

ASEAN Prioritizes Energy Security Amid Middle East Tensions

At the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Manila, energy and food security emerged as the bloc's top priorities due to growing instability in the Middle East. During the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference with the United States, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced a US\$1.5 billion strategic investment to strengthen Southeast Asia's energy security, supply chains, and aviation infrastructure. Washington also pledged support for the development of ASEAN's liquefied natural gas (LNG) market, deployment of advanced US grid technologies, and the implementation of the ASEAN Power Grid. The US reaffirmed its commitment to assisting ASEAN in implementing the ASEAN Petroleum Security Agreement, highlighting energy cooperation as a key pillar of the US-ASEAN strategic partnership.

The emphasis on energy security reflects ASEAN's growing awareness that geopolitical conflicts beyond the region can directly threaten its economic stability. The ongoing Middle East crisis has heightened concerns over disruptions to global oil and gas supplies, exposing Southeast Asia's dependence on imported energy. As a result, ASEAN is increasingly seeking to diversify energy sources, strengthen regional connectivity, and improve resilience through initiatives such as the ASEAN Power Grid.

The United States' investment also carries significant geopolitical implications. Beyond supporting regional development, it represents Washington's broader strategy to deepen its engagement in Southeast Asia amid intensifying competition with China. By investing in critical infrastructure and energy cooperation, the US aims to reinforce its position as a reliable strategic partner while promoting a rules-based regional order.

For ASEAN, however, the challenge remains balancing economic cooperation with major powers without compromising its strategic autonomy. While external partnerships are essential for addressing energy vulnerabilities, ASEAN will continue to avoid becoming overly dependent on any single actor. The current energy agenda therefore illustrates ASEAN's pragmatic foreign policy: leveraging external resources to enhance regional resilience while preserving its centrality and neutrality in an increasingly polarized Indo-Pacific.

Palestinian Activist Deported from Indonesia, Rights Groups Warn of Possible Extradition to Israel

On 16 July 2026, Indonesian authorities arrested Palestinian activist Abdel Karim Raed Miqdad and deported him to Cyprus within less than 24 hours. According to the Geneva Council for Rights and Liberties, the arrest was based on an Interpol Red Notice requested by Cyprus over alleged terrorism-related offenses. However, the rights group stated that no detailed evidence or factual basis for the accusations has been publicly disclosed. The organization warned that Miqdad could ultimately face extradition to Israel and urged Cyprus to suspend any such process pending an independent judicial review, citing the principle of non-refoulement and documented concerns over the treatment of Palestinian detainees in Israeli custody.

The rapid arrest and deportation of Abdel Karim Miqdad raises legitimate questions about due process and transparency. While Indonesia has the sovereign right to cooperate with international law enforcement mechanisms, an Interpol Red Notice is not equivalent to a conviction or an automatic extradition order. Allegations involving politically active individuals, particularly those who have been outspoken in advocating for Palestine, warrant careful judicial scrutiny to ensure that legal mechanisms are not perceived as instruments of political pressure.

Given Miqdad's consistent advocacy for Palestinian rights, the possibility of political motivations behind the case deserves independent examination rather than assumption. Indonesia, which has long positioned itself as a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause and international justice, should ensure that any action involving Palestinian activists adheres to the highest standards of due process, transparency, and international human rights obligations. Acting cautiously and allowing sufficient legal review would have reinforced Indonesia's commitment to the rule of law while avoiding perceptions that it acted too hastily in a case with potentially significant humanitarian and political implications.

Myanmar's Return to ASEAN? Thailand Opens Door to Dialogue with Junta

Myanmar's military leader Min Aung Hlaing is scheduled to visit Bangkok on 6–7 August 2026 for talks with Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul. The meeting follows discussions among ASEAN foreign ministers in Manila on Myanmar's future engagement with the regional bloc. According to Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow, the visit is part of a "dual-track approach" aimed at balancing diplomatic engagement with efforts to address Myanmar's ongoing political crisis.

Myanmar has been excluded from high-level ASEAN meetings since the 2021 military coup that overthrew the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Thailand, which shares a long border with Myanmar and hosts millions of Myanmar migrants and refugees, has been advocating for greater engagement with the junta, although this approach remains controversial within ASEAN.

The planned meeting signals Thailand's continued preference for constructive engagement rather than prolonged isolation of Myanmar's military leadership. From Bangkok's perspective, stability in Myanmar is directly linked to border security, refugee management, and regional economic interests.

However, reintegrating Myanmar into ASEAN diplomacy without meaningful progress on political reconciliation risks undermining ASEAN's credibility. The bloc's Five-Point Consensus has seen limited implementation, while violence and humanitarian suffering continue inside Myanmar. Any effort to restore Myanmar's diplomatic standing should therefore be accompanied by clear benchmarks, including a reduction in violence, expanded humanitarian access, and inclusive political dialogue.

Securing ASEAN's Future Requires More Than Clean Energy

A new International Energy Agency (IEA) report warns that the Iran war has become a major wake-up call for Southeast Asia's energy security. The conflict highlighted the region's heavy dependence on oil and gas transported through the Strait of Hormuz, leaving many countries vulnerable to supply disruptions, higher fuel prices, and inflation.

According to the IEA, Southeast Asia's energy import bill could rise from US\$80 billion in 2024 to US\$245 billion by 2035 if governments fail to diversify energy sources and reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels. In response to the crisis, countries across the region are accelerating the adoption of renewable energy, rooftop solar, electric vehicles (EVs), and even reconsidering nuclear power. The Philippines has seen record rooftop solar installations, while EV sales across Southeast Asia more than doubled in 2025, with Laos even banning imports of fuel-powered vehicles for the remainder of 2026.

The IEA concludes that improving electricity grids and expanding investments in solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, and other clean energy sources are essential to strengthening the region's long-term energy resilience.

The Iran war demonstrates that energy security has become inseparable from geopolitical stability. Southeast Asia can no longer rely heavily on imported fossil fuels whose supply depends on the security of the Middle East. Every escalation in the region immediately translates into higher energy prices, inflation, and greater economic uncertainty across ASEAN.

However, strengthening energy resilience alone is not enough. ASEAN should also adopt a more principled and proactive diplomatic stance toward conflicts that threaten global energy stability. As the current crisis has been driven by military escalation involving Israel and the United States against Iran, ASEAN should consistently call for an immediate end to hostilities, respect for international law, and peaceful conflict resolution. Prolonged military confrontations not only inflict humanitarian suffering but also undermine global economic and energy security.

If ASEAN seeks to safeguard its long-term strategic interests, it must pursue a dual approach: accelerating the transition toward renewable and diversified energy sources while collectively advocating for de-escalation and accountability under international law. Energy transformation can reduce vulnerability in the future, but preventing conflicts that destabilize global energy markets is equally essential for ensuring regional security and sustainable economic development.