



Laos 2024 ASEAN Chairmanship: Prospective Challenges and opportunities

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Executive Summary:

- The ASEAN 2024 Chairmanship will be under the Lao People's Democratic Republic. This will be her third time to host the regional summit and related meetings throughout 2024.
- The theme of ASEAN 2024 is "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience", with the priorities of promoting economic integration and recovery, strengthening ASEAN's resilience to global challenges, and deepening ASEAN's cooperation with its external partners.
- Lao's chairmanship will face multiple challenges, including the Myanmar crisis, the impending diplomatic and political heft, and the contested geopolitical tensions in the region.
- In order to overcome the challenges, seize the opportunity, and maximize collective interests for the region, Laos must emphasize building consensus and unity among ASEAN member states, maintaining ASEAN's neutrality and centrality, and strengthening the ability to project ASEAN's voice on the international stage.

Introduction

2024 will be a busy year for the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as she will be the chair of ASEAN after Indonesia. Laos Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone received the baton from President Joko Widodo at the closing ceremony of the Indonesian chairmanship, which portrayed the official resume of Laos' chairmanship for ASEAN 2024. Prime Minister Siphandone promised

to make ASEAN a more connected and resilient community under the theme "**Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience**". Prime Minister Siphandone also stated that Laos is committed to pushing for the expansion of the external partnership of ASEAN while simultaneously strengthening the unity and centrality of the bloc.¹ He stated that

"We will continue our collective efforts, including a stronger focus on the ASEAN community, seizing opportunities amid geopolitical and geo-economic challenges and changes".²

The ASEAN chairmanship is a rotational role that comes with responsibilities for all ASEAN member states. The ASEAN chairmanship is a challenging but important role. The chair must be able to balance the interests of the ten ASEAN member states while also representing ASEAN to the external world.

Recap of the 2023 ASEAN chairmanship

The 42nd ASEAN Summit, which took place on May 10–11, 2023, was hosted in Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The outcomes of the 42nd ASEAN Summit include multiple agreements on different matters discussed and conveyed by President Joko Widodo.³

¹ Indonesian National Police. 08 September 2023. "Laos Accept the Responsibility of Leading ASEAN to Broader Connectivity". <https://inp.polri.go.id/2023/09/08/laos-accept-the-responsibility-of-leading-asean-to-broader-connectivity/#:~:text=Accepting%20the%20responsibility%2C%20Siphandone%20pledges%20to%20continue%20the,external%20partnership%20while%20strengthening%20ASEAN%20unity%20and%20centrality.>

² ASEAN Indonesia 2023. 08 8, 2023. "Lao PDR to Assume ASEAN Chairmanship 2024 in Succession to Indonesia" :<https://asean2023.id/en/news/lao-pdr-to-assume-asean-chairmanship-2024-in-succession-to-indonesia>

³ Translation, Office of Assistant to Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents, "President Jokowi Unveils Three Conclusions of the 42nd ASEAN Summit"it." Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, May 11, 2023 <https://setkab.go.id/en/president-jokowi-unveils-three-conclusions-of-42nd-asean-summit/>.

In its capacity as the Chair of ASEAN 2023, Indonesia has diligently prepared several pertinent matters to be discussed. The theme of the 2023 ASEAN Summit was "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth". The following are some of the key outcomes of the 2023 ASEAN Summit:⁴

- i). The adoption of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, a blueprint for ASEAN's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii). The launch of the negotiations for the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), which aims to create a comprehensive and legally binding framework for digital trade and cooperation in ASEAN.
- iii). The signing of the ASEAN-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement, which upgrades the relationship between ASEAN and China to a comprehensive strategic partnership.
- iv). The adoption of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which outlines ASEAN's vision for the Indo-Pacific region and its key priorities for cooperation in the region,

What's on the agenda for the 2024 ASEAN Chairmanship?

