

ASEAN

Connecting to the Future

The ASEAN region is an increasingly vital hub in the global economy, connecting Japan and the Pacific region to India and other growth centers to the west. Japan has played an active role in cooperation with Southeast Asia for nearly 60 years, and continues to help to build ties with ASEAN's members—and connections to a shared future.

In 2013 Japan celebrates the fortieth anniversary of its partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). But the history of this partnership goes back well before 1973, when the first dialogue took place with the then five members of ASEAN at a forum on synthetic rubber, and even before 1967, when ASEAN was launched.

It was in 1954 that Japan reintegrated itself into the international community with its first development assistance in the postwar era. In October that year, having joined the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific, Japan signed its Treaty of Peace with Burma (now Myanmar) and the Agreement on Reparations and Economic Cooperation, opening the way to a string of agreements with countries including the Philippines, Indonesia, and Viet Nam.

Built on almost 60 years of history, Japan's ties to Southeast Asia are today "sound, dynamic, and thriving," in the words of JICA President Akihiko Tanaka. But as he also notes, the milestone years that Japan and ASEAN mark this decade are not merely times to reflect on past accomplishments, but times to look toward the future together.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE ASEAN NEEDS

Since its launch in 1967 with five initial members, ASEAN has expanded over the

years to become a 10-nation group. Culturally and economically diverse, it is home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies as well as to developing nations emerging on the middle-income stage. JICA has been a partner to the region ever since its foundation in 1974, and today is making some of its most innovative moves in Southeast Asia.

Official Development Assistance is often viewed in terms of major spending on physical infrastructure. And Japan has indeed been a key player in ASEAN in this sense, providing more than a third of all global assistance to the region since 1960. To support economic activity in this dynamic part of the world, JICA is cooperating, for example, in the development of port facilities at dozens of locations and the establishment of a roll-on/roll-off (RoRo) shipping network to connect continental and archipelagic Southeast Asia in a "Maritime ASEAN Economic Corridor." In the Mekong region, JICA is supporting road construction to create economic corridors across Indochina, from Viet Nam in the east to Myanmar in the west.

AN ARENA FOR DIVERSE APPROACHES

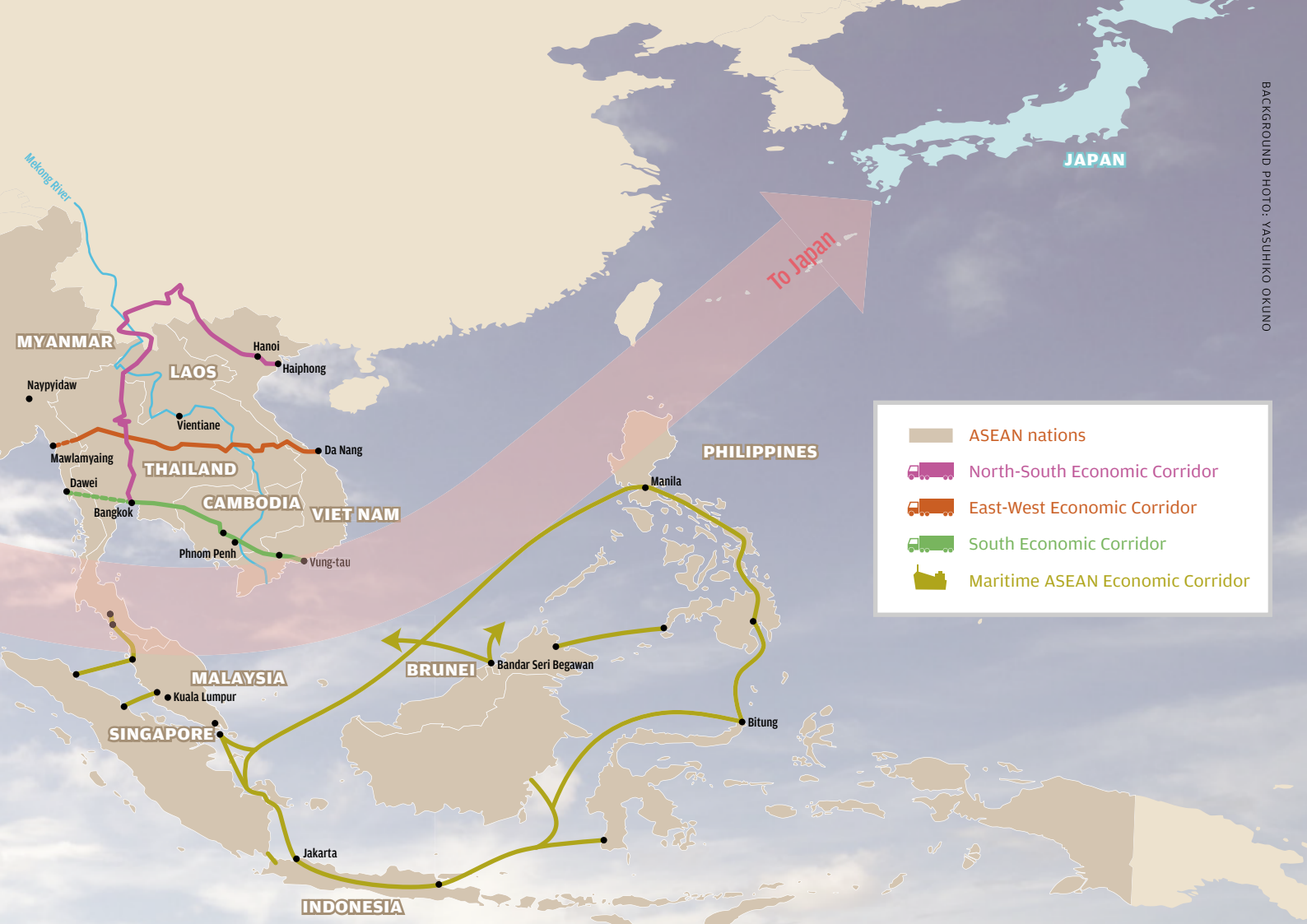
But nations' needs go beyond physical infrastructure. To fulfill its mission, JICA seeks to differentiate its assistance and tailor it to the complex needs of recipients.

