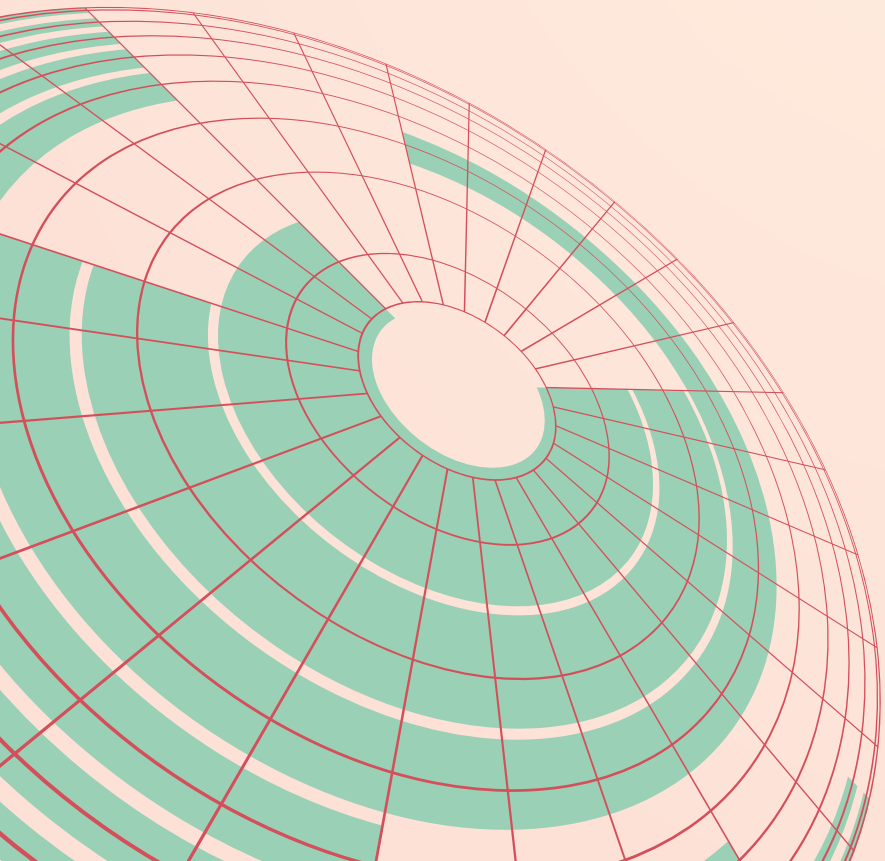
ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE

REGIONAL OUTLOOK FORUM 2025

Resilience amid Global Winds of Change

Thursday, 9 January 2025,
Sands Expo & Convention Centre, Orchid Ballroom, Level 4

GUIDE TO ROF2025

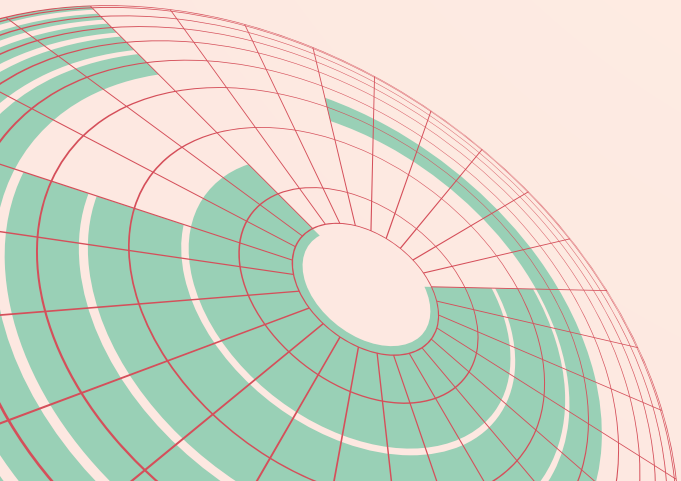


ABOUT THE ROF2025

The Regional Outlook Forum (ROF) 2025 will delve into the pressing need for resilience amid the disruptions and uncertainties caused by political, geopolitical, technological, and economic upheavals at both national, regional and global levels. The trajectory of global developments could take dramatic twists and turns, following the US presidential election. The Trump 2.0 presidency would intensify the resurgence of American isolationism, protectionism, and unilateralism, potentially driving further realignments and fragmentation in global politics and economy. In Asia, the network of US alliances and minilateral partnerships carefully constructed by the Biden administration now hangs in the balance even as the US-China strategic rivalry is set to deepen.

As nations, societies, and economies navigate these unprecedented changes and potential chaos, the Forum seeks to highlight pathways to stay resilient and adaptive. This includes emphasising the imperative to deepen regional economic integration, secure access to markets and technologies, and accelerate the green transition and digital transformation for continued growth.

ROF2025 will also assess domestic political situations in Southeast Asian countries and implications for their economies and foreign policies. We will reflect on the political upheavals in Vietnam, which have led to frequent changes in high-level leadership positions, and what is in store for the 2026 National Party Congress. Additionally, we will explore the fissures within the UniTeam alliance between the Marcoses and Dutertes and consider their policy impacts for the Philippines. For Indonesia, we will analyse how President Prabowo Subianto, coming out of his predecessor's shadow, will strengthen his country's economic and geopolitical standing to shape his own legacy. Lastly, as Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's Unity Government approaches its mid-term point, we will assess its capacity to undertake more difficult reforms while fostering social cohesion and political stability in Malaysia.



