

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

“U.S.-ASEAN Relations at 45: A Discussion with Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN”

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FEATURING

Lim Jock Hoi

Secretary-General, Association of Southeast Asian Nations

CSIS EXPERTS

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Transcript By

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Gregory B.
Poling:

Thank you all so much for coming. As always, I am always grateful we can get live people off of Zoom and into a room here in D.C. So thank you all very, very much.

This is a particularly special event for us, because it marks the first public event we've had for a senior leader in South Asia under a new initiative that we're launching, called the ASEAN Leadership Forum. And we're very happy to have the secretary-general of ASEAN himself. I can't imagine a more substantive or symbolic start to this series.

So, as most of you likely know, my name is Gregory Poling and I direct the Southeast Asia Program here at CSIS. And, as with all of our events now, we have a small audience here in the room. Most of our audience is going to be watching online, through YouTube or on CSIS. And then everything that we hear today is going to be available afterwards in perpetuity on YouTube. So obviously that means everything is on the record. After we have the keynote remarks, we'll have time for Q&A. So please get your questions ready, and we'll do it, you know, just like we used to before COVID. Hands up, and then you'll get a chance to ask in real time. So and one last bit of housekeeping. The event today, as with all of this event series, is made possible by general support to CSIS.

Now then, we're going to be hearing today from the secretary-general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Dato Lim Jock Hoi. He has served as the 14th secretary-general of ASEAN since 2018. He previously served as the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Brunei from 2006 to 2018. During his tenure, he served as Brunei's senior official for the ASEAN Economic Community Pillar and APEC, co-chaired during the negotiations for the ASEAN Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area, and Brunei's chief negotiator for both the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and the Brunei-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement.

So with that, please join me in welcoming Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi. (Applause.)

Secretary-
General Lim Jock
Hoi:

Gregory Poling, senior fellow and director Southeast Asia Program and Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is my privilege to share with you today some thought about ASEAN's community building, and how key that relation, that with the U.S., will further leverage to contribute not only our

community building but also regional peace and stability. Peace and stability has always been a primordial concern of ASEAN since it was founded in 1967. ASEAN has worked hard so that there would be

peace and stability in our part of the world amidst diversity and political and economic social system.

By promoting economic cooperation and serving as a confidence-building platform, ASEAN has successfully enabled Southeast Asian nation to evolve away from previously described as a Balkan sort of region to a community that provide opportunities to all. Indeed, peace and stability underpin economic prosperity. And certainly, without economic development there would be no peace and stability. ASEAN has gone through difficult time in its history when Southeast Asian was deeply affected by wars and conflicts. Member states of ASEAN hold high the value of peace that has been clearly stated in the ASEAN Charter as the very first purpose of ASEAN: Quote, “to maintain and enhance peace, security, and stability; and further strengthen peace-oriented value in the region.” Unquote. By the signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia – TAC – member state(s) of ASEAN have committed themselves towards a peaceful relationship with each other guided by the principle of mutual respect, noninterference in the internal affairs of one another, and peaceful settlement of dispute among others.

ASEAN has indeed become a bulwark of multilateral and complementary by its brands of regionalism, which has evolved to be anchor on dialogue and consultation as well as consensus. The primacy of dialogue and consultation has enabled ASEAN member state(s) to address issue confronting the region, arrive at approaches acceptable to all, as well as manage differences, enabling them to move forward notwithstanding the diversity in the political/economic/social system. As we often say, we call it the ASEAN way.

Beyond dialogue and consultation, ASEAN regionalism has likewise nurtured a conducive environment for peace and stability by initiating regional mechanism, cooperative processes, bringing together not only ASEAN member states but also external partner, including key players in the region and major powers of the world. These fora with ASEAN at the core – such as East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus – have become important mechanism. The culture of peace as well as the habits of dialogue and cooperation are nurtured by ASEAN, helping prevent disputes and conflicts from arising. Through these platform, ASEAN has become the driving force in regional affairs. Needless to say ASEAN members plus

dialogue – plus one dialogue relation with external partner are equally important avenue for cooperation. In fact, they are a building block for ASEAN relations with external partners at the multilateral level.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, ASEAN's achievement thus far in shaping and promoting norms that govern the interstate relation and behavior in the region have been duly acknowledged and recognized. ASEAN has been able to bring into established rules and norm external powers, including through the accession of TAC respect for the ASEAN way and ASEAN centrality, as well as abiding by ASEAN rules in the participation in the ASEAN mechanism I mentioned earlier.

