

# From trade talks to Trudeau's socks

Singapore saw a rush of diplomatic activity last week as it hosted the 33rd Asean Summit. The Sunday Times recaps the highlights.



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong shaking hands with Thai PM Prayut Chan-o-cha at the end of the Asean Summit last Thursday.

## What were the meetings about?

- The Asean chairmanship is rotated among all 10 members and each chairman hosts two summits a year. The first, usually held mid-year, takes stock of regional cooperation efforts.
- The second, towards the year-end (like last week's) also involves key partners discussing wider issues and strengthening ties with Asean.
- It culminates in the East Asia Summit, which groups all 10 members as well as Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the United States.

## What happens next?

- Thailand takes over as the next Asean chair and has pledged to work on enhancing connectivity across the region and focus on sustainable development.
- Singapore will also continue to help shepherd the Asean Smart Cities Network. As for other matters such as code of conduct, Asean members have their work cut out to stay united and work towards realising these economic and security goals to benefit the region's 650 million people.

## What did they achieve?

Quite a bit. Key highlights last week were:

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**1 Pledge to seal RCEP in 2019**  
Asean nations, Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand have been negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) since 2013. This year, they concluded five more chapters of the pact, bringing the number of sealed chapters to seven (out of 18). They also pledged to reach a deal next year.
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**2 Smart Cities**  
Leaders adopted a blueprint for cities in Asean to work with one another and outside partners to tap digital technology to develop economic opportunities, infrastructure and a sustainable living environment for their people. 26 cities are in the pioneer batch of the Asean Smart Cities Network (ASCN). They include all 10 capitals as well as cities like Da Nang, Luang Prabang, Makassar, and Mandalay.
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**3 Movement on a COC**  
Asean countries and China have been discussing a code of conduct (COC) to build trust and prevent miscalculations in disputed waters, and recently agreed on a single draft negotiating text. Last week, they agreed to complete a first reading of the draft text by next year, and work towards concluding a code early.
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**4 AHA Centre to help Rohingya**  
The exodus of over 700,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh from Myanmar's Rakhine State has created Asean's largest humanitarian crisis in years. Myanmar has invited the Asean Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) to send a needs assessment team to facilitate the repatriation process.
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**5 Asean centrality**  
Asean's partners have proposed various concepts of a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). Asean leaders stressed the need to support Asean unity and centrality, be clear about economic engagement with the region, espouse a rules-based order anchored upon international law, and support an open, transparent and inclusive regional architecture.

## Can you sing the Asean Anthem?

- Local community choir The Vocal Consort charmed audiences at the summit's opening ceremony last Tuesday with a rousing rendition of the Asean Anthem.
- While the Asean flag has since become a recognisable symbol of the region, not many would know the lyrics to the anthem, titled The Asean Way.
- This, however, did not faze Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and Indonesian President Joko Widodo, who were spotted mouthing the words to the lyrics with relative gusto.
- The song made its debut at the 2009 Asean Summit in Hua Hin, Thailand, about a year after a panel of judges unanimously voted it as the winner of a regional songwriting competition.

## Lyrics for "The Asean Way"

Raise our flag high, sky high  
Embrace the pride in our heart  
Asean we are bonded as one  
Looking out to the world.  
For peace, our goal from the very start  
And prosperity to last.  
We dare to dream, we care to share.  
Together for Asean  
we dare to dream,  
we care to share for it's the way of Asean.

## Asean veterans in the spotlight



Who has attended the most Asean summits? The answer is not Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (above), though at 93, he is definitely the oldest leader at this year's summit.

Sultan Hassanali Bolikiah (second from left) of Brunei, has attended Asean meetings for 34 years, more than a decade longer than Tun Dr Mahathir.

The 72-year-old Sultan, who is also Prime Minister of Brunei, celebrated his Golden Jubilee in

October last year.

But senior to him in age is Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (third from left), 73, whose absence from several meetings made headlines last week.

His no-shows last Wednesday prompted a statement from his office explaining that he had only had three hours of sleep the night before.

"He took power naps to catch (up) on sleep," presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said,

adding that "some quarters are making a big fuss of the President skipping a few meetings".