PROGRAMME

Timings in Singapore time

8.30 am – 9.00 am — Registration

9.00 am – 9.10 am — **Welcome Remarks**

Mr Choi Shing Kwok
Director & CEO, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

9.10 am – 9.55 am — **Keynote Address**
Can The Spirit of Cooperation Shine Through Turbulent Times?

Moderator: **Professor Chan Heng Chee**
Chairman Board of Trustees, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Speaker: **Enrique A. Manalo**
Secretary for Foreign Affairs, The Philippines

9.55 am – 10.10 am — Coffee Break

10.10 am – 11.25 am — **Session 1: Geopolitics – Pathways Between Post-Pax Americana and Pax Sinica**

This panel will examine the political developments and foreign policies of major countries, with a focus on the United States, China and Japan, and examine how these dynamics will shape the regional economic and geopolitical landscape in the coming years. Key issues include the policy direction under the second Trump administration and its impact on the US Indo-Pacific strategy, China's counter-containment efforts through the consolidation of its manufacturing and technological prowess and mobilisation of Global South countries, as well as Japan's evolving foreign and security strategies. We will also explore the implications for Southeast Asia, identifying both vulnerabilities and opportunities in this evolving geopolitical environment.

Moderator: **Ms Lee Sue-Ann**
Senior Fellow and Coordinator, Regional Strategic and Political Studies Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Speakers: **Mr Roy Kamphausen**
Special Advisor to the President and Senior Fellow for Chinese Security National Bureau of Asian Research, United States of America

Professor Da Wei
Director, Center for International Security and Strategy (CISS), Tsinghua University, China

Professor Ken Jimbo
Professor, Faculty of Policy Management, Keio University, Japan

PROGRAMME

11.25 am – 12.25 pm

Session 2: Economy – Securing Drivers of Growth Amid Global Fragmentation

This panel will discuss the shifting dynamics of international economic relations, focusing on the rethinking of globalisation, the reconfiguration of global supply chains, and the resurgence of protectionism, industrial policies and the heightened emphasis on economic security and resilience in major economies. It will address the challenges and opportunities that these trends present to Southeast Asian countries, and examine how regional nations, in collaboration with their economic partners, are navigating these changes. The discussion will highlight efforts to deepen regional economic integration, secure access to markets and technologies, and accelerate the green transition and digital transformation to sustain growth in an evolving global economic landscape.

Moderator: **Dr Jayant Menon**
Visiting Senior Fellow, Regional Economic Studies Programme,
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Speakers: **Mr Gita Wirjawan**
Founder and Chairman of Ancora Group
Former Minister of Trade, Indonesia

Dr Rebecca Fatima Sta Maria
Former Executive Director, APEC Secretariat

12.30 pm – 2.00 pm

Lunch

2.00 pm – 3.00 pm

Session 3: Malaysia – Madani at the Mid-Term: Closing Window for Reform?

Having survived the first two years with a checkered record, Anwar Ibrahim's Unity government looks stable and secure enough to run the full term to 2027. As it reaches its mid-point, the administration will look towards 2025 as the year for making decisive breakthroughs, mindful of the narrowing window for executing bold and potentially unpopular reforms. The Pakatan Harapan-led government continues to grapple with economic challenges, including generating growth, mitigating inequality and cost of living, and consolidating government finances. Politically, Malaysia faces persisting challenges of fostering ethnic and religious inclusiveness, reforming governance, and managing Peninsular-Borneo relations, particularly with Sabah's state elections in 2025. The Perikatan Nasional opposition will seek to consolidate its strongholds and expand its appeal in a year of heightening expectations. This panel will critically examine these issues from both sides of the political divide.

Moderator: **Dr Lee Hwok-Aun**
Senior Fellow and Co-coordinator, Malaysia Studies Programme,
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Speakers: **YB Wong Chen**
Member of Parliament for Subang
Chair, Parliament Special Select Committee on International Relations & Trade and All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia (APPGM) on Political Financing

YB Dato' Sri Saifuddin Abdullah
Member of Parliament for Indera Mahkota

PROGRAMME

3.00 pm – 4.00 pm

Session 4: The Philippines and Vietnam – Political Dynamics and Policy Implications

This panel will reflect upon the political upheavals in Vietnam brought about by the anti-corruption campaign, the ascent of Mr To Lam as the new General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and the implications of this leadership change for the country's political stability, economic direction and foreign policy. For the Philippines, the panel will examine the fissures within the UniTeam alliance between the Marcoses and Dutertes, their impact on the policy agenda of the current administration, and the prospects of the Philippines' political landscape leading up to and following the 2025 mid-term elections. The panel will also examine the Philippines' relations with the US and China, including a comparative analysis of how Manila and Hanoi embrace different approaches to addressing their shared security concerns regarding China in the South China Sea.