Keeping our region peaceful and stable has enabled ASEAN to reap the peace dividends. We have a combined of GDP of more than 3 trillion U.S. dollar(s). ASEAN is the fifth-largest economy in the world, accounting for 3.5 percent of

global economy in nominal terms and as high as 6.5 percent in purchasing power parity terms. For almost two decade(s) ASEAN has been growing at the average rate of 5 percent, consistently above the global average. ASEAN is now a global trade powerhouse, the fourth-largest traders in the world, accounting for more than 7 percent of global trade.

Notwithstanding the economic difficulties resulting from the pandemic, ASEAN, with a population of more than 650 million people, a rapidly growing middle class, and with more than half of its population under the age of 35, is still a very attractive market. With this potential ASEAN has become the world's top investment destination, and we hope that it will continue to do so. Despite the current uncertainty, we are confident that ASEAN will be able to maintain its growth momentum in 2022-2023 with a growth forecast at 5 percent and 5.2 percent, respectively.

The vision of the founding fathers of ASEAN to promote economic prosperity has today become a reality. But this past performance should not be taken for granted. It is important for ASEAN to keep its market open and forge ahead with reforms and economic integration agenda, narrow the development gap among the peoples of the ASEAN member state(s), and ensure sustainability of peace dividends that ASEAN currently enjoys.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, unfortunately, it is this exactly, these peace dividends, that's become more exclusive, must become

more inclusive, in recent year as it is now widely acknowledged the global strategy environment as well as the regional security landscape has become more fluid.

We are now witnessing the increasing competition among global powers, which, incidentally, are all external partners of ASEAN, and that most recently in the situation of the cross straits and Korean Peninsula have become more equally volatile.

Indeed, challenges around while ASEAN community building is getting deepened and relation(s) with external partner(s) are getting wider.

On the other hand, these – those are challenges that have confronted our region for the longest time, such as terrorism, transnational crime to include trafficking in person(s), maritime security, poverty, social economic development, to name a few. Efforts towards the conclusion of the code of conduct on South China Sea is mutually acceptable to all part(ies) concerned, effectively – effective and consistently been pursue(d). It is hoped that this code of conduct will be concluded as soon as possible.

On the other hand, our region also has to deal with the issue that if suddenly emerge foremost is the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to increasing digitalization of economy and social value, some of which we are gaining momentum but was further accelerated by the pandemic, cybersecurity threat

and disinformation become more difficult to address as well as the growing digital divide.

Meanwhile, the effect of climate change have also become more pronounced, so much so that mitigation efforts as well as means to ensure that we are all able to adapt effectively have become more imperative.

The ASEAN comprehensive recovery framework is ASEAN concrete response to these new multi-dimensional challenges which cover broad strategy, enhancing health system, strengthening human security, maximizing potential intra-ASEAN market and broader economic integration, accelerating inclusive digital transformation, and, finally, advancing towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

The Bandar Seri Begawan Roadmap on ASEAN digital transformation in particular highlights new and existing initiative that are crucial in supporting ASEAN ongoing digital integration. At the recent ASEAN economic ministers meeting in Siem Reap, Cambodia, ASEAN has agreed to accelerate the timeline to commence negotiation for the ASEAN digital economic framework agreement within the next two years.

With this initiative ASEAN has laid a clear pathway for these – for the next stage of these economic community building and integration efforts for the Southeast Asian region to emerge stronger and more resilient as a community.

As ASEAN pursue(s) its economic community building exercises, it's become evident that two parallel processes are at hand. One, it must sustain internal processes of consolidating its unity and solidarity. Second, it must continue to enhance its external relations, enable to leverage its numerous bilateral partnership, as well as being the driving force in ASEAN-led mechanism.

ASEAN's member state(s) recognizes the importance of meaningful contribution – contributing to addressing challenges that our individual members may be facing internally. Such contribution is to be undertaken such a way the principle of noninterference in the domestic affair of other country remains to be respected and upheld while acknowledging that certain domestic development equally impact ASEAN as a whole, thus making ASEAN collective response necessary.

