanship under the theme of “Inclusivity and Sustainability.” Under its leadership, ASEAN is working to address a range of issues that come under each category.

In regard to the former, key issues that the organization will focus on include such matters as creating more equitable opportunities for growth by striving to integrate smaller economies — such as the soon-to-be 11th member East Timor — into the regional framework. Responding as a bloc to geopolitical challenges is another aspect that calls for encouraging unity.

Likewise, there are global challenges. One of these, as the chosen theme suggests, is sustainability. While pursuing economic growth and integration, ASEAN seeks also to maintain awareness of member states’ environmental responsibilities. In 2020, the organization had already begun issuing a report on U.N. sustainable development goal indicators to track the progress of meeting those goals. It now is also guided by the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, which again underlines the need to achieve a sustainable community that encourages social development while also protecting the environment.

**‘Building Bridges’ in Osaka**

Perhaps these efforts can best be understood through the concept of “Building Bridges,” the theme for the ASEAN Pavilion at the Osaka Expo currently underway through October. At a news conference in April, Commissioner-General for the ASEAN Secretariat at the expo Nararya Soeprapto spoke of how the expo provides a platform for nations to collaborate on global challenges.

Through the pavilion, he said, the bloc is demonstrating its commitment to a more integrated region. Taking a story-based approach, the pavilion presents examples of ASEAN’s successes and moreover illustrates how its mechanisms for cooperation and the like benefit not only the citizens of member states, but of other nations as well, precisely because of the organization’s emphasis on creating connections.

The stories and activities presented at the pavilion include a World Heritage Site and ASEAN Heritage Park virtual tour, an artificial intelligence station to immerse visitors in a virtual experience of the members’ culture and history, and presentations on such topics as building smart, sustainable and inclusive communities in ASEAN, Japan and elsewhere.

The timing of the expo also coincides with commemorations for the 58th ASEAN Day on Aug. 8. As Soeprapto pointed out,

the organization plans to mark the occasion not only in Jakarta, but in Osaka as well. This is significant, he said, as it also provides the chance to celebrate the ASEAN-Japan relationship.

In remarks also delivered at the pavilion in April, ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn said that the group’s presence at the expo affirmed, in a sense, the bridges it has built with Japan. In particular, he highlighted how this aligned with ASEAN and Japan’s vision for friendship and cooperation at present and into the future. Underlying this, he said, was the desire to broaden and deepen their strategic partnership in several areas, including maritime cooperation, the pursuit of sustainability goals and economic affairs.

Kao also emphasized that because of its focus on dialogue and cooperation over division and competition, the expo provides a venue for nations to showcase the mutual benefits of economic integration. Sustainable global progress, he stressed, demands continued collaboration. Hence, he said, participation provides the opportunity to build bridges among nations — not only within ASEAN, but also with partner countries — at every level from the governmental to the individual, and to showcase for all the potential of the region.

**Enduring relations**

The shared vision between the group and Japan of which Kao spoke dates back to a joint vision statement and implementation plan that the two parties issued in December 2023 to mark the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation.

The group’s participation in the expo builds on this, but the legacy of ASEAN-Japan ties dates back all the way to 1973 when the two parties established informal dialogue relations. These were formalized four years later with the establishment of the ASEAN-Japan Forum.

Political and security cooperation has

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## Celebrating 58 years of resilient ties

KUNIHICO HIRABAYASHI  
SECRETARY GENERAL  
ASEAN-JAPAN CENTRE



Today we celebrate ASEAN Day, marking 58 years since its founding in 1967. Having navigated through geopolitical tensions, pandemics and financial crises, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations remains steadfast to its original declaration of accelerating economic, social and cultural development in the region, in addition to promoting regional peace.

This year, ASEAN adopted the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, the successor document to the ACV 2025. In it, ASEAN leaders reaffirmed their commitment to advancing their shared interests in the areas of political security, the economy, sociocultural issues and connectivity — the newest pillar. The association is also set to welcome East Timor as its 11th member in October, demonstrating its continued relevance within the region.