Since its official admission to this regional bloc on July 23rd, 1997, Lao PDR is not new to hosting such an important event. Laos hosted the ASEAN summits and related meetings two times already, in 2004 and 2016, respectively. The focus for Laos' chairmanship in ASEAN 2024 will be "**Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience**".⁵ The theme is in accordance with Laos' commitment to foster and attain a more interconnected and resilient ASEAN. According to the chairmanship acceptance speech in Indonesia, the Laotian Prime Minister mentioned the priority of narrowing the development gaps among ASEAN members, pushing for digital transformation, and advocating for carbon neutrality. However, detailed agendas have not been being unveiled by the

⁴ ASEAN Main Portal. "CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT OF THE 43RD ASEAN SUMMIT". September 05, 2023. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/CHAIRMAN-STATEMENT-OF-THE-43RD-ASEAN-SUMMIT-FIN.pdf>

⁵ "Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos - Handover Ceremony of the ASEAN Chairmanship to the Lao PDR." Accessed October 27, 2023. <http://www.mofa.gov.la/index.php/activities/state-leaders/5494-handover-ceremony-of-the-asean-chairmanship-to-the-lao-pdr>.

government of Laos and the committee responsible for the preparation for the summit and related meetings.

Challenges for Laos's chairmanship

Dealing with the Superpowers

For the last few decades, Southeast Asia has been a region where global superpowers have vested interests in terms of geopolitics and geoeconomics. China, on the other hand, has viewed all the ASEAN member states as its good neighbors and has been engaging intensively in order to enhance people-to-people relations and cross-cultural exchange with ASEAN.⁶ The Chinese government believes that these activities will push for a comprehensive strategic partnership and ultimately build a stable, viable, and prosperous region. That is why President Xi Jinping suggested creating a closer ASEAN-China community ten years ago with the aim of expanding interactions and collaboration in tourism, education, culture, and more.⁷

Moreover, China is the main financier and builder of large-scale infrastructure projects in Laos, which is crucial for achieving Laos' national development priorities, such as becoming the "battery of Southeast Asia."⁸ Recently, during the 10th anniversary of the BRI project held in Beijing, Xi Jinping met with the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the President of Laos, Thongloun Sisoulith. President Xi Jinping and President Thongloun Sisoulith endorsed an Action Plan on Establishing a China-Laos Community with a Shared Future (2024-2028) between the Communist Party of China and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party.⁹ They also observed the signing of various bilateral cooperation agreements

⁶ The Asan Forum. "Southeast Asian Strategies toward the Great Powers: Still Hedging after All These Years?," February 22, 2016. <https://theasanforum.org/southeast-asian-strategies-toward-the-great-powers-still-hedging-after-all-these-years/>.

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 07 September 2023. "Concept Paper 2024 ASEAN-China Year of People-to-people Exchanges". https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/dqzzywt_663588/202309/t20230907_11139374.html

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Xi Jinping Meets with General Secretary of Lao People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee and Lao President Thongloun Sisoulith." Accessed October 27, 2023. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202310/t20231025_11167893.html.

including Belt and Road collaboration projects, digital economy, media, culture, tourism, well-being, and border control and quarantine in general. China's involvement in Laos is of utmost significance, as it assumes multifaceted roles that surpass the provision of official aid and investment.

However, it is important to note that China is not the sole key diplomatic and economic partner of Laos. The US, on the other hand, looks to strengthen its tie with ASEAN member states to balance China's influence in the region. For this reason, President Biden is in favor of the development of US-ASEAN ties through the introduction of five new high-level dialogues on health, energy, women's empowerment, the environment and climate, and transportation.¹⁰ Moreover, during his remarks at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2023, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin reiterated the US's role in the Indo-Pacific, restating the commitment to the region that all countries are free to pursue their interests.¹¹

So, the challenge that comes to the Laos chairmanship is that its government has to balance relations with China and other major powers. Laos has been viewed as a close ally of Beijing for a long time. Looking at the debt record of Laos, China currently holds around 50% of Laos' aggregate national debt.¹² Laos' heavy debt to China raises concerns about its ability to remain impartial and act as an objective mediator within ASEAN as it primarily linked to infrastructure projects financed by Chinese loans. While these projects have contributed to economic growth, they have also increased Laos' reliance on China for financial support. This dependency could limit Laos' ability to pursue independent economic policies and negotiate favorable terms with other ASEAN members and it also has the potential to result in higher priority for Chinese interests within ASEAN matters, which may pose a challenge to the unity and decision-making process of the bloc.