Meanwhile, ASEAN continues to leverage its external partners partnership. It is delighted to see an increasing number of countries requesting to accede to TAC, a manifestation of the increasing support to ASEAN and the principle of ASEAN community, belief in. More importantly, increasing number of country to accede to the TAC means an increased number of country that would want to deal with ASEAN in a peaceful manner.

Similarly, ASEAN is delighted to see an increasing number of country wanting to be formal partners of ASEAN, such as not only manifestation of increasing support of ASEAN but, more importantly, this means additional partnership that could contribute to the ASEAN community building. Meanwhile, existing formal partnership of ASEAN are continuously being elevated and upgraded as an indication of a shared desire of ASEAN and its partners to make this partnership substantive, meaningful, and mutually beneficial.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, ASEAN is now in the process of charting a future direction beyond 2025. A high-level task force for this purpose have been constituted. As ASEAN move into post-2025, it is anticipated that our community will continue to be deepened, able to promote its centrality, and maintain its role as the driving force in the regional affairs, as well as able to project a united voice in the global affairs. Relatedly, it is envisioned that ASEAN will remain to be

adaptive community capable of addressing current and emerging challenges for the benefit of the ASEAN people.

Given the multidimensional character of the issue facing ASEAN, it becomes more imperative to have cross-pillar approach to this issue. There is therefore a need to ensure that ASEAN continues to adapt – to be adaptive and responsive, nimble, agile, and institute its institutional capacity, including ASEAN secretariat enhance, and as guided by the ASEAN leader-envisioned exercise shall be participatory, inclusive, holistic, including – includes greater engagement and consultation in relevant stakeholders of ASEAN.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to touch upon ASEAN-U.S. relations from the ASEAN perspective. ASEAN-United States engagement expanded and deepened significantly since its inception in 1977. Over the years, the relations were strengthened to a robust cooperation across the three pillars of ASEAN community: political security, economic and sociocultural, as well as development cooperation – particularly in technology transfer, capacity building, and various economic support programs. In the subsequent years, the relationship witnessed a number of key milestones which, among others, include the launching of the Joint Vision Statement on Enhanced Partnership, 2005; the United States accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, 2009. The United States was the first non-ASEAN member state to appoint a resident ambassador to ASEAN in 2010. And the United States joining East Asia Summit in 2011. 2015 was another historical point, with the establishment of the ASEAN-U.S. Strategic Partnership. Building on this momentum and the significance of ASEAN, the convening of the historic Sunnylands summit in 2016, and President Obama pivot to ASEAN – to Asia and the Pacific strategy brought about additional focus to the relations. This year, special summit held for the first time in Washington, D.C., provide a new impetus for the partnership amidst the current geopolitical uncertainty and economic challenges.

Looking ahead, as we mark the 45th anniversary of the partnership and work towards establishment of the ASEAN-United States

Comprehensive Strategic Partnership later this year, it is an opportune time for us to reflect and set out a

future direction of our partnership. There is a tremendous potential in the longstanding historical relationship that can bring prosperity and security to our combined 1 billion people. The CSB status should motivate both sides to work harder to bring new impetus to the partnership to support ASEAN community building, post pandemic

recovery efforts, as well as other initiatives such ASEAN outlook of Indo-Pacific and the principle upon which it is based.

On that note, I would like to highlight a couple of key area in which ASEAN and United States can work together to bolster our relations. For peace and stability, we will work towards continuing maintaining peace and stability in the region. The peace dividend that the region has enjoyed cannot be taken for granted, as geopolitical economic landscape and the region is increasingly becoming polarized and challenging. The United States' presence in ASEAN region is important. And we hope it can work with the partners to compliment ASEAN effort to maintain peace and stability. United States should complement existing regional architecture that is open and inclusive.

United States is an important trade partner, but also important investment partner of ASEAN. In 2021, two-way trade between ASEAN and United States reached \$364 billion, or equal 10.9 percent of the ASEAN total trade, making the United States the second-largest trading partner of ASEAN. The U.S. continues to be the largest source of foreign direct investment in ASEAN. Total FDI inflows from United States stood at \$40 billion in 2021, or 23 percent of the ASEAN total inflow. This investment figure was 41 percent higher than the U.S. \$28.4 billion recorded earlier, mainly driven by the increase in investment, in banking, in finance, and in other electronic, biomedical, pharmaceutical industry.