Having promoted ASEAN-Japan relations in the areas of trade, investment, tourism and people-to-people exchanges since 1981, ASEAN’s achievements have also been celebrated by those of us at the ASEAN-Japan Centre.

ASEAN’s milestones also coincide with Japan’s hosting of the Osaka Expo. Leveraging this, the center collaborated with the ASEAN Secretariat to make full use of the opportunity to raise awareness of the association among the Japanese and international population alike.

In May, we co-organized a dialogue and discussion titled “The Future I Want to See: Smart, Sustainable, and Inclusive Communities in ASEAN, Japan, and Beyond” at the Expo Theme Weeks Studio. Attended mainly by students at Japanese universities, the session brought together veteran and

rising advocates for change to share their experiences and discuss how the group and Japan can collaborate to improve lives across the region.

The center also strives to remain aligned with a constantly evolving ASEAN. Serving as the chair of ASEAN last year, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic identified “Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience” as the region’s theme for 2024. In support of that, the center participated in the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit as well as the ASEAN Investment Forum, sharing our experience in facilitating investment activities between both ASEAN and Japan.

In 2025, the center is pleased to continue this practice during Malaysia’s turn leading ASEAN under the theme of “Inclusivity and Sustainability.” In February, we hosted the ASEAN-Japan Women Entrepreneurs Summit in Kuala Lumpur, an extensive event that drove discussions forward on how women-led enterprises in ASEAN and Japan could be better supported through policymaking and social innovation.

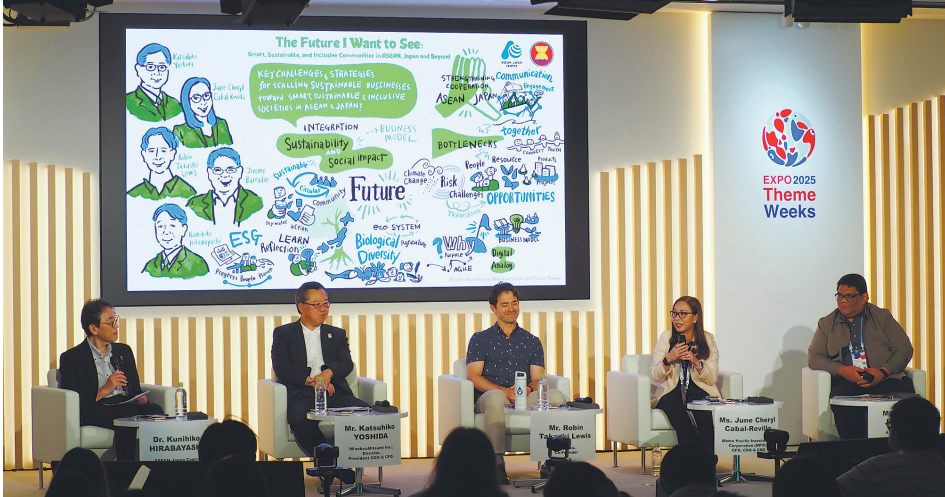
At this event, the center was recognized by the ASEAN Business Advisory Council Malaysia as a supporting partner for the new ASEAN Inclusivity Collective initiative

for our efforts in championing inclusivity in business and the workplace.

Building on this momentum, the center also signed a letter of intent in April with the Malaysia Design Council and the Japan Institute of Design Promotion to become strategic partners. This collaborative arrangement aims to contribute to sustainable development and inclusive economic growth by harnessing the transformative power of design across Malaysia, Japan and other member states of the association.

