

ASEAN roll up their sleeves to fight against climate change

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Climate change has disastrous consequences and affects all countries. Southeast Asia is one of the most vulnerable region where countries are affected by the climate change. A relentless number of natural disasters continue to strike Asia Pacific, from cyclones and floods to droughts and heatwaves. [The Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2019](#) published by UNESCAP found that Asia Pacific climate disasters are hitting the most deprived and marginalised communities, driving them further into poverty. The projection has shown that 56 million people could live in extreme poverty by 2030, but the figure could double to more than 123 million without practical steps being implemented by

policymakers across Asia Pacific to increase public capability to mitigate the threat of catastrophe. Through reviewing collected news from the third quarter of 2019, the main issue of climate change in Southeast Asian region is unresolved and has become more substantial than ever, but through concrete action, climate change still can be alleviated.

Environmental Risks

The record-breaking Wildfires in Amazon, Brazil is a fresh warning if it is not learned, for Indonesia – which has the biggest rainforests in the world, along with Brazil. Distrusted of not doing enough to prevent deforestation, the world now blaming both governments on the result of forest fires, especially for Indonesia. Given the increasingly harmful effects of climate change, [Indonesia requires extra strategies to reduce environmental calamities](#). In Indonesia, forest and land fires, for the most part, remain unhindered, particularly now that the country is mostly facing a very long drought. The Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency (BMKG) has forecast that the dry season will continue until October, due to "a negative anomaly of the sea surface temperature of the region."

[The drought also happened in the Mekong countries](#). The Mekong is reeling from the combined onslaught of climate change, sand-mining, and incessant damming of the river, which combined to help cause the worst



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drought recorded in over 100 years in July. The main reason for this July's unusual low water level in the Mekong was the lack of precipitation, but operations on China's Jinghong dam and the nearly completed massive Xayaburi dam in Laos are blamed for exacerbating the water crisis. China decided to "turn off the Jinghong Mekong tap because the "grid maintenance" had to be performed. Besides Lao PDR, Thailand also faces the same problem. [Even Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has instructed the military to assist in areas affected by the drought.](#) Eight provinces along the river in the northeastern and northern regions — Chiang Rai, Loei, Nong Khai, Beung Kan, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Ubon Ratchathani and Amnat Charoen — are expected to bear the burnt of the hydroelectric test, which began last Monday, persists as scheduled until July 29th.

Besides the drought, the sea level rise is also becoming the primary concern in the ASEAN region. A World Bank report identified low-level coastal areas and analysed the likely impact for eighty-four developing countries, utilising world maps overlaid with population growth information (if the regional distribution remains unchanged). The study shows that the effects of the rise in sea levels will be particularly severe in this region, including 12 nations – Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, DPR Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Eight out of twelve indicated as threatened countries are the ASEAN Member States (AMS). Nevertheless, [the new analysis published in Nature Communications in August](#) suggests that the elevation above sea level of the Mekong is only 0.8 meters on average — almost two meters below the estimates commonly quoted -- after examining ground-based topography measurements that had been limited for years by outside scientists.

Climate Financing

The scale of necessary transition is unprecedented. Stimulating the low-carbon development in the energy sector is critical for generating more business and policy indications for green finance investment. Nonetheless, [some of the ASEAN banks still do not consider the climate change effects.](#) Most of them are mainly unaware of the climate-related threats present in their investments and lack of policy to mitigate such risks. Ninety-one per cent of the 35 banks involved in the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Sustainable Banking study published last month in the ASEAN report tend to finance new coal-fired power plants.

Though, according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), [ASEAN Member States will need USD 157 billion in annual infrastructure investment over the next five years](#), programs must be "climate-proofed" to reduce the region's susceptibility to natural disasters and climate change. [Energy, Science, Environment, and Climate Change Minister of Malaysia, Yeo Bee Yin, proposed last year a fresh overhaul of the renewable energy strategy](#), setting a 20 per cent renewable energy goal as a share of power generation by 2030. A goal of 20 per cent is a successful policy shift. Roughly any leading global emitter would reduce 75 to 90per cent of the difference between pollution expected under current policies and the 2°C goal utilising today is validated technologies.

Cleaner Energy

Renewable energy in most parts of the world is now cheaper than fossil-fuel production. In addition, renewables could provide millions of people to more competitive and more efficient access to affordable clean energy. Renewables could make a significant contribution to global warming by [decarbonising power systems under the Paris agreement](#) to reduce



global temperature to 1.5°C which will benefit significantly from sustainable economic growth.