Given geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamic, ASEAN is ready to work with United States private sector to provide and facilitate reorganization of global value chains in Asia and participate in digital transformation in ASEAN. In particular, American companies can consider leveraging on the ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, the largest free trade agreement in the world, and enter into force earlier this year. Owing to its impact in facilitating GDP and growth to trade facilitation and better custom processes, we invite the business from United States to invest in ASEAN region, and to relocate their production facility to RCEP economies.

ASEAN is generally pleased to learn that IPEF of United States, as illustrated in its official strategy that was launched earlier this year, gave a lot of attention to the ASEAN region. The initiative provides a vast new opportunity for ASEAN and its member state(s) to engage more substantively with the United States more specifically and the wider Indo-Pacific region more broadly. However, these initiative are to be in line with ASEAN outlook of Indo-Pacific. We stress among

others ASEAN centrality, openness, transparency, inclusivity, making sure that all relevant actors in the region are included.

ASEAN and United States could work through a range of area(s) to further strengthen our partnership on climate change and environment, particularly the urgent goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius; enhance effort to improve public health and health security as part of United States-ASEAN Health Future(s) Initiative; support sustainable development by making effective and efficient use of materials and energy as the region move towards low-carbon secular economy. Finally, strengthen people-to-people ties. This is an area that will serve a solid foundation for the partnership and will have a lasting impact on our relations. We can work to create network of emerging leaders by engaging young leaders, promoting human capital development through the continuation of expanded scholarship/fellowship program and women/youth empowerment in nurturing a more cohesive identity in the region.

With that, I would like to thank you for your attention and look forward to your – our conversation. Thank you. (Applause.)

Mr. Poling: Thank you so much, Secretary-General Lim, for starting off this event and helping us kick off this new event series refocusing on a region that is, obviously, critical to U.S. national interests.

Now we're going to take questions from the floor. We have a stand mic over here. So if you'd like to ask a question, get my attention and please identify yourself. And then, if we have time, we'll also go to questions coming in from online.

All right.

Camille Bismonte: Hi. Thank you so much, Secretary Lim, for coming and talking to us today. My name is Camille Bismonte. I am an associate at the Albright Stonebridge Group working on our East Asia-Pacific and Southeast Asia markets.

I wanted to know, could you speak more to ASEAN's ongoing efforts to coordinate responses to emerging public health threats such as the ASEAN Center for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases? And what role might there be for civil society and the public sector to support? Thank you.

Mr. Poling: Thanks, Camille.

Sec.-Gen. Lim: It's one of the key strategy of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework. This is one of the important project that we are doing together with our data partner on the implementation of ASEAN Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases. And we have now implemented and put this center into three country: Thailand, Indonesia, and – as well as Vietnam, in Hanoi. And it is important that United States is a major power that – a major contributor to the pandemic mitigation, especially providing vaccine and other important public health material, and we see United States will be part of this endeavor. And already during the ministerial meeting the secretary for human development in

United States have engaged with all the ASEAN health ministers, and there are several initiative(s) that have been undertaken in order to mitigate emerging diseases. And we hope that through our cooperation with CDC and research and development we will be able to mitigate the future.

This is not the end of it. I think we have to work very hard. And we have to collaborate with all member – our dialogue partners, in particular the United States.

Mr. Poling: Thank you.

Phelim Kine: Thank you, sir. My name is Phelim Kine. I work for Politico.

I have two quick questions, if I may. The first question is regarding the IPEF. I just would be interested in your perceptions of this mechanism's effectiveness given that several ASEAN states are not members and that India recently refused to sign on to the digital trade component of it. It seems like this is a mechanism that's a little bit rudderless. So I'd just be interested in your perceptions from the ASEAN perspective.

Second question, if I may, sir. Just a really general perspective from you on how is ASEAN in terms of – you frequently talked about geopolitical competition. Could you speak about how ASEAN is seeking to position itself, given that the U.S. is renewing its engagement in the region to counter and displace China? I'd really be interested in your views on that. Thank you.

Sec.-Gen. Lim: First question, on the IPEF. We are very grateful that seven of our member are part of the IPEF. IPEF is nothing new to us. They are also part of – part of what we discussed in the ASEAN-U.S. trade investment arrangement under TIFA. And we see that IPEF will be important platform for us to parallelly discuss the issue of common interests, for

example, in the trade area, in the supply chain resilience, as well as environment and infrastructure, and the other one is corruption and labor.