Moderator: **Dr Aries Arugay**
Visiting Senior Fellow and Coordinator, Philippine Studies Programme,
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Speakers: **Professor Julio Teehankee**
Professor of Political Science and International Studies at
De La Salle University, the Philippines

Dr Le Hong Hiep
Senior Fellow and Coordinator, Vietnam Studies Programme,
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

4.00 pm – 4.15 pm

Coffee Break

4.15 pm – 5.15 pm

Session 5: Indonesia – Prabowo's Era: Contours and Constraints

By January 2025, the Prabowo administration will have been in power for just over two months, and there is considerable anticipation and anxiety surrounding its trajectory. This panel aims to shed light on how Mr Prabowo's personality and character will shape his presidency, the composition of his cabinet, and his government's key political and policy objectives. It examines the challenges the new administration will face and the potential policy areas where there would be continuity and change from the Jokowi era. The panel will also discuss how President Prabowo would shape his own distinctive legacy, particularly in the realm of international diplomacy.

Moderator: **Ms Julia Lau**
Senior Fellow and Co-coordinator, Indonesia Studies Programme,
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Speakers: **Professor Bambang Brodjonegoro**
Special Advisor to the President for Economic Affairs and
National Development, Indonesia

Professor Dewi Fortuna Anwar
Research Professor, Research Center for Politics,
National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Indonesia

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS

WELCOME REMARKS



Mr Choi Shing Kwok is Director and Chief Executive Officer of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute and Head of the ASEAN Studies Centre and Singapore APEC Studies Centre at the institute. Prior to this appointment, he was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources from 2012 to 2017. Mr Choi started his career in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) in 1978. He held various appointments in the SAF before he was appointed as Director, Security and Intelligence Division, Ministry of Defence in 1995 and held the post till 2005. After leaving the Ministry of Defence, Mr Choi held the post of Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Transport from 2005 to 2012.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS — CAN THE SPIRIT OF COOPERATION SHINE THROUGH TURBULENT TIMES?



Ambassador Enrique A. Manalo is the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines. He has a long and distinguished career in the Philippine Foreign Service spanning more than four decades. Before taking the helm of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), he was appointed as Undersecretary for Policy twice, being the principal adviser to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in matters involving the country's relations with the international community. As Undersecretary for Policy, he also served as the Philippines' Senior Official in the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting (ASEAN SOM). Secretary Manalo is an expert in multilateral diplomacy, having served as the Philippine Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York and Geneva. He also held other notable positions, including Acting Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Philippine Ambassador to the United Kingdom and Belgium, and Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. Secretary Manalo holds a M.A. and a B.A. in Economics from the University of the Philippines, Diliman. In recognition of his exceptional service to the country, he was awarded the Order of Lakandula with rank of Grand Cross (Bayani) in 2018, the Gawad Mabini with rank of Grand Cross (Dakilang Kamanong) in 2017, and the Order of Sikatuna with the rank of Grand Cross (Datu) in 2010.

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

The strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific is currently facing myriad challenges – from natural calamities exacerbated by climate change to the lingering impact of global health emergencies, to geopolitical tensions in the maritime space. The rules-based international order is also facing strain from the disregard or reinterpretation of international law, which has long served as the linchpin of global security, stability and prosperity.

Amidst these turbulent times, some are questioning whether there is still space for the spirit of cooperation to shine through.

Philippine Secretary for Foreign Affairs argues that global problems require concerted action and that greater international cooperation, firmly anchored on international law and the sovereign equality of states is, in fact, the only viable path to address these challenges effectively.

MODERATOR



Professor Chan Heng Chee is Chairman of the Board of Trustees of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. She is Ambassador-at-Large with the Singapore Foreign Ministry and holds the appointment of Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities in the Singapore University of Technology and Design. She was appointed a Member of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights in 2012 and continues to serve in that position. Ambassador Chan is the Deputy Chairman of the Social Science Research Council in Singapore. She is a Member of the Science of Cities Committee (National Research Foundation). She is a Trustee of the National University of Singapore, and of Yale-NUS College. In 2022 Ambassador Chan was appointed a Trustee of the University of the Arts Singapore. She is the Global Co-chair of Asia Society and a Board member of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS

SESSION 1 — GEOPOLITICS – PATHWAYS BETWEEN POST-PAX AMERICANA AND PAX SINICA



Mr Roy D. Kamphausen is a internationally recognized expert on Indo-Pacific regional security issues, U.S.-China strategic competition, and China's People's Liberation Army. He was president and CEO of America's leading policy research institution focused exclusively on the Indo-Pacific – the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) – from 2019-2024. Kamphausen also was appointed by the Senate Majority Leader to two terms as a Commissioner on the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. Earlier in his career, he served as a political-military strategist in the U.S. Army, with assignments as China policy director in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, China strategist for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and as a military attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. He is the author or editor of more than a dozen volumes on Asian regional security topics and China's People's Liberation Army and has spoken in more that two dozen countries across Asia and Europe on these topics. He holds an M.A. in International Affairs from Columbia University. He has professional proficiency in Mandarin Chinese, is a senior advisor to the Office of Global Affairs at the University of Connecticut and is a member of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations.

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

For the first time in more than a century, the United States has elected a president to a non-consecutive second term, one of many historically unusual aspects of the 2024 presidential contest. That American voters returned former President Trump to the White House after a fraught ending to his first term and the four years of the Biden Administration shocked many international partners.

