

CLAWS Newsletter



GeoSEA | V1 | No 1

by Diksha Jain

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Brunei's economic growth forecast at 2.5 pct in 2025: ADB

(Xinhua, April 14, 2025)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has projected Brunei Darussalam's economy to grow by 2.5 percent in 2025 and 2.0 percent in 2026. In its latest Asian Development Outlook, ADB noted that growth is expected to slow following a strong performance in 2024, mainly due to lower global energy prices impacting the oil and gas sector. Inflation is forecast to stay low, reflecting trends among Brunei's major trading partners. ADB also warned that domestic disruptions or delays in project completions, global energy price volatility, and geopolitical tensions could threaten the growth outlook.

Commander of US Special Operations Command Pacific visits Brunei

(Borneo Bulletin, April 15, 2025)

According to the US Embassy in Bandar Seri Begawan, Rear Admiral Jeromy Williams, Commander of US Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC), arrived in Brunei on April 14, 2025, to reinforce the US-Brunei strategic partnership and enhance defence and security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. During his visit, Rear Admiral Williams met with senior Bruneian defence officials, engaged with the US Embassy, and held discussions with United Kingdom Garrison counterparts.

Brunei attracts Indian investors

(Xinhua, April 16, 2025)

Brunei's pro-business policies, political stability, and commitment to sustainability make the country an attractive partner for Indian companies seeking to reduce risks and explore new opportunities, a senior Brunei official said. Speaking to a group of Indian businessmen on Monday, Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB) Acting CEO Daniel Leong highlighted that economic diversification is central to Brunei's Vision 2035. Leong noted that Brunei already hosts two Indian FDI projects, with several more recently approved in the oil and gas downstream, food, and services sectors, offering strong potential for further collaboration and regional supply chain integration.

CAMBODIA

Mr. Um Sam An claims that Cambodia will win the case against Thailand and Vietnam regarding the islands if it sues the International Court of Justice

(The Cambodia Daily, April 02, 2025)

Opposition lawmakers in Cambodia have claimed the country would win “1 million percent” if it brought territorial disputes over Koh Tral, Koh Kut, and overlapping maritime zones with Vietnam and Thailand to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) under UNCLOS. Senior CNRP official Um Sam An argued that both islands lie well within Cambodia’s territorial sea or contiguous zone based on their distance from the Cambodian coast. He also claimed the 26,000-square-kilometre overlapping sea area with Thailand falls entirely within Cambodia’s maritime boundaries.

National Bank of Cambodia collaborates with Chinese company to create new cross-border remittance network

(The Cambodia Daily, April 02, 2025)

To help migrant workers send money back to their families, the National Bank of Cambodia has partnered with the Chinese company UnionPay International (UPI) to launch a cross-border remittance service. The service, called Bakong Scan UnionPay, allows Cambodian workers in Thailand to send money by simply scanning a QR code using their ID card. This method, which leverages the UPI network, was first introduced in December 2023 using the KHQR Code. The new remittance solution integrates UPI with mobile apps from local banks. It aims to meet the needs of both tourists and migrant workers, making international money transfers more accessible and convenient for the Cambodian population.

Cambodia tops list of new Trump tariffs, 49%

(The Phnom Penh Post, April 03, 2025)

US President Donald Trump has announced a sweeping 49% tariff on goods imported from Cambodia — the highest among a range of new tariffs targeting several major trading partners. Trump framed the move as a “discounted reciprocal tariff” and dubbed April 2 “America’s Liberation Day,” signalling a sharp pivot in his administration’s trade policy to correct long-standing trade imbalances.

The new tariff poses a serious challenge for Cambodia, which counts the US as its largest export market, accounting for nearly 38% of its total exports. In 2024, Cambodia shipped \$9.92 billion worth of goods to the US, mainly garments, travel goods, and footwear, while US exports to Cambodia reached only \$264.15 million. The tariff spike could hit Cambodian manufacturers hard, especially those relying on the American market for growth.

In the first quarter of 2025, Cambodia approved nearly 200 investment projects, while US projects accounted for 0.18%

(The Cambodia Daily, April 10, 2025)

In the first quarter of 2025, the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) approved 172 investment projects worth about \$2.5 billion, which are expected to create nearly 120,000 jobs. Over half of these projects — around 56% — were backed by Chinese investors, while Cambodian and Singaporean investments followed behind. Most of the capital was directed into the industrial sector, with projects spread across 13 provinces, including Phnom Penh, Kampong Speu, and Svay Rieng. However, opposition figure Hing Soksan noted that despite the surge in Chinese investment, Cambodia's high export taxes — especially the 49% tariff imposed by the U.S. — could discourage long-term investment compared to neighbouring ASEAN countries with lower rates.