¹⁰ White House. 12 November 2022. "President Biden and ASEAN Leaders Launch the U.S.-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership". [FACT SHEET: President Biden and ASEAN Leaders Launch the U.S.-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership | The White House](#)

¹¹ Foreign Politics. 14 August 2022. "The United States Is Deeply Invested in the South China Sea". [China and America Are Contending For the South China Sea \(foreignpolicy.com\)](#)

¹² East Asia Forum. "Laos Set Its Own Debt Trap," October 31, 2020. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/10/31/laos-set-its-own-debt-trap/>.

However, as the Laos government has pledged, it must uphold ASEAN's unity and centrality in addressing regional and international issues. Moreover, the disputes in the South China Sea will affect relations with other ASEAN member states, such as the Philippines and Vietnam, and with China. Laos is suffering from small state syndrome because Laos has a limited voice and small capacities to defend and maintain her national interests, which lead to more vulnerabilities and limited options in the international order, besides having to obey the rules set by major powers.¹³

Bearing the financial and logistical cost of whole summits and related meetings

Laos commenced the year 2022 with a baggage of financial challenges. From 2022 to 2025, the country will be burdened with an annual debt repayment amount of US\$1.16 billion, and Laos has showed little positive progress of its ability to repay.¹⁴ The nation's economy is in serious trouble because of energy crisis-fueled inflation. The realization of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the enhancement of the ASEAN Smart Cities Network with green growth, and environmental protection will also have to be part of the agenda led by Laos. Moreover, Laos is on the quest to graduate from "Least Developing Country" status in 2024, which would bring more losses to the sources of development aid and relieve trade.¹⁵ Graduating from LDC status would mean that Laos would no longer be eligible for certain types of development aid and concessional financing. This could lead to a decline in the flow of financial resources to the country, potentially hindering its economic and social development efforts. Moreover, the graduation from LDC status would expose Laos to more intense trade competition from other ASEAN members. This could challenge domestic industries and make it more difficult for Laos to export its products to other regional markets. Therefore, the summit will bring more financial burdens to Laos in term of logistical and security arrangement for the ministers and all governmental officials arriving in Laos for the meetings.

¹³ Archer, Clive & Wivel, Anders & Bailes, Alyson. (2014). Setting the scene: Small states and international security. 10.4324/9781315798042.

¹⁴ Nikkei Asia. "Laos Debt at 'critical Level' with China Payments Still Opaque." Accessed October 27, 2023. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Laos-debt-at-critical-level-with-China-payments-still-opaque>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Dealing with the Myanmar crisis

Being a chair of ASEAN next year, the Laos government cannot escape from dealing with the Myanmar crisis. Since the coup in 2021, the previous chairs of ASEAN have attempted to provide recommendations and solutions to the Military Junta, especially with the Five Point Consensus (5PC). But more than two years later, no progress has been made. Laos, the designated chair of ASEAN for the year 2024, has reached an agreement to collectively assume the responsibility of spearheading ASEAN's diplomatic efforts concerning Myanmar alongside Indonesia and Malaysia, the chairs for 2023 and 2025, respectively.¹⁶

Besides the joining talks in Brunei back in 2021, ASEAN has not invited the military leader, Min Aung Hlaing, to participate in the summit because the Myanmar government has not respected its promise in the process of democratization in its country. In response to the slow progress in implementing the Five Point Consensus, ASEAN has decided to create a troika of chairs, consisting of Indonesia, Laos, and Malaysia, with the primary goal of addressing the crisis within the Five Point Consensus's framework.¹⁷