What can the Asia-Pacific region expect from a second Trump Administration? Easy predictions are risky, but analyzing four tensions at the center of foreign policy deliberations can yield insights to overall Trump policy direction:

- Will the second Trump Administration prioritize *Europe or Asia* for resources and senior leader attention?
- Will America's *allies and partners* face the same scrutiny on national security and trade matters as non-allied countries?
- Will American leadership on *multilateral trade* continue to decline and will new tools and outcomes become available?
- Will *China* occupy the central place in the US' foreign policy deliberations, or will it be just one of many priorities?

How the tensions may resolve hinges on whether the Trump Administration perceives a "*mandate to govern vs. a bipartisan need to collaborate*" in the formation and execution of policy.

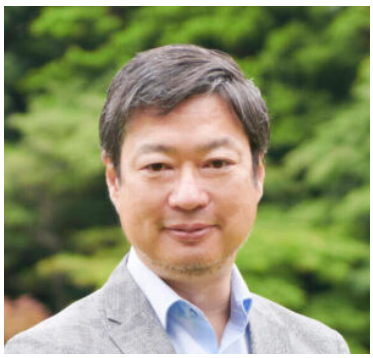
SPEAKERS & MODERATORS



Professor Da Wei is Director of the Center for International Security and Strategy (CISS) at Tsinghua University, and Professor in the Department of International Relations at Tsinghua. His research expertise encompasses China-US relations and US security & foreign policy. Da Wei has been working in China's academic and policy community for nearly three decades. He had served at China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) for over 20 years, including as Director of the Institute of American Studies from 2013 to 2017. After that, he served as the Assistant President of the University of International Relations (UIR) and Dean of the Department of International Politics of UIR from 2017 to 2020. In addition to his current positions at Tsinghua, Da Wei serves as Vice President of the Chinese Association of American Studies and is on the boards of various other academic organisations and associations. He earned his B.A. and M.A. from the University of International Relations in Beijing and his Ph.D. from CICIR. Da Wei was a senior visiting scholar at the Atlantic Council (2006-2007), Johns Hopkins University (2008-2009), and Stanford University (2024).

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

Donald J. Trump's re-election as President of the United States would bring significant disruptions to the international order, the geopolitical dynamics of East Asia, and US-China relations. In 2025, US-China relations are likely to face an extremely challenging year, with the risk of the bilateral relationship once again plunging into freefall. At the same time, nationalism is re-emerging as the dominant framework through which major world powers interpret international relations, signalling the end of hyper-globalization and the so-called liberal international order. As a region where nationalist orders collide, East Asia may not experience a structural shift, but the clash between the US and China, coupled with changes in the global order, will introduce new uncertainties to the region.



Professor Ken Jimbo is Professor of International Relations at Keio University and Managing Director of Programs at the International House of Japan (IHJ/I-House). He is concurrently an adjunct Senior Research Fellow at the Canon Institute for Global Studies (CIGS). He served as Special Advisor to the Minister of Defense, Japan Ministry of Defense (2020) and Senior Advisor to the National Security Secretariat (2018-20). His main research interests are in international security, Japan-US security relations, and Japan's foreign and defence policy. He has been a policy advisor for various Japanese governmental commissions and research groups, including the National Security Secretariat, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His policy writings have appeared in RAND Corporation, NBR, Stimson Center, Pacific Forum CSIS, Japan Times, Nikkei, Yomiuri, Asahi and Sankei Shimbun.

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

Japan is confronted with an increasingly complex regional security environment driven by heightened geopolitical tensions and shifting power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific. The resurgence of China's maritime assertiveness, tensions over the Taiwan Straits, North Korea's nuclear/missile developments, and the broader implications of global shifts, particularly following the 2024 US presidential election, reshape the strategic calculus for Japan and its allies. Japan's evolving national defence strategy seeks to respond to these challenges through a multi-layered approach. With the fundamental reinforcement of Japan's defence capability, Japan has decided to double the size of its defense budget by 2027, investing in seven focal areas, including counter-strike capability. The US-Japan alliance remains a central pillar of its security posture, with ongoing efforts to strengthen joint deterrence capabilities and interoperability, which is also vital for maintaining a stable balance of power in the region. In parallel, Japan's growing trilateral and multilateral defence networks with key regional partners, notably South Korea and the Philippines, underscore its proactive engagement in fostering collective security frameworks to address shared security concerns, particularly in maritime domains and the context of rising economic and technological vulnerabilities. Furthermore, integrating economic security within Japan's broader strategic agenda reflects an acute recognition of the importance of securing critical supply chains and safeguarding technological advantages. This multi-dimensional strategy positions Japan as a key actor in shaping the evolving security architecture of the Indo-Pacific, ensuring both national resilience and regional stability in the face of rapidly shifting geopolitical realities.

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS

MODERATOR



Ms Lee Sue-Ann is Senior Fellow and Coordinator of the Regional Strategic and Political Studies Programme, and editor at Fulcrum, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. She also directs the Media, Technology and Society Programme which focuses on how media technologies and platforms have been utilised to shape political perceptions, narratives and behaviour. Sue-Ann graduated from the National University of Singapore with an honours degree in Political Science and from Harvard's Kennedy School with a Master of Public Policy. Her research interests include topics such as the rise of China and its strategic implications, technology as the emerging key arena for big-power competition, the politics of Islamisation and the continued salience of identity politics as a divisive factor in political discourse.