"We assure the nation that his aforementioned absence has nothing to do with his physical health and well-being, which have been the subject of speculation," he added.

Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi (right), also 73 and a few months younger than Mr Duterte, made the headlines for another reason.

The Rohingya issue has sparked concern among several members, and all eyes were on how Dr Mahathir, who was seated next to Ms Suu Kyi – a former political prisoner – at meetings, would broach the issue with her.

He told The Sunday Times: "People who had been under detention should understand the sufferings of people who are oppressed."

## Journalists on the job

- While several of the world leaders were busy at different high-level meetings, media colleagues from various publications and agencies were busy too.
- In between furiously typing out news reports and rushing to the next important doorstep interview, journalists found time to grab some good food at the Suntec City convention centre.

Mr Nikolai Ivanov, a correspondent with Russian TV news channel Mic Izvestia, was seen holding up a copy of The Straits Times on camera. He said he was telling viewers in Russia about ST's coverage of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit, as well as Asean-Russia relations.



## From Asean handshake... to Asean wave

- One key change under Singapore's Asean chairmanship was the change from leaders locking arms for the group photo, to waving with their right hands.
- The traditional "Asean-way handshake" has often befuddled invited guests.
- At last year's summit in Manila, US President Donald Trump was seen using both hands to clasp the extended fingers of Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, leaving Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte with a spare hand. At the corner of the photo, Russian PM Dmitry Medvedev held out both hands instead of doing the traditional "crossover" for the Asean handshake.



From left: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Brunei's Sultan Hassanali Bolikiah, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Laos Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith at the opening ceremony of the 33rd Asean Summit at the Suntec Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre last Tuesday.

## Sock diplomacy



- Apart from being one of the (visibly) younger statesmen in town, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, 46, is also known for his sartorial savvy – in particular, socks.
- Mr Trudeau, who was invited to the meetings as Canada is president of the G-7 group of advanced nations, did not disappoint. At the Four Seasons Hotel on Tuesday, he sported a pair of socks with a geometric blue,

white and red pattern, matching his suit, shirt and tie.

• At a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong the next day, he showed off socks in shades of blue, black and grey – once again impeccably matching his clothes.

• On a visit to the National University of Singapore, where he joined in a town hall discussion, on Thursday, he was seen with patterned socks in contrasting

layers of purple, pink and grey.

• His sock choices last week were more conservative, though he has donned more creative designs. For May the Fourth, a day commemorating the Star Wars films, he wore mismatched socks featuring R2-D2 and C-3PO separately. He even wore a pair of purple and yellow socks with ducks to the World Economic Forum summit in Davos in January.



## 33rd Asean Summit in numbers



- Number of meals the 10 Asean leaders shared.
- Last Tuesday, a working dinner.
- Last Wednesday, an informal breakfast summit with Australian PM Scott Morrison; a working lunch that included Canadian PM Justin Trudeau, Chilean President Sebastian Pinera and International Monetary Fund managing director Christine Lagarde; and a gala dinner.
- Last Thursday, an informal breakfast summit with Indian PM Narendra Modi; and an East Asia Summit lunch retreat.

# 6,650

- Number of Home Team officers mobilised for the event.
- They were assisted by the Singapore Armed Forces and technology – like the Police patrol robot.



# US\$1 trillion

- Joint target for two-way trade between Asean and China by 2020, which countries agreed to work towards at the Asean-China Summit with Premier Li Keqiang.

# US\$200 billion

- Joint target for two-way trade between Asean and India by 2022, highlighted at the Asean-India Informal Breakfast Summit with PM Narendra Modi.
- This figure is also the projected value of Asean's Internet economy by 2025, which will be helped by the Asean e-commerce agreement inked last Monday.

# 80,000

- Number of Asean residents Japan aims to support training for in the next five years in sectors like artificial intelligence, under its Industrial Human Resource Development Cooperation Initiative 2.0. This was announced by PM Shinzo Abe at the Asean-Japan Summit.

# 550,000

- Number of jobs Asean creates for Americans through trade in goods and services, highlighted by PM Lee at the Asean-US Summit with US Vice-President Mike Pence.