Economist: No need for concern over Cambodia's 90% Chinese trade deficit

(The Phnom Penh Post, April 15, 2025)

Cambodia and China's bilateral trade surged in the first quarter of 2025, reaching over \$4 billion — a 26.7% increase compared to last year, according to the General Department of Customs and Excise (GDCE). While trade continues to grow, the gap remains heavily tilted in China's favour, with Cambodian exports dropping 4.9% to \$348.19 million and Chinese imports rising sharply by 30.8% to over \$3.7 billion. This resulted in Cambodia's staggering 91.44% trade deficit, highlighting its reliance on Chinese raw materials and components for its manufacturing sector.

The economic partnership was expected to deepen as Chinese President Xi Jinping visits Cambodia from April 17–18, 2025. The visit, which aims to reinforce the “ironclad friendship” and comprehensive strategic partnership, is likely to see the signing of new agreements across various sectors, underlining both nations' ambitions to expand cooperation beyond trade.

INDONESIA

Cikarang Data Centre highlights deepening France-Indonesia digital partnership

(Indonesia Business Post, April 11, 2025)

On April 9, 2025, French Minister of Foreign Trade Laurent Saint-Martin met with Indonesian Minister of Communication and Digital Applications Meutya Hafid to discuss the progress of the National Data Centre (PDN-1) project. Meutya emphasised that the Ministry of Communication and Digital Application is collaborating with Indonesia's National Cyber and Crypto Agency (BSSN), the Indonesian Military's Strategic Intelligence Agency (BAIS), and the State Intelligence Agency (BIN) to ensure the security and integrity of the data managed at the centre.

Indonesian Navy to build strategic base in Sumenep

(Indonesia Business Post, April 11, 2025)

On April 10, 2025, the Indonesian Navy received a land asset grant from the Sumenep Regency Administration in East Java to construct a naval base (Lanal) on Madura Island. This new base is crucial in strengthening Indonesia's defence system, particularly within the Second Indonesian Archipelago Sea Lane (ALKI II) area. The grant agreement and handover minutes were signed at the Indonesian Navy's Second Fleet Headquarters in Surabaya, witnessed by Indonesian Navy Chief of Staff Admiral Muhammad Ali. The Sumenep Regency officially handed over 10.17 hectares of land in Patean Village, Batuan District, to the Indonesian Navy. Lanal Sumenep will be part of Surabaya's Fifth Main Naval Base (Lantamal).

Indonesia Dismisses Reports on Planned Russian Air Base in Papua as False

(Jakarta Globe, April 14, 2025)

On April 15, the Indonesian Defence Ministry firmly denied reports claiming the government allowed Russia to build an air base in Papua. The reports, which surfaced from a defence publication, alleged that Russia aimed to establish a military presence at Manuhua Air Force Base in Biak after meetings between defence officials from both nations. Ministry spokesperson Frega Wenas Inkiriwang, quoted by Antara news agency, dismissed the claims as false. The rumours had raised regional concerns, especially from Australia, amid heightened sensitivity over Russia's military activities in Ukraine.

Indonesia Seeks Role in Türkiye's Kaan Fighter Jet Project

([GBP](#), April 14, 2025)

On April 10, 2025, President Prabowo Subianto announced that Indonesia is keen to join Turkey's 5th-generation fighter jet program, KAAN, following a meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara. Subianto expressed Indonesia's interest in collaborating with Turkey's defence industry on the development of both the KAAN jet and submarines.

KAAN, developed by Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), is a response to Turkey's removal from the US F-35 program due to its purchase of the Russian-made S-400 air defence system. The first prototype of KAAN completed its maiden flight in February 2024, and further prototypes are expected to undergo extensive testing in the coming months. The first production model is anticipated by 2028-2029.

Indonesia-Qatar launch US\$2 billion joint investment fund to boost key sectors

([Indonesia Business Post](#), April 15, 2025)

On April 13, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani reached an investment agreement worth US\$2 billion (Rp33.4 trillion) during their meeting in Doha. The two leaders also witnessed the signing of several memoranda of understanding to strengthen economic, investment, and development cooperation between Indonesia and Qatar.

