



Looking Back on Myanmar's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2014



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The year 2014 was a milestone in Myanmar's history as it was the year that two ASEAN summits were held in the country, after 17 years of its membership in ASEAN. It was also the year when the ASEAN Community was established, an epic milestone for peoples from ASEAN Member States who are enjoying the blessings of peace, freedom, and prosperity.

Myanmar as Chair made two declarations: the Nay Pyi Taw Declaration on Realisation of the ASEAN Community by 2015, adopted on 11 May 2014 by the 24th ASEAN Summit held in Nay Pyi Taw, and the Nay Pyi Taw Declaration on the ASEAN Community's Post-2015 Vision adopted on 12 November 2014 by the 25th ASEAN Summit in Nay Pyi Taw.

Both declarations, the result of a series of debates and deliberations among the ASEAN Member States, were needed to finalise the ASEAN Post-2015 Vision and its central elements and were to lead to the establishment of the ASEAN Community by the end of 2015.

The Nay Pyi Taw Declaration was made after full consensus from the ASEAN Member States and is considered the very first step in realising the post-2015 road map that ASEAN had envisioned during Brunei Darussalam's ASEAN chairmanship in 2013 during which a high-level task force on strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat and reviewing the ASEAN organs was created. The task force held several rounds of meetings in ASEAN cities and made recommendations. After consolidating all recommendations, the ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group on the ASEAN Community's Post-2015 Vision also identified central elements of the three pillars of the post-2015 ASEAN Community.

In hosting events under Myanmar's chairmanship, the major tasks were planned, organised, and conducted primarily by the government and the public sector. The major events were held in government buildings, and relevant government departments took leading roles in hosting meetings in several places. This gave public servants involved in such activities a great opportunity to gain valuable experience in holding such events. The government's hosting and conducting of meetings not only reduced the cost but also increased the confidence and heightened the pride of civil servants. To overcome obstacles in providing logistic support and conference and event management, for example, the Myanmar National Secretariat learned from fellow ASEAN Member States who shared experiences and good practices from ASEAN-related meetings.

The union-level steering committee was chaired by the Vice-President and composed of union ministers, deputy ministers, and senior officials from the ministries representing the three ASEAN Community pillars. Organisational and administrative matters were supported by 17 subcommittees. For the ASEAN Political-Security Community and ASEAN Economic Community pillars, several preparatory and coordination meetings were held before the summits. Sideline events were arranged and programmes were set in selected venues. Programmes showcasing the culture and tradition of Myanmar were shown prior to most of the events.

Myanmar hosted over 250 ASEAN-related meetings throughout 2014, including the 24th ASEAN Summit, the 25th ASEAN Summit, the 9th East Asia Summit, and the 47th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.

The success of the 2014 ASEAN chairmanship was due to the great contribution from representatives from the ASEAN Member States who had shared their experience as former ASEAN Chairs in addition to the study tours in Indonesia, Singapore, and Viet Nam to inspect and study the venues of the previous summits. The governments of China, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Germany, and the United States assisted in capacity building and providing materials before and during Myanmar's chairmanship year while the ASEAN Secretariat dispatched a team to support it, thus enabling Myanmar to host the events smoothly and successfully. Myanmar's ambassadors in ASEAN countries also contributed through their presence.

Myanmar's chairmanship of ASEAN was historic and was a benchmark for attracting regional and global attention. The successful hosting of summits and other meetings showed that Myanmar could manage and conduct the events very well. The outcome documents of the summits also reflected their substance and relevance to the ASEAN Community. In our 17 years of ASEAN membership, the very first time we chaired ASEAN, we gained the trust and confidence of ASEAN Member States, dialogue partners, and the international community. Myanmar's success is also the ASEAN region's success. The motto of 'One ASEAN, One Community' was proved by the unity of member states and their helping hand for Myanmar's chairing of ASEAN. The self-confidence and pride of civil servants of Myanmar increased and the Myanmar people felt proud to be the host. Myanmar chose 'Moving Forward in Unity to a Peaceful and Prosperous Community' as the theme for its chairmanship. Since Myanmar would be at the threshold of the ASEAN Community in 2015, it called for ASEAN to promote solidarity, effectiveness, and competitiveness to overcome internal and external challenges and maintain ASEAN's centrality and unity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Before his retirement, Kan Zaw was Union Minister at the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and Rector at the Yangon University of Economics. He was the founder of the Monywa Institute of Economics and pioneered executive-level master courses for development studies, public administration, and business administration, and PhD programme at the Yangon Institute of Economics.

He holds a master's degree in development studies from the International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands; a PhD in economics from the Yangon University of Economics; and the title Doctor of Business Administration from Victoria University, Switzerland. He worked as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Developing Economies, Tokyo, in 1996. His over 30 years' experience in research, consultancy, and capacity building in economics and regional planning included work in ASEAN and neighbouring countries.

Kan Zaw has worked on several research projects; published in international journals; and written conference papers, book chapters, and development reports. He participated in several research projects on socio-economic development and industrial development as well as programmes funded by the United Nations Development Programme and other organisations.