It's important that we discuss this issue openly, understand the issue, and hopefully one day our other partners in ASEAN will be part of the IPEF. So we hope that if they be part of IPEF, the centrality of ASEAN will be very much evidenced in the IPEF. We really appreciate the United States' initiative in this and to be engaged in our part of the world, and especially in ASEAN, in the area of trade and economics which have been so much missed in a couple – few years ago.

Secondly, on the ASEAN geopolitical front, we see there are so many issue being addressed by both side. I know that China is also our major trading partner – number-one trade with ASEAN – and also a major investment to ASEAN. Equally important, the United States is also, as I've described just now, is the number-one investment to ASEAN economy, with the investment of 40 billion (dollars) in

2021, and also the second largest trading partner of ASEAN, over 340 million (dollars) in 2021.

We see both are important for ASEAN. We hope that both major power discuss constructively, you know, in order to make the region more conducive to trade and investment and create opportunity for all of us, including the United States and China, and ASEAN as a whole. And this initiative is very important. And we hope that we can work together constructively using the ASEAN-led mechanism. That is ASEAN-led mechanism, EAS, will be an opportune time for all of us to discuss all the issue for the common benefit of our region.

Darshana
Baruah:

Thank you so much. My name is Darshana Baruah with the Carnegie Endowment.

My question was regarding the Quad, the Quadrilateral Group between the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia. And I was wondering, usually the group does identify Southeast Asia as one of the region where they would like to work together with, coordinate more of its efforts, whether it's COVID, capacity building, maritime security. And I was wondering if you could speak a little bit more to how the – to how ASEAN views such groupings, and if it considers groups such as the Quad constructive in its kind of regional collaborations and the challenges it seeks to address. Thank you.

Sec.-Gen. Lim:

Thank you for that question on the Quad. I think you were talking about Quad. The Quad has been there for quite some time, and

recently it's become more apparent because of the pandemic and other issue. And we see the Quad is not – we see that Quad is a platform that will address those issue of common interest to ASEAN, for example pandemic and production of vaccine, connectivity, and also other area of common interest.

So we – as long as Quad is doing something in parallel with ASEAN, I don't see there's any competition there. In fact, there will be complementarity, complementing one another, and using ASEAN as a centrality – as a central for their process. We hope that we can work closely with the Quad in the area of common interest to ASEAN and we can do – (inaudible) – together with ASEAN. That mechanism we can develop more benefit to all our people, especially in the area of pandemic mitigation as well as in the area of the connectivity.

Patsy
Widakuswara:

Thank you, Secretary Lim. I'm Patsy Widakuswara with Voice of America.

I have two questions. The first one, ahead of the U.S.-ASEAN summit in November that President Biden, I believe, will be attending, what are some of the key issues that you believe will be priority in this discussion? That's my first question. The second one is, as you know the White House is convening the first U.S.-Pacific countries summit – tomorrow will be – no, sorry – Wednesday and Thursday. And I'm not sure if this is going to be a formal subject of discussion, but from what I understand one of the issues that they'll be talking about is finding an alternative shipping route through the Pacific in the case of a Chinese invasion on Taiwan. I wonder if this kind of discussion is also present among your ASEAN colleagues. Thank you.

Sec.-Gen. Lim:

Well, ASEAN-U.S. summit normally meets annually at the end of the November. This year I'm sure it's in November. I think the ASEAN-U.S. summit will review the relationship between ASEAN and U.S. as we enter into the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership this year. And a lot of these activities I highlighted right now will be part and parcel of this plan of action. I'm sure issue of this bilateral relationship, how to enhance further our both political, economic and social culture, will be further examined, and we will adopt the plan of action for the CSB.

Obviously, when leaders meet, of course, they will discuss the issue – regional issue, including multilateral issues. For example, the issue like – issue like inflation, issue like food security, energy security. Those are the issue we think that will have to be high in our agenda. Obviously, we cannot stop the leader to talk of other issue of common interest for all of us. I cannot comment on U.S.-specific engagement, because they have not yet – because this is other parts of ASEAN. We

are not part of it. So we hope the engagement between these two region(s) will be – will create an environment of peace, stability, and provide prosperity not only to them but to ASEAN region. Thank you.