Chief Investment Officer of Daya Anagata Nusantara Investment Management Agency (BPI Danantara), Pandu Sjahrir, confirmed that the funds would be directed toward joint projects with Danantara, focusing on priority sectors such as food security, energy, resource down streaming, and digital infrastructure. Pandu emphasised that the investment aims to create sustainable added value for Indonesia's economy, beyond short-term profits. Prabowo also confirmed the commitment but did not disclose specific project details.

LAOS

Khammouane provincial soldiers complete training in document management, protection and protocol work

(Kongthap, April 09, 2025)

On April 3, 2025, the Khammouane Provincial Military Command concluded a two-day training program on document management, preservation, and protocol work for officers and specialists. The training, held from April 2-3, was chaired by Colonel Vientivilay Panichan, Head of the Khammouane Provincial Military Command Office and throughout the training, experts and staff from the Research and Compilation Department and the Foreign Relations Department of the Ministry of National Defence shared their knowledge and practical skills, helping participants deepen their understanding of document handling and office protocol work.

Laos-China Railway Issues New Parking Regulations for Lao New Year Period

(The Laotian Times, April 10, 2025)

The Laos-China Railway Company Limited, in a notice issued on April 8, announced new parking regulations to ensure safety and smooth operations during the festive period from April 12 to 16. Personal vehicles are limited to a two-hour parking time, and drivers must follow traffic rules, including avoiding unauthorized parking and wrong-way driving. Government vehicles must use designated gates with special access cards and staff assistance, while civil servants must submit their tickets and travel details in advance. Tour company vehicles are restricted to designated waiting zones and cannot park for extended periods.

Asian Development Bank Predicts 3.9 Percent Economic Growth for Laos in 2025

(The Laotian Times, April 10, 2025)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) officially launched its Asian Development Outlook for April 2025. The report forecasts Laos' GDP to grow by 3.9% in 2025 and 4.0% in 2026, compared to the broader developing Asia and Pacific projection of 4.9% in 2025 and 4.7% in 2026. Inflation, which averaged a high 23.3% due to elevated prices for food, alcohol, restaurants, and hotels, is projected to ease to 13.5% in 2025 and 10.4% in 2026. Despite these improvements, the report notes that Laos' high public debt will remain a major challenge to fiscal sustainability, limiting government spending flexibility.

MALAYSIA

Ringgit Gains Marginally Against US Dollar as DXY Declines

(Malaysian Tribune, April 14, 2025)

According to analysts, on April 14, 2025, the ringgit closed slightly higher against the US dollar, supported by a decline in the US Dollar Index (DXY). At 6 pm (local time), Malaysia's currency strengthened to 4.4100/4160 against the greenback, compared to last Friday's close of 4.4200/4265 on April 11, 2025. Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd's Chief Economist, Dr. Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid, noted that the DXY continued its downward trend, hovering around 99 points. However, given ongoing concerns over U.S. import tariffs, he expressed uncertainty about whether the index would remain at these lower levels.

Malaysia, South Korea strengthen cooperation in construction technology

(The Malaysian Reserve, April 16, 2025)

On April 15, the Korea-Malaysia Road & Construction Technology Cooperation Seminar marked 65 years of collaboration. Malaysia's National Construction Policy 2030 was pointed out as a catalyst for transforming the local construction sector by integrating advanced technology into work processes and business practices.

Contributions from Korea included the Korea Agency for Infrastructure Technology Advancement (KAIA), Korea Expressway Corp (KEC), Korea Institute of Civil Engineering and Building Technology (KICT), Lembaga Lebuhraya Malaysia, the Public Works Department's Centre of Excellence in Engineering & Technology (CREaTE), and the Construction Industry Development Board Malaysia (CIDB).

Chinese President Xi accorded state welcome at Istana Negara

(The Edge, April 16, 2025)

On April 16, Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Malaysia's King, Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar, at Istana Negara during his three-day state visit on April 15. Xi is also scheduled to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to discuss bilateral cooperation and exchange views on regional and global matters. According to Wisma Putra, Xi is accompanied by Chinese Cabinet ministers and senior officials. Anwar will host an official dinner for Xi at Seri

Perdana, Putrajaya, later in the evening. Xi's visit to Malaysia is part of his 2025 state visit tour, including Vietnam and Cambodia.