SESSION 2 — ECONOMY – SECURING DRIVERS OF GROWTH AMID GLOBAL FRAGMENTATION



Mr Gita Wirjawan is Founding Partner of Ikhlas Capital and Chairman of Ancora Group, an Indonesian business group with interests in real estate, natural resources, arts and technology, which he founded in 2007. His public service has included positions as Indonesia's Minister of Trade (2011–2014), Chairman of its Investment Coordinating Board (2009–2011), and Chair of a 159-nation WTO ministerial conference in 2012 on easing global trade barriers. He also led his country's national badminton association from 2012 to 2016. As an investment banker, he has held key appointments at Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan, where he led many mergers, corporate restructuring, corporate financing and strategic sales involving leading companies in Southeast Asia. His various board roles included service for the state-owned oil giant Pertamina and Axiata Group Berhad. Gita hosts the educational podcast "Endgame" that promotes Southeast Asia's growth and prosperity. He is a visiting scholar at Stanford University's Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center. Additionally, he is a member of the Angsana Council, a non-profit group dedicated to boosting the region's businesses and economies, and global advisory firm Macro Advisory Partners. His degrees are from the Harvard Kennedy School (MPA), Baylor University (MBA), and the University of Texas at Austin (BSc).

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

As global economic fragmentation intensifies, Southeast Asia's ability to navigate international dynamics and secure sustainable growth hinges first on addressing critical internal challenges. This presentation examines three fundamental prerequisites that demand immediate attention before the region can effectively respond to shifting global economic paradigms. First, the suboptimal intersection of power and talent requires strategic realignment, particularly in developing human capital that can drive both technological advancement and economic diplomacy. Second, the region's constrained fiscal and monetary spaces need structural reforms to build economic buffers against global volatility and fund critical transitions in green technology and digital infrastructure. Third, the under-narration of Southeast Asia's economic potential and strategic significance hampers its ability to shape international economic discourse and secure favourable partnerships in an increasingly bipolar world. By addressing these internal imperatives, Southeast Asian nations can better position themselves to capitalize on supply chain reconfigurations, advance regional economic integration, and transform global challenges into opportunities for sustainable growth. This introspective approach provides a foundation for more effective engagement with evolving international economic dynamics.

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS



Dr Rebecca Sta Maria is former Executive Director of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Secretariat based in Singapore where she advised and provided support for APEC's 21 diverse member economies in the 2019-2024 period. Dr Sta Maria spent years as a top-level civil servant and trade negotiator in Malaysia. As Secretary-General of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, she oversaw the formulation of Malaysia's positions in major agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. Dr Sta Maria also chaired the body that drafted ASEAN's economic community blueprints for 2015 and 2025. In 2024, she was featured in Forbes' third annual *50 Over 50: Asia list*, which showcases 50 inspirational women over the age of 50 from across the Asia-Pacific region.

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

History shows us how with every crisis there is, among others, a renewed focus on international economic relations. Looking across the various regional bodies, ASEAN, APEC, G20 what stands out is the common theme of sustainable economic development, inclusive growth and the growing (maybe disruptive) impact of the digital economy. Whither ASEAN in this changing economic landscape?

ASEAN must add substance to its assertion of ASEAN "centrality" by ensuring a stronger, more coherent voice on the regional and international stage. It needs to stamp its position collectively as a credible 'middle power.' ASEAN has convening power, but the jury is out as to whether ASEAN has leveraged its collective strength to steer the economic conversation, highlighting what it has done and is doing to manage sustainable economic development, inclusive growth and digital transformation. ASEAN must value-add to the global narrative and ensure that the concerns of the business and people in the region are brought to the table and given due consideration. The global challenges present ASEAN with an opportunity to steer the conversation, an opportunity that ASEAN should not pass as it plans for ASEAN 2045.

MODERATOR



Dr Jayant Menon is a Visiting Senior Fellow at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, following a long career at the Asian Development Bank. His last post at ADB was Lead Economist in the Office of the Chief Economist. After obtaining his PhD from the University of Melbourne, Dr Menon worked in academia, with positions at the Centre of Policy Studies at Monash University, as well as the University of Melbourne, Victoria University, the American University in Washington, DC and the ADB Institute in Tokyo. He has served as a Board Director of CDRI, Cambodia, and on the Advisory Board of the University of Nottingham, Malaysia. He holds adjunct appointments with the Australian National University, University of Nottingham, UK and IDEAS, Malaysia. He has authored/edited more than 15 books, 40 book chapters, and 80 articles in peer-reviewed journals.

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS

SESSION 3 — MALAYSIA – MADANI AT THE MID-TERM: CLOSING WINDOW FOR REFORM?