In ASEAN, JICA has found the perfect place to implement approaches that resolve a broader range of issues. The assistance comes not only from government

sources, but from academia and industry, too. With programs like SATREPS, the Science and Technology Research Partnership for Sustainable Development, JICA promotes joint research targeting global issues. Japanese and Southeast Asian researchers come together to tackle everything from communicable diseases to disaster response, contributing knowledge that can be applied to other fields and in other regions of the world. To date SATREPS has launched 79 research projects in 39 countries worldwide, with more than half taking place in Asia.

Another important aim is to build human capacity in the partner countries. Toward this end JICA created SEED-Net, the Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network. A subnetwork of the ASEAN University Network (AUN), SEED-Net ties 14 supporting universities in Japan to 26 institutions of higher learning throughout Southeast Asia, providing opportunities to bright young scholars to further their studies in Japan. Since AUN/SEED-Net's launch in 2001, hundreds of Southeast Asian researchers have taken part, earning advanced degrees and broadening networks in Japan and throughout the region.

ASEAN members' diverse needs go be-



	ASEAN nations
	North-South Economic Corridor
	East-West Economic Corridor
	South Economic Corridor
	Maritime ASEAN Economic Corridor

yond “hard” infrastructure to include “soft” systems in sectors like education and finance. In Myanmar, JICA is managing a project involving cooperation by diverse actors on the donor side—including private Japanese banks, government organs, and the Tokyo Stock Exchange—with the aim of modernizing the nation’s financial systems. ASEAN will form a unified market in 2015, and its developing members are working hard to prepare for integration. Having learned while growing from poverty to highly developed status, Japan has much to offer in the system architecture, networks, and complex knowledge that underpin a modern society.

CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH PEOPLE

Human ties are vital to all of these projects. Many of today’s Southeast Asian leaders came to Japan in their youth and carried out their studies with Japanese governmental assistance. Today they stand at the forefront of the people-to-people connectivity that characterizes JICA-ASEAN ties, and the region is well positioned to work together with Japan to build a brighter future.

What form of relationship are we work-

ing to construct? Straightforward monetary assistance is no longer urgently needed by many ASEAN members, which can issue attractive bonds to get the funding they need. The region has enjoyed rapid economic growth, particularly since the end of the Asian financial crisis touched off in 1997. Today ASEAN is a key global production center, with manufacturers concentrated heavily in the Bangkok-Jakarta corridor, as well as a major global consumer market with a burgeoning middle class. Many ASEAN members are now emerging donors in their own right, with wealth and technical expertise to offer to developing economies around the world. ASEAN is an increasingly vital hub connecting the Indian Ocean region with the Asia-Pacific, and global interest in Southeast Asia, on both the public- and private-sector levels, is on the rise.

Japan’s philosophy today is one of facilitating win-win ties. JICA focuses its assets on projects that benefit the partners and Japan alike, as well as on the crafting of human networks among the leaders of the future. When Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda announced the Fukuda Doctrine in 1977, pledging that a peaceful Japan would stand as an equal partner with the nations of Southeast Asia, it signaled a

new era of cooperative ties. In 1982 Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad announced the “Look East” policy, directing his nation to learn from Japan’s experience. Japan remains dedicated to sharing that experience with ASEAN.

JICA’s focus is also shifting increasingly toward assistance solutions tailored to both existing and emerging needs. Japan is a forerunner in dealing with a falling birthrate and the graying of its population, issues that will one day affect many more societies. JICA is already offering Japanese insight in places like Thailand, where work is proceeding in a project to prepare Thai society for the demographic challenges that accompany rising incomes.

Over the last decade Japan has deeply rethought its approach to ODA. Today JICA offers a full spectrum of assistance, targeting infrastructure, trade, financial and economic systems, education, and more with comprehensive approaches bringing together academia, local governments in Japan, specialists with vital knowledge, and businesses both large and small. In a region as vibrant and diverse as ASEAN, these connections will be the most effective as the partners work toward their future together.