Malaysia and China signed 31 memorandums of understanding and agreements covering AI, diplomacy, defence, railway visa exemption, etc.

(News Seehwa, April 16, 2025)

Following bilateral talks between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Chinese President Xi Jinping, Malaysia and China have signed 31 memoranda of understanding (MOUS) and agreements, including 23 MOUS, 3 agreements, and 2 diplomatic notes. The signing ceremony involved various cabinet ministers from Malaysia and Chinese officials, marking key collaborations across several sectors. Here are the ministries involved:

1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Defence
3. Ministry of Home Affairs
4. Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry
5. Ministry of Transportation
6. Ministry of Agriculture and Food
7. Ministry of Science and Technology
8. Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability
9. Ministry of Higher Education
10. Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture
11. Ministry of Communications
12. Ministry of Education
13. Ministry of Domestic Trade and Cost of Living

PHILLIPINES

Philippines cleared to buy F-16s at estimated \$5.6B

(Breaking Defence, April 01, 2025)

The U.S. State Department has approved a potential Foreign Military Sale of 20 F-16 fighter jets to the Philippines, valued at an estimated \$5.58 billion. The package includes 16 F-16C Block 70/72 jets and four F-16B Block 70/72 fighters, along with engines, radars, and advanced munitions such as AIM-120C-8 missiles, AIM-9X Sidewinders, SDB-1 bombs, and general-purpose MK-82 and MK-84 bombs. The announcement follows U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth's recent visit to Manila, where he reaffirmed deepening defence ties between the two nations.

The Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) noted the sale aims to strengthen the Philippines' capability for maritime domain awareness, close air support, aerial interdiction, and suppression of enemy air defences (SEAD), while boosting its ability to safeguard national interests and expand interoperability with U.S. forces. The deal highlights Washington's commitment to bolstering a key Southeast Asian partner amid evolving regional security dynamics.

Philippines adds speedy warship to maritime arsenal

(France24, April 08, 2025)

The Philippine Navy welcomed the arrival of the 3,200-ton BRP Miguel Malvar, part of a two-corvette deal with Hyundai Heavy Industries signed in 2021. Its sister ship, BRP Diego Silang, was launched in South Korea last month and will soon follow. The addition of these warships, designed to boost the country's maritime defence, comes amid heightened tensions with China over the South China Sea, where Beijing continues to assert expansive, internationally rejected claims.

At the Subic Bay ceremony, Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro called the BRP Miguel Malvar a key step toward a "self-reliant and credible defence posture" and a deterrent against threats, highlighting its role in joint operations with allies. The Philippine Coast Guard accepted 20 surveillance drones from Australia, which will help extend maritime patrol coverage while reducing risks and fuel use, according to Coast Guard Commandant Ronnie Gil Gavan.

India Poised to Supply Combat-proven Akash System to Philippines, Enhancing Defence Against Chinese Jets, Cruise Missiles, and Drones

(Defence.in, April 08, 2025)

India is nearing a major defence agreement with the Philippines for the supply of the indigenous Akash Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) system, expected to be finalised in 2025. The potential deal, estimated to be worth over \$200 million, would mark India's second major defence export to the Philippines, following the \$375 million BrahMos supersonic cruise missile contract signed in 2022.

While it is yet to be confirmed whether the Philippine Army or Marine Corps will operate the system, the anticipated sale highlights the strengthening of strategic ties between the two countries amid growing security concerns in the Indo-Pacific. Developed by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and produced by Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), the Akash missile system is a medium-range air defence platform designed to intercept and destroy aerial threats, including fighter aircraft, cruise missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVS).

Australia and Philippines strengthen cooperation through joint military training program

(Australian Government Department of Defence, April 07, 2025)

Military cooperation between Australia and the Philippines is set to expand significantly in 2025, with the Joint Australian Training Team - Philippines (JATT-P) program planning over 20 training activities and exchanges — more than double the number conducted in 2024. The initiative, part of Australia's Enhanced Defence Cooperation Program, aims to strengthen interoperability and deepen defence ties through Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) from the Australian Defence Force (ADF) working directly with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) across various military domains.