As uncertainty becomes the new norm in the world, the partnership between ASEAN and Japan as a stabilizing force is ever important. Just as ASEAN’s inception 58 years ago on this day brought about lasting peace and economic growth within the region, the next decades will be no different. The ASEAN-Japan Centre will continue to contribute to the goals set forth by both the association and Japan in the Joint Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation and its implementation plan, and the ACV 2045, through our activities in promoting trade, investment, tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

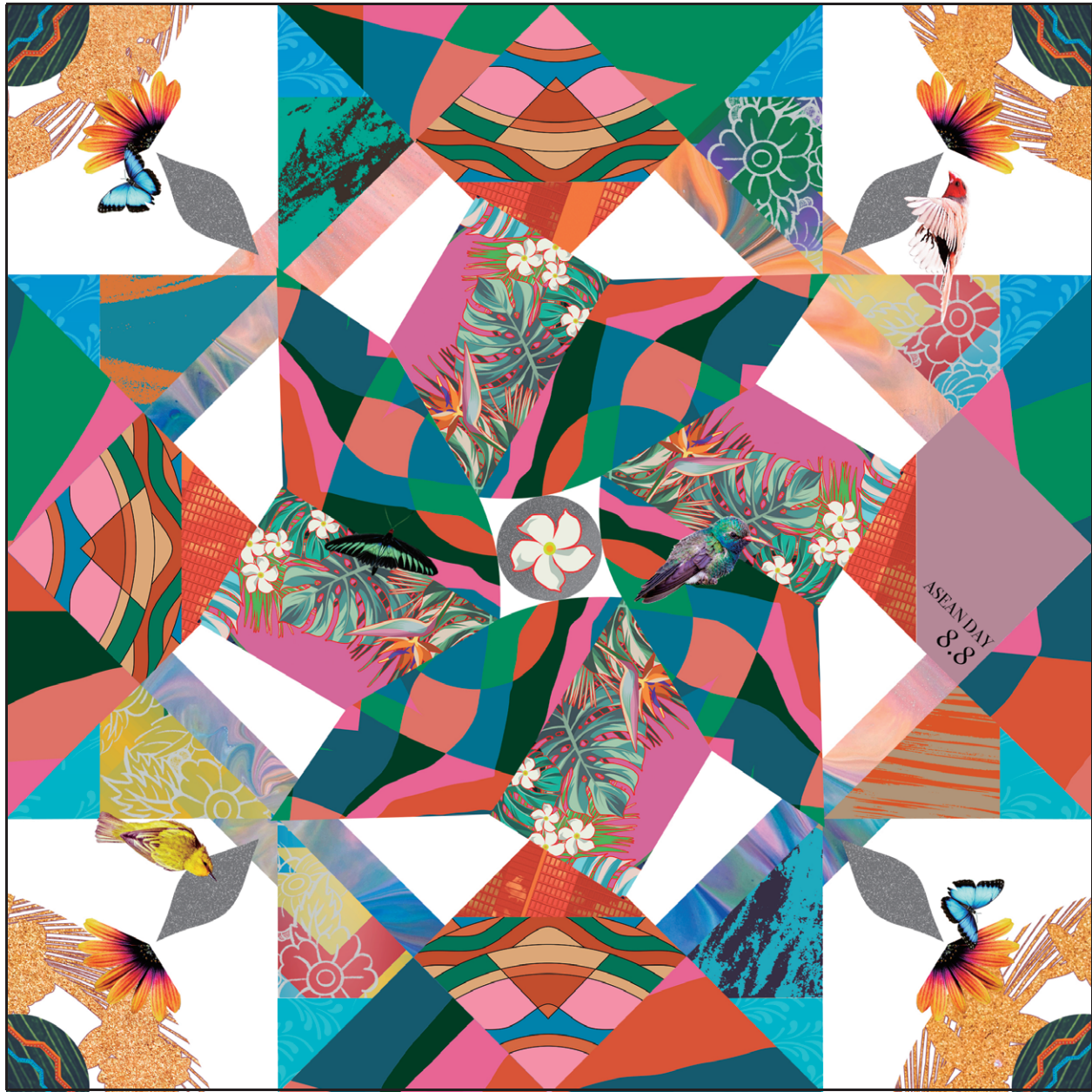
Happy ASEAN Day.