YB Wong Chen is a third-term Malaysian Member of Parliament for Subang. He was first elected to office in 2013 as the Member of Parliament for Kelana Jaya. A technocrat from the People's Justice Party, he was the head of the party's Investment and Trade Bureau and Public Policy Bureau. He also headed the Opposition Alternative Budget Committee from 2012 to 2017. He is currently Chairman of the Parliamentary Special Select Committee on International Relations and Trade. Previously, he served on the Public Accounts Committee and was the Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Special Select Committee on Finance and Economy. During the Covid-19 pandemic, he was a member of the bipartisan National Recovery Council. Internationally, he is a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Working Group on Science and Technology, representing the Asia-Pacific region, and also member of the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights and recently became chairman of its Malaysian chapter. An outspoken progressive reformist, he specialises in fiscal, economic, international trade, climate change and human rights policies. He was also a former corporate lawyer with 22 years of experience. He was educated at the United World College of Southeast Asia, Singapore and a graduate of the School of Law of the University of Warwick, UK.

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

Malaysia enters an eventful 2025. The Sabah election due before year-end will be a landmark for the state but is unlikely to have a national impact, with Sabah politics being localised and not fully reflective of national politics. However, it will be interesting to see if the Unity Government components will work together or agree on seat allocations to compete as an alliance. Currently, coalitional relations are somewhat complicated by a corruption exposé, but win or lose at the state level, Sabahan politicians are going to side with the federal government of the day.

In 2024, reforms proceeded at a slower pace because almost half of the Unity Government MPs are from parties that do not share Pakatan Harapan's reform agenda. The UG Cabinet members also needed some time to bond and familiarise with each other. Against all odds, the UG has held together for two years and today the bond is stronger than ever, which means the government is probably more ready than ever to pursue reforms. The Prime Minister has been signalling of late that he is committed to fighting systemic corruption.

The economic plans are on track especially for attracting high tech FDIs and realizing the Johor-Singapore SEZ. The race is now to provide renewable energy and produce more and better STEM graduates. The government will probably take a softer approach on rationalising subsidies, using big data via the PADU central database and continually monitoring sentiments. As long as the economy grows, we have time to stretch out and deploy a less painful subsidy rationalisation process.

As Malaysia assumes the ASEAN Chair, we can look forward to: (a) making positive steps towards ending the Myanmar conflict, and (b) driving a more unified regional climate change agenda.

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS



YB Dato' Sri Saifuddin Abdullah is Member of Parliament for Indera Mahkota, Shadow Minister of Education and Supreme Council Member of Parti BERSATU. He was Minister of Foreign Affairs (twice), Minister of Communication and Multimedia, and Deputy Minister of Higher Education. Saifuddin is a progressive politician who advocates New Politics, and is involved in works on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Political Financing Act, and political/governance and education reforms. He is Founder of the Malaysian Women Basketball League and Co-founder of the Malaysian Universities Royal Debate. Before active in politics, he was President of the Malaysian Youth Council, Member of the United Nations Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Youth Employment, Consultant of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and a student activist. He has written nine books, the latest two are *Kehidupan Digital: Teknologi yang Manusiawi* (Digital Life: Humane Technology) (2022), and *New Politics 2.0: Multiracial and Moderate Malaysian Democracy* (2017). He authored two government policies: *Focus in Continuity: Malaysia's Foreign Policy Framework for Post-Pandemic World* (2021) and *Change in Continuity: Foreign Policy Framework for New Malaysia* (2018), and is columnist at *Sinar Harian*. Saifuddin studied at The Malay College Kuala Kangsar and holds a BA Hons (Malaya).

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

We want a better Malaysia that realises excellence with soul that is based on values. The short-term political challenges are the state elections in Sabah, Melaka and Johor while the Parliamentary delimitation exercise, which could increase seats and redraw borders in 2026, is a potential hot button for both sides of the divide. But what is really needed is New Politics, i.e. bringing politics to a higher level towards a truly multi-racial and moderate Malaysian Democracy.

We need real *islah* (reform): reset what used to work before, improve certain things, introduce/innovate policies and systems, and prevent decay. To date, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has done very little reform, with most of his promises not implemented, e.g. the price of petrol did not go down, while initiatives on the Parliamentary Services Act, political financing, constituency development funding and asset declaration, receive not the sense of urgency expected from his team. About a dozen more – e.g. abolishing the Sedition Act, and independence of the Election Commission and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission – are hardly mentioned. Hence, BERSIH, the electoral and democratic reform NGO, gave him a 'D' grade for performance on institutional reforms.

Cost of living remains the biggest unsolved problem. Economic advancement is slow, without concrete implementation of policies to optimise new wealth, e.g. rare earth and iconic digital economic projects.

On the international front, Anwar has to be more measured in his words and actions. As ASEAN Chairman, he has to focus on two main items, i.e. increasing intra-ASEAN trade and solving the Myanmar crisis.

MODERATOR



Dr Lee Hwok Aun is a Senior Fellow and Co-coordinator of the Malaysia Studies Programme at the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute. His research focuses on inequality, affirmative action, discrimination, labour, and electoral politics. He is the author of *Affirmative Action in Malaysia and South Africa: Preference for Parity* (2021, Routledge), and numerous articles published in the ISEAS Perspective and ISEAS Trends in Southeast Asia series, and in international refereed journals. He also co-edited *Learning from Covid-19 in Southeast Asia: Restriction, Relief, Recovery* (forthcoming, ISEAS), *Inequality and Exclusion in Southeast Asia: Old Fractures, New Frontiers* (2021, ISEAS) and *The Defeat of Barisan Nasional: Missed Signs or Late Surge?* (2019, ISEAS), and was national consultant for the *Malaysia Human Development Report 2013* (2014, UNDP).