These MTTs will focus on combined joint planning, fire support, combat engineering, maritime sustainment, aircraft maintenance, intelligence analysis, and aviation safety, along with cyber security, logistics, and support functions essential to modern military operations. The program not only hones technical skills but also builds personal trust and professional understanding between both forces, ensuring both nations are well-prepared for regional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

SINGAPORE

Singapore's DSTA, Thales to develop AI tech for combat systems

(Army Technology, April 02, 2025)

Singapore's Defence Science and Technology Agency (DSTA) and Thales have established a joint laboratory (Co-Lab) to accelerate the development of AI-enabled technologies for the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). This collaboration is designed to enhance the SAF's ability to meet conventional and unconventional security challenges. The joint effort will initially focus on Counter-Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (C-UAS) capabilities and Advanced sensing and detection systems.

Over the past five months, engineers from DSTA and Thales have co-developed machine learning-enabled software modules designed to reduce false alarms in drone detection systems, thereby enhancing the performance of radar sensors. This collaboration comes against Singapore's steadily increasing defence budget, which has grown from \$11.4 billion in 2021 to an estimated \$17.7 billion in 2025. The acquisition budget alone has expanded from \$2.1 billion to \$3.3 billion over the same period, reflecting Singapore's commitment to modernising its defence capabilities.

Singapore confirms the purchase of eight more F-35A fighter jets to complement earlier F-35B acquisition

(Army Recognition, April 08, 2025)

Singapore's Minister for Defence, Dr. Ng Eng Hen, officially announced the procurement of eight additional F-35A fighter jets from the United States during the Committee of Supply Debate. The Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) confirmed the following delivery timeline:

- The first batch of four F-35Bs is expected to arrive by 2026.
- An additional eight F-35Bs will be delivered in 2028.
- The newly announced eight F-35As are scheduled for delivery around 2030.

This acquisition was outlined as part of Singapore's FY2025 defence budget, which saw a 12.4% increase to S\$23.4 billion (approximately US\$17.4 billion), reflecting Singapore's commitment to maintaining a credible and advanced defence posture. According to Lieutenant Colonel Zhang Jianwei, head of the RSAF's Next-Generation Fighter Project Office, the F-35A acquisition is a strategic step in replacing the RSAF's ageing F-16 fleet. The future composition

will consist of a mix of F-35A and F-35B variants, enhancing operational flexibility and readiness.

Singapore downgrades 2025 GDP forecast to 0%-2% as US-China tariff war weighs on global growth

(The Straits Time, April 15, 2025)

On April 14, 2025, Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) downgraded the country's 2025 GDP growth forecast to a range of 0% to 2%, down from the earlier 1% to 3% projection, as the escalating US-China tariff war casts a shadow over global and regional economic stability. The move follows the 0.8% quarter-on-quarter contraction in Singapore's economy for Q1 2025, despite a 3.8% year-on-year growth, slower than the 5% growth in the previous quarter. Alongside this revision, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) eased its local currency policy to cushion the economy against mounting global risks and cooling inflation.

The tariff standoff was intensified after US President Donald Trump imposed sweeping tariffs — including a 145% levy on Chinese goods — sparking retaliatory moves from China, which raised tariffs on American imports to 125%. Singapore was also hit with a flat 10% tariff on its exports to the US from April 5, 2025. Analysts warn that the tit-for-tat tariff escalation could trigger a full-scale global trade war, disrupt supply chains, weaken demand, and raise the likelihood of a technical recession for Singapore, defined as two consecutive quarters of GDP contraction.

THAILAND

Prime Minister had a discussion with Prime Minister of Sri Lanka

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 09, 2025)

On April 04, 2025, H.E. Ms. Paetongtarn Shinawatra, the Prime Minister of Thailand, held a productive meeting with Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, on the sidelines of the 6th BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok. The two leaders engaged in discussions on a wide range of topics, including:

- Economic cooperation and enhancing trade and investment ties, focusing on tourism, the gem and jewellery industry, and sustainable maritime development.
- Cultural exchanges and strengthening people-to-people relations, with an emphasis on promoting Buddhist linkages as part of their shared cultural heritage.
- Cooperation within the BIMSTEC framework, particularly in addressing transnational crime and strengthening regional collaboration for mutual security.

