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# ASEAN: Japan's Indispensable Partner

**Q: How does the ASEAN Charter affect ASEAN countries?**

At the ASEAN Summit held in November 2007 in Singapore, the ASEAN Charter was signed and is waiting to go into force. Under this Charter which stipulates the ASEAN Summit as the supreme policy-making body, the organizational structure of ASEAN will be strengthened from the legal and institutional point of view. The function of the ASEAN Secretariat will also be empowered under the leadership of Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, who became the new Secretary General in January 2008. Under this new framework, ASEAN is making a transition to become a more effective and cohesive organization and, thus, taking giant strides towards the creation of the ASEAN Community by 2015. Meanwhile, narrowing economic gaps among ASEAN countries remains a crucial issue: various measures need to be tackled on this issue, particularly in human resource development and the improvement of infrastructure in the Mekong Sub-region.

**Q: How is the ASEAN-Japan relationship changing?**

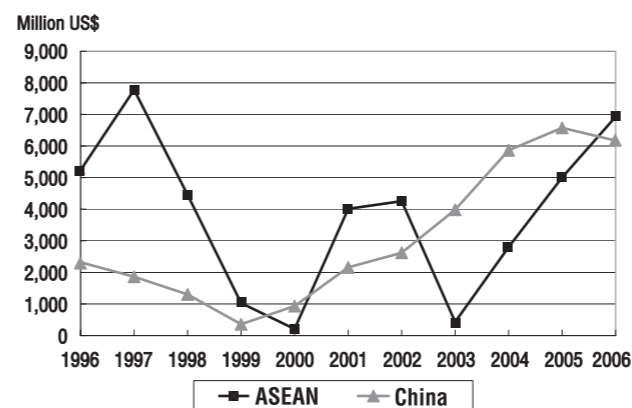
In time, ASEAN and Japan will further strengthen their mutually complementary economic relationship. Japan has already signed Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with six ASEAN countries, with three of the respective EPAs (Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand) in force. Furthermore, given that negotiations on the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership (AJCEP) Agreement were concluded and the Agreement is expected to be signed this year, ASEAN and Japan would create one large market and production base, which brings economic benefit to both parties. With the changing economic environment, particularly the economic rise of China and India, ASEAN and Japan should further collaborate closely as mutually indispensable partners to strengthen the international competitiveness of ASEAN.

**Q: What are the activities and role of the ASEAN-Japan Centre?**

Since its establishment in 1981, the ASEAN-Japan Centre has played an active and cohesive role in promoting exports from ASEAN markets to Japan while vitalizing investment and tourist traffic from Japan to ASEAN to embody the Fukuda Doctrine. The recent development of ASEAN-Japan relations necessitates the Centre to widen and deepen its scope of activities to respond to diverse needs of the new era and challenges. In

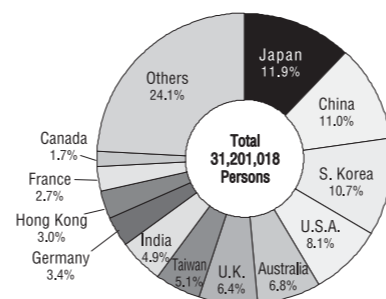
anticipation of the amendments to the Agreement Establishing the Centre to come into force this year, two-way promotion programs for tourism and investment, as well as personal exchange programs will be initiated and introduced. With a view to narrowing existing economic gaps between the first six members and the four new members of ASEAN (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam), the Centre continues to implement the efficient development of human resources and infrastructure, including narrowing the digital divide in the region. In serving as a catalyst to link Japan with ASEAN, the Centre will also continue to make every effort to conduct the most effective activities to enhance the ASEAN-Japan relationship.

**Trends of Japan's Foreign Direct Investment to ASEAN and China (1996-2006)**



Source: Website of Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO)  
Note : ASEAN includes Laos and Myanmar from 1998, and Cambodia from 1999.

**Tourist Arrivals in ASEAN Countries (2006)**



Source: Respective National Tourist Offices in ASEAN Countries  
Note : Excluding intra-ASEAN travelers



The Eleventh ASEAN-Japan Summit (Singapore, November 2007)  
Photo: Kyodo News



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2007 marked the 40th Founding Anniversary of ASEAN. Nobutoshi Akao tells us about the relationship between ASEAN and Japan, future perspectives of ASEAN and more.

**Q: Please explain the relationship between ASEAN, celebrating its 40th anniversary in the past year, and Japan.**

Last year was not only the 40th founding anniversary of ASEAN, but also marked 30 years of the "Fukuda Doctrine," in which Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda emphasized the significance of a "heart-to-heart understanding" between ASEAN and Japan. Following on from the announcement of the "Fukuda Doctrine," the once frosty relationship Japan had with ASEAN started to thaw and was soon operating on a friendlier basis, both economically and politically. Nowadays, the close ties can be seen in the economic data: the total value of two-way trade between ASEAN and Japan reached 18 trillion yen in 2006. Japanese investment in ASEAN was standing at a net total of 809 billion yen in 2006 – the first time investment in ASEAN has risen above investment in China since 2003. Japan is the largest donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to ASEAN, accounting for 44.6 percent of the total amount of ODA ASEAN received in 2005. Japan is the largest source of tourists to ASEAN markets from outside the region with more than 3.7 million Japanese visiting the region in 2006.