Participants take part in a panel discussion co-organized by the ASEAN-Japan Centre and the ASEAN Secretariat at the Osaka Expo on May 25. AJC

## Celebrate ASEAN Day with Origami

折り紙で祝う ASEAN 設立記念日



### #ASEANDay

You can use the patterned section of this ad as origami paper. Follow the instructions to fold a flower and join us in celebrating ASEAN’s founding day. Some parts of the petal-folding process may be a bit challenging, but we encourage you to give it a try! We’d be delighted if you shared your finished flower on Instagram with the hashtag #ASEANDay.

この広告の絵柄部分は、切り取って折り紙としてご利用いただけます。手順に沿って花を折りながら、ASEAN 設立記念日と一緒に祝いましょう。花びらの折り方には少し難しい部分もありますが、ぜひチャレンジしてみてください。完成したお花の写真は、「#ASEANDay」のハッシュタグを添えて、Instagram にぜひご投稿ください。

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## Congratulations to ASEAN on its 58th Anniversary. Wishing Continued Prosperity.

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# ASEAN special

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**Left: Visitors to the ASEAN Pavilion at the Osaka Expo can experience a virtual tour of ASEAN's rich cultural heritage sites and biodiverse landscapes. Right: The ASEAN forest installation at the pavilion provides information on the region's forests and the importance of preservation for a sustainable future.** ASEAN SECRETARIAT

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been a core element of this partnership from the start, but the relationship extends far beyond that into other realms. The two parties see their comprehensive strategic partnership as also encompassing economic and sociocultural cooperation, as well as expanding connectivity and narrowing the development gap among the region's nations.

ASEAN has seen Japan as a long-standing and trusted partner across a broad spectrum that ranges from trade and investment to education, disaster management and capacity-building. At a joint forum this March in Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture, officials from the bloc and Japan emphasized that this partnership remains strong.

At that forum, representatives stressed the progress that has been made in realizing the statement and implementation plan. Japan also reiterated its support for the group's efforts to both strengthen its core and to build communities. ASEAN welcomed Japan's commitment to pursue various projects and activities in support of initiatives that would foster cooperation.

Beyond this, Japan and the member states continue to collaborate through a variety of other frameworks and initiatives.

One example of the former is the ASEAN-

Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership framework that reduces or eliminates border tariffs among the signatory parties on certain products and materials, including iron, ore, semiconductors and automotive parts.

As to the latter, both Japan and ASEAN have broadly agreed that it is necessary to preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific region with ASEAN at the center. ASEAN and Japan share the goal of dialogue and cooperation within the region, improving intraregional physical connectivity and ensuring development and prosperity for all.

Aside from geopolitical and economic matters, ASEAN and Japan have also seen exchanges at the more personal level. Needless to say, tourism is probably the most readily accessible avenue for people-to-people exchanges, and the sector appears to be thriving.

For example, the ASEAN-Japan Centre says that, as of 2022, around a quarter of the foreign visitors to Japan came from ASEAN countries. Meanwhile, Japan ranked 11th in 2023 as a source of foreign visitors to member states, placing behind only more populous countries such as China and India and intraregional states. Educational exchanges and cultural diplomacy are also thriving. For example, Japan has been inviting students from member states to study

here through its Japan-East Asia Network of Exchanges for Students and Youths program since 2007.

Conversely, in recent years the ASEAN University Network in collaboration with the Japan Foundation and Kyoto University has been inviting Japanese students to come to group countries through the ASEAN-Japan Youth Forum. Furthermore, since 2023 the Japan Foundation has been pursuing ASEAN-focused people-to-people initiatives that include two-way intellectual and culture exchanges.

## Shared priorities, outlook

Underscoring these varied initiatives on the parts of both ASEAN and Japan, as outlined in the ASEAN-Japan comprehensive strategic partnership, is a shared commitment to sustainable development and inclusive growth. That statement notes the interest of both in cooperating to address regional and global challenges ranging from climate change to public health and beyond.

One of the ultimate goals, as the joint vision statement stresses, is for ASEAN and Japan to be partners in the co-creation of a prosperous and sustainable economy and society that is diverse, inclusive and resilient — some of the very themes highlighted at the ASEAN Pavilion at the expo.

# Congratulations

## On the 58th anniversary of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations



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