Thailand Calls for Closer Cooperation to Promote Inclusivity, Social Welfare and Rights at the 32nd ASEAN-New Zealand Dialogue

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 10, 2025)

On April 9, 2025, H.E. Mr. Paisan Rupanichkij, Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, participated on behalf of the Permanent Secretary in the 32nd ASEAN-New Zealand Dialogue held in Da Nang, Viet Nam. New Zealand and Viet Nam, the Country Coordinator for ASEAN-New Zealand Dialogue Relations co-chaired the meeting. Timor-Leste attended the meeting as an observer. The discussions focused on strategies to expand and deepen cooperation between ASEAN and New Zealand, particularly in anticipation of the 50th Anniversary Commemorative Summit scheduled for November 2025 in Malaysia. Key Areas of discussion were:

- Inclusivity, Social Welfare, and Rights
- 50th Anniversary of ASEAN-New Zealand Dialogue Relations
- Bilateral Cooperation

Thailand to negotiate US trade policies, avoid pork imports

(The Thaiger, April 12, 2025)

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, Pichet Choonhavan, outlined five strategies to address the impact of the so-called Trump tariffs on Thailand, emphasising that the country would avoid importing pork due to concerns over domestic producers. Pichet revealed that while no specific date had been set for negotiations with the United States, discussions were expected to take place soon, possibly within the month, involving representatives from the US Trade Representative (USTR) and other key figures associated with President Donald Trump.

Pichet highlighted that the US's trade deficits with Thailand and other countries couldn't be balanced quickly, and the solution would require importing more US products while boosting Thai exports to the US and other global markets. The goal was to expand the pet food sector's market share from 3% to 6% in the next five to seven years, which would require boosting domestic production capacity and increasing raw material imports.

The 7th Thai-Danish Political Consultation

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 13, 2025)

On April 10, 2025, the Deputy Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and the State Secretary for Trade and Investments of Denmark, co-chaired the 7th Thai-Danish Political Consultation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark. Both sides reviewed bilateral relations and discussed ways forward toward establishing a Thai-Danish green strategic partnership aimed at further strengthening sectoral cooperation in key areas, including:

- the circular economy
- livestock and agriculture
- innovation and logistics
- green transition
- health
- maritime affairs

They also explored avenues to expand trade and investment, including the timely conclusion of negotiations on a Thailand-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA), Denmark's support for Thailand's accession to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the waiver of visa requirements for Thai ordinary passport holders entering the Schengen area.

TIMOR-LESTE

During the existence of FF-FDTL 2 young women assume leadership positions

(The Dili Weekly, April 03, 2025)

Over the past 24 years since the establishment of the Falintil-Timor-Leste Defence Force (F-FDTL), only two women have held official leadership roles, despite 276 women serving alongside male military personnel. Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Domingos Raul “Falur Rate-Laek,” highlighted that one female officer reached the rank of Captain and another became a Lieutenant, while others serve as soldiers and sergeants.

Lieutenant General Falur emphasised the significance of women’s contributions in the F-FDTL, noting that despite their small numbers, female personnel have shown strong commitment and performance across their military careers. He added that the leadership remains dedicated to nurturing women’s mental resilience and professional capabilities to ensure they work effectively alongside their male counterparts.

Timor-Leste Hosts 6th G7+ Ministerial Meeting to Strengthen Collective Action and Define Common Strategy in the Face of Global Challenges

(Government of Timor-Leste, April 11, 2025)

On April 11 and 12, Timor-Leste hosted the 6th Ministerial Meeting of the G7+, marking 15 years since the intergovernmental group’s founding in Dili. The gathering brought together Foreign Ministers and high-level delegates from member countries to reflect on the group’s journey and chart new strategies for peace, resilience, and cooperation among conflict-affected states.

At the opening ceremony, Timor-Leste’s Foreign Minister Bendito dos Santos Freitas and President José Ramos-Horta underscored the G7+’s role as a strong advocate for fragile states, promoting country-led solutions and solidarity. Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão recalled the group’s early days and urged the members to embrace national dialogue, peer learning, and collective political action to build a more substantial bloc for peace.

Vice-Minister Milena Rangel Represents Timor-Leste at the 32nd ASEAN-New Zealand Dialogue and the 4th ASEAN-UK Meeting

(Government of Timor-Leste, April 14, 2025)

From April 8 to 10, Timor-Leste's Vice-Minister for ASEAN Affairs and representative at the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meetings (SOM), Milena Rangel, attended the 4th ASEAN-United Kingdom Senior Officials' Meeting (AUKSOM) and the 32nd ASEAN-New Zealand Dialogue in Da Nang, Vietnam.

