

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 47TH ASEAN SUMMIT

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The 47th Summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was held on 26-28 October in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the current ASEAN Chair Malaysia, with the theme Inclusivity and Sustainability. During the opening ceremony, it was announced that East Timor became a full ASEAN member. East Timor, which gained independence in 2001, applied for ASEAN membership in 2011 and received observer member status in 2022. The debate regarding the country's ASEAN membership is rooted in its separation from Indonesia. Poverty is the most critical issue facing East Timor, which is Asia's youngest country. The recent decline in US support and the introduction of new tariffs have intensified the country's search for new trade agreements. In recent years, Chinese investment in the country has increased. Amidst Myanmar and Singapore raising questions about its ASEAN membership, East Timor managed to become the 11th member of ASEAN during the blocs 47th summit. It can be said that ASEAN membership will advance East Timor's economic integration with neighboring countries.[1]

The ASEAN Kuala Lumpur Summit was attended by the leaders of ASEAN member countries, as well as US President Trump, Chinese Premier Li, and Japan's new Prime Minister Takaichi -with this occasion marking Takaichis first overseas visit. Indias Prime Minister Modi participated in the summit online. The leaders of BRICS members Brazil and South Africa attended the ASEAN Summit as part of their Southeast Asia tours, stating that Brazil and South Africa wish to advance investment and trade with ASEAN countries.[2] Therefore, it is possible to say that the ASEAN Summit offered important opportunities for South-South cooperation.

One of the most important developments at the summit was the signing of the Kuala Lumpur Peace Agreement between Thailand and Cambodia. The agreement was signed at a ceremony attended by the Prime Ministers of Thailand and Cambodia, as well as Malaysias Prime Minister and the US President. The conflict between the two countries, which began on 24 July, was resolved with the mediation of Malaysia and the support of US President Trump. It should be noted that the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia stems from a border dispute and that the resolution to the conflict has been characterized as being precarious. However, with the peace agreement, it can be said that an important step has been taken towards resolving the issue at the ASEAN Summit. In this way, ASEAN has also become a platform where regional disputes are addressed and concrete steps are taken towards resolution.

US President Trump attended the ASEAN Summit for the first time since 2017 and held various bilateral meetings during the summit. With the participation of US President Trump and Malaysian Prime Minister Ibrahim, a mutual trade agreement was signed between the US and Malaysia, and relations between the two countries were raised to the level of a strategic partnership. The issue of critical minerals was raised in the agreement signed between the two countries.

The ASEAN Defense Ministers' meeting took place on 31 October. The US signed various defense cooperation agreements with India and Malaysia.[3] It was also decided to establish a military-to-military communication channel between China and the US.[4]

ASEAN and Türkiye

Türkiye became a party to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) and became an ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partner in 2017. With the impact of the Asia Anew Initiative launched in 2019, Türkiye sought to enhance relations with ASEAN in 2024 and submitted an application for the Dialogue Partner status. In July 2025, the 7th Türkiye-ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partnership Trilateral Meeting was held in Malaysia, which was chairing the term at the time. Moreover, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs stated at the meeting that Türkiye aimed to deepen its relations with ASEAN. During Turkish President Erdoğan's tour of Asia in February 2025, it was stated that economic and commercial relations with the countries of the region would be deepened.[5] Furthermore, Türkiye is advancing its commercial relations with regional countries, particularly in the defense industry, through various agreements, primarily with Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. These developments reflect Türkiye's interest in ASEAN, which has recently become an important platform for Türkiye economically and regionally, and its wish to enhance its relations with member countries to a higher level.

47th ASEAN Summit and China

Since Chinese President Xi did not attend the summit, the country was represented by

Prime Minister Li. Apart from his online participation in the 2021 ASEAN Summit, President Xi has so far not attended any of the ASEAN summits.[6] At the 47th ASEAN Summit, the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (ACFTA) 3.0 protocol was signed.[7] Negotiations for the third update of the ACTFA, which aims to facilitate free trade between China and ASEAN (whose framework agreement was signed in 2002), began in 2022. In the field of defense, China and ASEAN agreed to hold the second China-ASEAN joint naval exercise in 2027, the first of which was conducted in 2018.[8] In addition, the ASEAN+3 platform summit was held with the participation of Japan and South Korea, as well as China.[9] The ASEAN Summit also hosted a meeting between American and Chinese delegations. It has been reported that the preliminary talks on US-China trade agreements were concluded and that a consensus was reached on a framework agreement.

Malaysias ASEAN Chairmanship

Malaysia, which has held the ASEAN chairmanship for the year 2025, can be said to have assumed significant roles for ASEAN under the leadership of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. First, Malaysias role as a mediator in the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia symbolizes an important initiative that enhances Malaysias regional role in terms of foreign policy. The signing of the peace agreement at the 47th ASEAN Summit has strengthened ASEANs role in the Southeast Asian region. The fact that the agreement was signed with the participation of Trump indicates that a diplomatically balanced approach was pursued. Furthermore, Malaysias raising of issues such as the Gaza War, the Israel-Hamas ceasefire, and the Sudan and Myanmar crises at the ASEAN summit enabled important global issues to be addressed. On platforms such as ASEAN, which aim to enhance regional cooperation, the emphasis on dialogue, consultation, and mediation in the resolution of regional problems and conflicts increases the effectiveness of such platforms. In the case at hand, ASEAN not only serves as dialogue platform but also plays a role in facilitating conflict resolution and strengthening the South-South cooperation model. ASEANs efforts to establish a code of conduct for the South China Sea, where disputes persist due to the overlapping claims of many countries, should also be evaluated within this context. Finally, 2025 has become a record year for the number of agreements that have been signed within a single year as a result of the agreements concluded at the ASEAN Defense Ministers meeting, which indicates that various steps have been taken in the field of defense. During the 47th ASEAN Summit, Prime Minister Ibrahims statement that All agreed that this region should not be an area of contestation for superpowers underscores Southeast Asias desire not to be become a party to superpower competition and highlights the importance of regional security.[10] These factors demonstrate the progress that has been made by ASEAN under Malaysias chairmanship. Malaysia has handed over the chairmanship to the Philippines for the year 2026.

In conclusion, the 47th ASEAN Summit concluded with the full membership of East Timor and the signing of the Thailand-Cambodia peace agreement. It served as a platform for the advancement of trade and defense relations between China and ASEAN countries. With the participation of the US President Trump, trade-related discussions were held with

many countries, particularly Malaysia, and trade talks took place between the Chinese and American delegations. Originally established for regional cooperation, ASEAN has today emerged as a significant platform for South-South cooperation that addresses economic, trade, and defense issues.

Picture: Association of Southeast Asian Nations

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