Ms. Widakuswara: Do you talk about the subject of finding alternative shipping routes in the case of an attack on Taiwan? Is that something that's discussed among your ASEAN colleagues?

Sec.-Gen.Lim: Well, anything can be discussed. But I don't know specifically what they're going to discuss. But obviously regional and international issue will be very much on the agenda.

Mario Masaya: Thank you very much, Secretary-General. It's good to see you in the U.S.

I just want to have one question. It's been five years since you assumed this office, Secretary-General, and in those years I reckoned your support to us. I'm Mario with the U.S.-ASEAN Business Council, by the way. Your support to us is pretty – is pretty strong, and I think there are a lot of things that we can do more from private sector point of view. I want to ask your views on how you see private sector involvement in shaping AEC and strengthening U.S.-ASEAN relations in general. Are we doing enough? Should we do more? Are we – is ASEAN open enough? And what else can be done in the future? Thank you very much, SG Lim.

Sec.-Gen. Lim: Thank you. See you.

Five years are supposed to be long, but it's very short because of the pandemic. We are being seized with doing our work through videoconferencing. Nevertheless, we managed to produce significant result. For example, we have several initiatives in the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, as I say just now, a clear manifestation of ASEAN eagerness to make sure that we will come out from the pandemic.

As you know, the pandemic has created problem for all of us. We lost around 10 million people out of job and a lot of poverty that we have been working trying to raise the standard of living have been affected. All these are very important. And we see it's important that this ACRF is implemented, and that will complement the ASEAN blueprint.

Since then, I think we – 10 ASEAN country opened for business. We have no restriction. Our trade has come back even better than pre-pandemic level and our economic activities has increased. As I said, this year we expect to get 5 percent growth; next year, 5.2 percent.

And hopefully, we can manage the issue – the global issue recession, high interest rates, and others.

But again, the mostly affected is tourism and travel, and tourism and travel is back to normal – not to normal, but back again in the high rate. And we hope that we can increase the supply side so as to increase the level of tourism.

And of course, private sector play an important role. And ASEAN-U.S. Business Council is always in the forefront trying to help ASEAN, and also develop a good relationship to help implement the ACRF and other cooperation that we have.

And the ASEAN-U.S. Business Council's always in the – having consultation of the sectoral dialogue ministerial meeting. For example, recently, they were at the ASEAN economic minister. They will be at the ASEAN energy minister, ASEAN transportation minister, ASEAN digital minister, so on. We see the role of the businesspeople are very much robust in ASEAN. And we hope that they can continue this momentum and to get to – to help ASEAN to build its economic community, especially in the digital as well as in the area of sustainable development.

Digital, of course, you have a lot of experience. And as we embark on digital action agreement by 2025 or even earlier than that, and also as we enter into a low-carbon economy, a green economy, we will be working with the private sector in the area of secular economy and carbon neutrality and energy transition.

So, input from private sector are critical as we embark into a new way of our economic activity. And I can say that the two area(s) that will become our driver for economic growth, one is the digital economy. By 2030, we are having around 1 trillion GDP growth from digital economy. And the other one is – driver will be sustainable development and also trying to mitigate climate change. And thus, we'll create a lot of opportunity for employment, opportunity for growth in the region. So private sector welcome to work together with ASEAN.

Elina Noor:

Thank you so much, Dr. Lim. I am Elina Noor from the Asia Society Policy Institute.

And I was wondering in the runup to the November summit whether you could comment on the options available to the ASEAN family with regard to the Myanmar crisis.

And relatedly, if social media is any barometer the youth of the ASEAN region seem to be losing faith in the ability of ASEAN to resolve the crisis in Myanmar with any timely fashion. You mentioned people-to-people relations. How do you propose that we in ASEAN revive some of that faith that seemed to be lost? Thank you.

Sec.-Gen. Lim: Well, Myanmar is always a family part of ASEAN. And the leaders has agreed a five-point consensus, and they also agreed to create special envoy for ASEAN chair. And so far, we worked very hard to get things. Of course, it is a very complex issue. It will – takes time. But there is a push to have it to be done as much as they can.