During the ASEAN-New Zealand Dialogue on April 9, participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the Strategic Partnership, as the two sides marked 50 years of dialogue relations. Discussions focused on regional peace, economic integration, sustainable development, education, and disaster risk reduction. Delegates also supported the proposal to elevate the partnership to a comprehensive strategic level, along with drafting a new ASEAN-New Zealand Action Plan for 2026-2030.

Vice-Minister Rangel also spoke at a session promoting tourism between ASEAN and Da Nang, sharing Timor-Leste's vision and experiences. She held bilateral talks with New Zealand's representative, Grahame Morton, on the sidelines, addressing New Zealand's continued support for Timor-Leste's ASEAN accession process. On April 10, she attended the 4th ASEAN-UK Senior Officials' Meeting, which reviewed the progress of the ASEAN-UK Action Plan 2022-2026, which is now nearly 95% implemented.

Prime Minister Begins Official Visit to Chinese Province of Hunan to Strengthen Bilateral Cooperation

(Government of Timor-Leste, April 14, 2025)

On April 13, 2025, Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão began an official five-day visit to the Province of Hunan in the People's Republic of China, reinforcing the long-standing friendship and cooperation between Timor-Leste and Hunan. On April 14, the Prime Minister paid tribute to Mao Zedong at his former residence in Shaoshan. He later visited the Hunan Institute of Geology to explore scientific and technical cooperation opportunities. The Timorese delegation visited the Zhuzhou Beidou Industrial Park, Liuyang Qingtai International Fireworks Exhibition Centre, and Zoomlion's Smart Industrial City to identify potential investments and facilitate knowledge transfer.

Timor-Leste to Host International Conference on the Law of the Sea and Maritime Dispute Settlement from 15-16 May 2025

(Government of Timor-Leste, April 16, 2025)

The Land and Maritime Boundary Office (LMBO) of Timor-Leste will host the Second Dili International Conference on the Law of the Sea, scheduled from 15-16 May 2025 at the JL World Hotel in Dili. The 2025 Dili International Conference will also welcome participation from senior representatives across the Pacific, ASEAN, the G7+ group of fragile nations, the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, and other international stakeholders committed to advancing peaceful, lawful, and cooperative solutions for maritime disputes.

This year's conference, themed "Navigating Challenges: Law of the Sea and Maritime Dispute Settlement", will gather distinguished policymakers, legal experts, academics, and practitioners for an invitation-only dialogue on the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes, with a particular focus on the frameworks and mechanisms established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The conference will explore:

- Lessons from the landmark Timor Sea Conciliation case.
- The effectiveness and future of international legal mechanisms in dispute resolution.
- Regional approaches to conflict settlement.
- The impact of climate change on maritime disputes.
- Strategies for sustainable resource management in disputed maritime zones.

VIETNAM

Vietnam says to buy more US goods as it seeks tariff delay

(France24, April 08, 2025)

Vietnam has urged the United States to delay the implementation of new 46% tariffs on its exports by at least 45 days, seeking time to negotiate and avoid potential economic damage. Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh emphasised Vietnam's commitment to balancing trade with the U.S., including increasing purchases of American products, particularly in defence and aviation. Top Vietnamese leaders, including President To Lam, have directly appealed to Trump, aiming to resolve the dispute through diplomacy. Analysts warn that if enforced, the tariffs could cut Vietnam's GDP by up to 3% this year, severely impacting its export-driven growth model — a fear reflected in a sharp 6% drop on Vietnam's leading stock exchange following the announcement.

Vietnam, China to hold 9th border defence friendship exchange

(Vietnam Plus, April 09, 2025)

The ninth border defence friendship exchange between Vietnam and China took place in Vietnam's northern province of Lang Son and China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on April 16-17. At a press conference on April 9, the Ministry of National Defence announced that Vietnam's delegation was led by Minister of National Defence Phan Van Giang, while China's was headed by Minister of National Defence Dong Jun.

On April 16 in China, the exchange included various activities such as welcome ceremonies, visits to the Youyi Guan tourism area, smart border gates, schools, and cultural villages, while the April 17 program in Vietnam featured tree planting, school visits, border guard tours, and the signing of cooperation agreements. Notably, Vietnam's missile frigates 015 and 016 joined the exchange, conducting joint patrols with the Chinese navy in the Gulf of Tonkin from April 10-19.