SESSION 4 — THE PHIILIPPINES AND VIETNAM – POLITICAL DYNAMICS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS



Professor Julio C. Teehankee is Full Professor and Research Fellow of Political Science at the Department of International Studies, De La Salle University. He served as Chair of the Political Science Department (1994-2007); Chair of the International Studies Department (2008-2013); and Dean of the College of Liberal Arts (2013-2017). He also served as President of the Philippine Political Science Association (2017-2019) and the Asian Political and International Studies Association (2009-2011). He is also the Regional Manager of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. He has held several visiting appointments, including with Kyoto University, Australian National University, City University of Hong Kong, Osaka University, University of Tokyo, Waseda University, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and the London School of Economics and Political Science. His research is on issues of popular participation, governance, democratisation, and contested institutions in East and Southeast Asia. He has published extensively on the topics of elections, party politics, and political dynasties. His latest book *Rethinking Parties in Democratizing Asia* was published by Routledge in 2023. He appears regularly as a political analyst for local and international media outlets and his YouTube channel – *Talk Politics with Julio Teehankee*.

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

The UniTeam alliance, formed by the convergence of the Marcos and Duterte dynasties in 2022, aimed to consolidate power across the Philippines' divisive political landscape. It represented a strategic union of two influential families—the Marcoses, their stronghold in the north, and the Dutertes, dominating the south. Initially seen as a potentially stabilising force for elite cohesion, the alliance began to unravel due to inherent power struggles, conflicting ambitions, and different leadership visions between President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte. Key events, such as Sara Duterte's resignation from her cabinet position, brought internal discord into the public eye, highlighting the fragile nature of political alliances based primarily on power consolidation rather than shared governance ideals. This talk analyzes how dynastic politics, territorial bailiwicks, and elite dominance perpetuate political instability in the Philippines. Drawing from Higley and Burton's elite unity theory, it highlights how the lack of cohesive elite consensus undermines democratic governance and fosters political volatility. The feud not only disrupts immediate governance by stalling policy initiatives and creating bureaucratic gridlock but also erodes trust in democratic institutions. The presentation also addresses the broader implications of this elite discord for Philippine democracy. It contemplates potential realignments within the political landscape, suggesting opportunities for opposition groups to garner support amid the dynastic fallout. Additionally, it considers how media narratives shape public perception and contribute to the political dynamics of the feud. The dissolution of the UniTeam alliance underscores the fragility of Philippine political stability, driven by elite fragmentation and dynastic competition, with significant implications for future governance and democratic processes.

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS



Dr Le Hong Hiep is Senior Fellow and Coordinator of the Vietnam Studies Programme at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. He is also Co-editor of the Institute's flagship journal Contemporary Southeast Asia (CSEA). Hiep holds a B.A. from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, M.A. in International Relations and Master of Diplomacy from the Australian National University. In 2015, Hiep earned his Ph.D in Political and International Studies from the University of New South Wales. Prior to joining ISEAS in early 2015, Hiep worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam and taught at the Faculty of International Relations, Vietnam National University-HCMC. He is the author of two books and has published extensively on Vietnam's political, economic and foreign policy issues.

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

In the period between late 2022 and August 2024, Vietnam experienced significant political instability and uncertainty, with a series of high-level leadership changes occurring in quick succession. This resulted in the removal of seven Politburo members, including two state presidents and one National Assembly chairman. The unprecedented turmoil not only destabilised the political system of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), but also raised concerns about the country's economic outlook. The election of CPV General Secretary To Lam after the passing of his predecessor, Nguyen Phu Trong, in early August 2024, has brought some semblance of stability back to the system. However, with the 14th CPV National Congress scheduled for early 2026, there are lingering questions about whether Vietnam will experience further political infighting and renewed instability, or if there will be a smooth reconfiguration of power under the new leadership. This session will provide an assessment of Vietnam's recent political and economic developments under new General Secretary To Lam. It will also explore the country's political future leading up to the 14th CPV National Congress, and the potential implications for Vietnam's foreign partners and investors.

MODERATOR



Dr Aries Arugay (Georgia State University, Ph.D.) is a Visiting Senior Fellow and Coordinator of the Philippine Studies Programme at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (Singapore). He is also Professor and Chairperson at the Department of Political Science at the University of the Philippines Diliman. His research interests are comparative democratization, security sector governance, foreign and security policy, and digital politics. Aries is the Editor-in-Chief of Asian Politics & Policy, a journal in political science and international relations published by Wiley-Blackwell and the Policy Studies Organization. He has published in Asian Perspective, Pacific Affairs, Journal of East Asian Studies, American Behavioral Scientist, and the Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, among others.

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS

SESSION 5 — INDONESIA – PRABOWO'S ERA: CONTOURS AND CONSTRAINTS



Professor Bambang Brodjonegoro has held several prominent positions in Indonesia's government, including Minister of Finance (2014-2016), Minister of National Development Planning (2016-2019), and Minister of Research and Technology/Head of the National Research and Innovation Agency (2019-2021). Currently, he serves as Special Advisor to the President for Economic Affairs and National Development and holds key positions as President Commissioner of PT Telkom Indonesia Tbk, PT Bukalapak.com, and PT Prudential Sharia Life Assurance. He is also an Independent Commissioner for several Indonesian companies. Dr Brodjonegoro earned his Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and is an active lecturer at the University of Indonesia.