But again, always an issue that will be discussed by the family itself. And the ASEAN will work together, see – to run up to the summit and see how we can manage the issue related to a family problem.

But again, I must say that our foreign minister has met recently in New York. Of course, they will discuss this matter and they will further engage themselves on this particular issue. We hope they can resolve before the summit, but again, these are – the issue will be discussed in the coming weeks.

Mr. Poling: Well, we have a few minutes left, so let's turn to our online audience who has sent in a few questions. I want to start with Edmund Sim with Appleton Luff who asked whether or not you could comment on the status of Timor-Leste's application to join ASEAN.

Sec.-Gen. Lim: Timor-Leste has a – it's a long story. They have applied to be a member of ASEAN in 2012, and since then Timor-Leste is working the way up and they improved the infrastructure, they improved their corporate governance, and we see they have also works with the WTO to accede to the WTO by next year. They have – they have done a lot of work in the economic reform and 252 legislative agenda has been done by them in order to accede to WTO.

So, as part of ASEAN, yes, they have again renewed their interest to be part of ASEAN, to be ASEAN members. We have done our work by going there and to do the fact finding. I think the last one was on economic and sociocultural fact finding, and we see there's some very much improvement in the area that are

important to all of us. And we were very hopeful. We're very positive that one day we will discuss this at a forthcoming working group on Timor-Leste accession to ASEAN and see. From then we will work towards a process of addressing to the foreign minister, the ASEAN

Coordinating Council, and to their – to their leaders. And of course, we would like to see them to be in this year, and let's see how it goes.

Mr. Poling: Thank you.

Nora Toh, the Ph.D. candidate at Columbia University, asked: How does ASEAN balance the preferences of important external dialogue partners and the preferences of its own member states? When those diverge, how does ASEAN manage pressure from its dialogue partners?

Sec.-Gen. Lim: Well, it's always when you're having – we engage dialogue partners, always a mutual beneficial. And certainly, you have to discuss the issue. But again, we will discuss the matter with dialogue partner in a positive manner and we will resolve it in a mutually beneficial.

We have three pillars. One is political security, which we work closely with all the dialogue partners to maintain the region's peace and stability.

Second, an economic pillar. We work very, very hard with dialogue partner, and we work towards having the mutual interest in providing an environment for trade and investment in the region.

And finally in the area of sociocultural, which is a very important part, that will maintain the robustness among our people, robustness in our engagement with dialogue partner.

So we believe that these three pillars are critical towards the development of a strong, robust relationship between our dialogue partner.

Mr. Poling: Thank you.

And then we have one from Jose Asensio with Inside U.S. Trade who, again, asked about the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. In particular, he asked now the non-IPEF members – Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar – reacted to the framework. And is there any hint that they are interested in joining?

Sec.-Gen. Lim: We understand the reason why it is not all ASEAN country was invited to be part of IPEF. But we see there is room for us to provide the platform for our non-IPEF members. As I said just now, we have the TIFA. TIFA is addressing the same issue that are being addressed under the IPEF. And hopefully, with the capacity building and clear understanding of the issue, one day our, too, dialogue partners will be

part of the IPEF and that will strengthen IPEF as part of ASEAN centrality.

And we hope we can work closely with United States in the area of – four area of common interest to all the people in IPEF family. I know the – I have just spoken to USTR about IPEF, how to engage our non-IPEF. So the issue of TIFA will be very much in the part of the platform that we could address in the future.

Mr. Poling: Thank you. I think we'll give the last word to Sam Harris, who's across the street at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Sam said: Have you had a chance to meet with Yohannes Abraham, the new U.S. ambassador to ASEAN? What do you think his top priority should be?

Sec.-Gen. Lim: Yeah. We're very grateful that now we have a full ambassador that's been appointed by United States. I'll be seeing him next week to present his credential. I'm sure he is young but very energetic and forward-looking. And also we will work very closely with him as we strive to enhance our relationship between ASEAN and United States. I will look forward to work closely with him in other area of mutual interest and common interest for the two regions. And I very much welcome him and congratulation for being appointed as the ambassador to ASEAN.

Mr. Poling: Well, with that, thank you so much. If everybody could please join me in a round of applause. (Applause.) Thank you all so much for tuning in or coming. And thank you, again, Secretary-General Lim.

Sec.-Gen. Lim: Thank you.

(END)