Vietnam's party chief wants enhanced defence, security, connectivity with China

(Reuters, April 14, 2025)

From April 14-15, 2025, Vietnam's Communist Party Chief To Lam had called for enhanced cooperation with China in diplomacy, defence, security, and infrastructure, ahead of Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Vietnam. His remarks were published in Chinese state

media on Monday, highlighting the strategic importance Hanoi placed on its relationship with Beijing. Lam emphasised that Vietnam considered three planned rail links with China to be its top priority in infrastructure cooperation. These projects were expected to boost trade and cross-border connectivity, supporting both nations' regional development goals.

PM highlights Vietnam, Kenya's role in global sustainable development

(Vietnam Plus, April 16, 2025)

On April 16, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh hosted Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Defence Soipan Tuyu in Hanoi, underlining the importance of multilateralism, international solidarity, and the growing role of developing nations in promoting green and sustainable growth. The Kenyan delegation is visiting Vietnam for the 4th Partnership for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 (P4G) Summit.

During their meeting, both sides acknowledged the untapped potential for stronger cooperation in defence, trade, education, food security, clean agriculture, and digital transformation. PM Chinh stressed Vietnam's focus on innovation and technology. At the same time, the Kenyan official conveyed President William Ruto's message, reaffirming Kenya's interest in deepening bilateral ties and partnering with Vietnam on digital and sustainable development goals. Both countries also agreed to explore setting up diplomatic missions and advancing negotiations in areas such as crime prevention, agriculture, and science-technology collaboration.

Feature: Xi's Vietnam visit highlights "camaraderie plus brotherhood"

(The Cambodian News, April 16, 2025)

On April 15, 2025, Chinese President Xi Jinping, together with Vietnamese Communist Party General Secretary To Lam and President Luong Cuong, attended a photo exhibition at the Hanoi International Convention Centre to commemorate 75 years of China-Vietnam diplomatic relations. The visit, part of Xi's fourth trip to Vietnam in a decade, underscored the two nations' historical bond, which Xi described as built on "camaraderie plus brotherhood" — a phrase famously used by late Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh to capture the depth of their shared revolutionary struggle. Xi announced a new "Red Study Tours" program to further strengthen the cooperation.

Vietnam wants to learn UAE's experience in economic transformation: PM

(Vietnam Plus, April 16, 2025)

On April 16, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh welcomed the UAE's Minister of Climate Change and Environment, Amna bint Abdullah Al Dahak, who is visiting Hanoi for the 4th Partnership for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 (P4G) Summit. Minister Al Dahak reaffirmed the UAE's commitment to climate action, especially following its COP28 presidency, and encouraged Vietnam to consider joining the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

She also highlighted the deepening Vietnam-UAE partnership, which was marked by recent milestones like the Comprehensive Partnership upgrade and the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Both sides agreed to boost high-level exchanges, strengthen multilateral cooperation, and expedite agreements on investment protection and visa exemptions for diplomatic and official passport holders. PM Chinh also extended invitations to the UAE's President and Prime Minister for official visits to Vietnam in 2025.

Qualcomm plans 3rd largest R&D centre in Vietnam

(VN Express, April 16, 2025)

During a meeting in Hanoi on April 16, Qualcomm's Senior Vice President of Engineering, Jilei Hou, announced its intention to establish its third-largest research and development (R&D) centre in Vietnam, focusing on artificial intelligence (AI). This move follows Qualcomm's acquisition of MovianAI, a subsidiary of VinAI, reinforcing its commitment to AI innovation and talent development in Vietnam.

Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Chi Dung welcomed Qualcomm's investment plans and praised the company's role in fostering technological growth and innovation in Vietnam. He urged Qualcomm to build a clear development strategy for MovianAI, helping local startups and experts integrate into global semiconductor and AI value chains.

About the Author

Diksha Jain is a dedicated scholar in Defence and Strategic Studies, with a strong academic foundation in International Relations. She completed her master's degree in Defence and Strategic Studies, focusing on areas such as maritime security and the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Region. Prior to this, she earned her bachelor's degree in International Relations, where she developed a comprehensive understanding of global politics and regional dynamics.

As a Research Assistant at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), Diksha explores critical issues related to defence strategy and maritime security. Her work focuses on the Indian Ocean Region, examining its geopolitical challenges and their implications for regional stability.



All Rights Reserved 2023 Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS)

No part of this publication may be reproduced, copied, archived, retained or transmitted through print, speech or electronic media without prior written approval from C L A W S. The views expressed and suggestions made in the article are solely of the author in his personal capacity and do not have any official endorsement. Attributability of the contents lies purely with author.