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

In the initial months of President Prabowo Subianto's administration, several transformative domestic policies have been introduced, such as the free school lunch initiative, healthcare expansion, and salary increases for civil servants and law enforcement. These programmes reflect a strong focus on improving social welfare and reducing inequality. However, their implementation poses challenges in terms of fiscal sustainability, administrative efficiency, and equitable outcomes.

Dr Bambang Brodjonegoro will analyse these policies from an economic perspective, assessing their alignment with Indonesia's broader macroeconomic goals, including poverty alleviation, fiscal reforms, and economic resilience. Special emphasis will be placed on the potential economic trade-offs, public response, and institutional readiness. The discussion will also explore the administration's immediate economic priorities for the next six months, particularly regarding fiscal stability, private sector engagement, and structural transformation, offering insights into the implications of these policies for sustainable growth and Indonesia's long-term economic development.

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS



Professor Dewi Fortuna Anwar is an Academician of the Social Science Commission of the Indonesian Academy of Sciences (AIPI), Research Professor at the Research Center for Politics, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Chairman of the Board of Directors of The Habibie Center (THC) and Co-Founder of the Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia (FPCI). In 2001-2010, she was Deputy for Social Sciences and Humanities at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI). In 2010-2017 Dewi served as a Deputy Secretary to the Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia. Dewi was Distinguished Visiting Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), NTU, Singapore in 2017-2018, and Distinguished Visiting Professor at SAIS, Johns Hopkins University in 2007. She has written extensively on Indonesia's foreign policy, ASEAN and regional political-security issues. Dewi has served in a number of national and international advisory boards of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) since 2019, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in 2010-2020, and the UN Secretary General Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters in 2008-2012. She obtained her Ph.D. from Monash University, Melbourne, and her M.A. and B.A. (Hons) from SOAS, University of London.

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

Unlike Joko Widodo, Prabowo Subianto is expected to be a foreign policy president interested in a more comprehensive set of foreign policy issues beyond economic diplomacy. By appointing his relatively inexperienced protégé, Sugiono, as foreign minister, Prabowo clearly indicates his intention to have a stronger control over Indonesian foreign policy directions, priorities and implementation. The higher emphasis put on foreign policy is also reflected in the appointment of three vice ministers of foreign affairs.

Under Prabowo, the iteration of Indonesia's free and active foreign policy is more high-octane, as shown by his frequent trips overseas since winning the presidency and moves to join various multilateral/minilateral economic platforms, including BRICS, alongside Indonesia's earlier application to join the OECD. While Indonesia's annual joint military exercises with the US have become bigger, Indonesia has also broadened its partners for joint bilateral military exercises, which also include China and recently Russia.

Economic diplomacy remains a priority to support the government's ambitious domestic programs, including achieving 8 per cent annual growth. The stress on a 'good neighbour' policy means that ASEAN and regional cooperation will remain the cornerstone of Indonesian foreign policy, and Prabowo will likely be interested in playing a greater regional leadership role, particularly on political-security issues. President Prabowo wishes to maintain strong relations with both the US and China as well as help to defuse tension in the South China Sea. The controversies over the Indonesia-China Joint Statement which talks about joint development in areas of "overlapping claims" which Indonesia has consistently refuted as being inconsistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982), however, points to some of the risks posed by a more adventurous president-led foreign policy.

MODERATOR



Ms Julia Lau is a Senior Fellow and Co-coordinator of the Indonesia Studies Programme at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, and an Editor of fulcrum.sg, ISEAS' commentary and analysis website. Julia's current research interests include Indonesia's foreign policy and domestic politics, Timor Leste studies, and Singapore's war memory of the Japanese Occupation. She holds postgraduate degrees in Security Studies and in Government (Georgetown University), and LLB and LLM degrees from the National University of Singapore. Julia was lead editor for The Road to Nusantara: Process, Challenges and Opportunities (2023), a multi-authored volume on Indonesia's new capital city. Prior to joining ISEAS, Julia taught international relations and law, comparative politics, and research methods at Georgetown, the Catholic University of America, and McDaniel College. In her early career, she was an analyst and manager at the Ministry of Defence, Singapore.

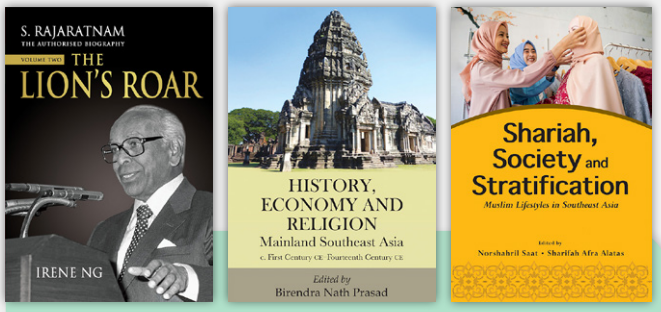
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