The Philippines, through President Duterte, [announced policies to advance renewable energy deployment](#) to tap the archipelago's enormous solar, wind, hydropower, ocean and biomass potential. Duterte's call for a rapid transition to renewable energy from coal use is a welcome move for most civil society groups and the national government as it has a significant impact on the climate future of the country and on the global effort to achieve the 1.5°C climate target. Effectively, the Presidential Directive sends a clear signal to policymakers, regulators, investors, and executives in the energy industry to promote and invest in more affordable, reliable, and cleaner power infrastructure that, in turn, builds electricity generation diversity and bakes price deflation in the long-term energy sector.

Nuclear, even though not classified as renewables, still also become the option in some countries in the ASEAN region. Some front-runners like the Philippines and Indonesia still have a strong desire to have a nuclear power plant in their respective countries. According to [the energy insight from ASEAN Centre for Energy](#), Department of Energy (DOE)'s Secretary of Energy, Alfonso G. Cusi says DOE is looking to leverage all available energy options, including nuclear power, to ensure sufficient energy to satisfy growing demand. The DOE has also set up a Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP) reconstruction plan that invites South Korea and Russia to use their feasibility studies as the foundation for their campaign to ensure public acceptance of nuclear power. Meanwhile, Indonesia has proceeded the Experimental Power Reactor (EPR) project to prepare and expand Indonesia's nuclear capacity.

Even after the eight years since the catastrophe in Fukushima's accident provoked a global energy policy overhaul, indications

have appeared that Singapore might warm up to the source of power. Last month, pro-nuclear speculation in the city-state sparked when [Ho Ching–Singapore State Investment Fund Chief Executive Temasek Holdings, wife to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong–posted a lengthy Facebook post expressing support for the power source](#). Ho's post was attached to an opinion piece from Bloomberg that criticised Germany's decision to phase out all nuclear power by 2022 which is 16 years ahead of the 2038 coal. Singapore was telling a sign, which had been announced twice in the past 12 years that nuclear power was unacceptable, however now the country might switch its mind. Furthermore, it is not on its own.

Climate Acts

On September 20-27th, 2019, [7.6 million protesters marched to campaign to combating climate change](#). The marches took place across several big cities and small towns around the world. Millions of people stood side by side and lifted their voices across the support of the climate. The Global Climate Strike proves that they have the people's power to stop the fossil-fuel era. [In Jakarta, the campaigners were shouting and raising their banners](#), asking the central and regional governments to tackle the climate change's threats more forcefully and to enact effective solutions to fix it. Even though the former Indonesian Vice President, [Jusuf Kalla blamed the climate change as a contributor the increasing forest fires in Sumatra and Kalimantan](#), which have exacerbated poor air quality in neighbouring countries as well as in Indonesia.

In parallel with the Climate Strike Action, Prayut Chan-o-cha, [Thailand's Prime Minister was presenting a statement to the United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York on behalf of ASEAN member states in his](#)



[capacity as ASEAN Chair](#). He said that the intensified impacts of climate change have steadily challenged the economic and social development of the region. In order to tackle the challenges, ASEAN is prepared to promote its cooperation on climate action with the global society to ensure prosperity for current and future generations.

During National Rally Day 2019, Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, delivered a lengthy speech and also talked about [Singapore's response to climate change](#). He highlighted the vulnerability of Singapore to rising sea levels, as Singapore is a low-lying country. The United Nations forecasts that by the end of the century, sea levels will rise by up to 1 meter, but the predictions of scientists have been increasing, and sea levels may well rise higher and faster than that, Mr Lee added. [To protect the country from rising sea levels, he predicts it will cost USD 100 billion or more over 100 years.](#)

The business side also tries to tackle climate change, not only on the government hands. In Malaysia, [Petronas-- Malaysian oil and gas company that founded on 17 August 1974, also launch the program acts](#) as a forum for promoting technology solutions and catalysing concrete climate change action and collaboration. The Oil & Gas Climate Change Initiative (OGCI), which is coordinating the 13 oil and gas firms, allowing the oil and gas industry to work together to tackle climate issues during the recent Sabah Oil & Gas Conference and exhibition 2019. The OGCI companies will pursue and implement selected low-emission innovations in their industries and activities.

Therefore, [the mitigation activities of the United Nations Member States need to be re-doubled](#), including to tackle the environmental risks, building a favourable climate financing scheme, shifting to cleaner energy and even pushing the related stakeholders through the protest down the road. (MRK).