In terms of diplomatic relations, Lao PDR is regarded as having weak diplomatic corps and is also a hermetic country. When the coup happened in Myanmar in 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR stated the importance of retaining political stability in all ASEAN Member States, and the country itself encouraged all parties concerned to engage in constructive dialogue and peaceful reconciliation. Laos also reiterated that the Lao PDR is ready to work closely with the ASEAN Member States to achieve lasting peace and stability in Myanmar. Lao PDR is the only member state that sends its Foreign Minister to engage in a "1.5-track" dialogue with the junta in Thailand-hosted talks in March and June.

Timor-Leste's membership

¹⁶ Widakuswara, Patsy. "Myanmar's Seat Empty as VP Harris Speaks to ASEAN Leaders" VOA, September 6, 2023. <https://www.voanews.com/a/myanmar-s-seat-is-empty-as-vp-harris-speaks-to-asean-leaders-/7256962.html>.

¹⁷Priti Naik. September September 2023. "ASEAN Establishes a Troika of Chairs to Address Myanmar Crisis: Indonesia, Laos, and Malaysia Take the Lead". <https://bnn.network/international-relations/asean-establishes-troika-of-chairs-to-address-myanmar-crisis-indonesia-laos-and-malaysia-take-the-lead/>

Although located in the southern part of the island of Timor and regarded as a part of the Southeast Asia region, the island nation of Timor-Leste has not been part of the ASEAN bloc yet. It was granted observer status in 2002 after gaining independence from Indonesia. In 2005, it was admitted into the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2007.¹⁸ Timor-Leste expressed its intention to join ASEAN and submitted the formal application to be part of the regional bloc in 2011.¹⁹ In 2022, the leaders of ASEAN agreed ‘in principle’ for the admission of Timor-Leste as its 11th member at the 41st ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh.²⁰ Attending the ASEAN Summit for the first time as an observer state, Timor-Leste was reassured by the ASEAN leaders about their support and commitment to assist the Timor-Leste government in succeeding in the milestone required for full membership at the 42nd ASEAN Summit in 2023.²¹ According to its president, the country was expected to become a full-fledged ASEAN member in 2025 but was open to other time frames recommended by other ASEAN member states.

“ASEAN leaders may decide at some other time or year. Maybe in 2024, and we would obviously go along with it. If it were to occur in 2025, it would mean we have two solid years to build on the progress that we have made under the roadmap to be better prepared as a full-fledged member,” the East Timorese president, José Ramos-Horta said.²²

According to the ASEAN Charter, one of the membership criteria is “All ASEAN member states must recognize the state.”²³ Hence, the perception of ASEAN Member States is important to fully check the membership criteria box. The survey by the ASEAN Studies Centre at the ISEAS-Yusof

¹⁸ Angaindrankumar Gnanasagaran. 05 January 2018. “Admitting ASEAN’s 11th member”. <https://theaseanpost.com/article/admitting-aseans-11th-member>

¹⁹ Foreign Policy Research Institute. 02 June 2023. “ASEAN in 2023: What to Expect”. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/06/asean-in-2023-what-to-expect/>

²⁰ East Asia Forum. 03 January 2023. “Timor-Leste can strengthen ASEAN centrality amid global crises”. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2023/01/03/timor-leste-can-strengthen-asean-centrality-amid-global-crises/>

²¹ ASEAN. 11 May 2023. “Chairman’s Statement of the 42nd ASEAN Summit Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, 10-11 May 2023”. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FINAL-Chairmans-Statement-42nd-ASEAN-Summit-1.pdf>

²² Jakarta Globe. 07 August 2023. “Timor Leste to “Ideally” Become Full ASEAN Member in 2025: President”. Available at: <https://jakartaglobe.id/news/timor-leste-to-ideally-become-full-asean-member-in-2025-president>

²³ Thuzar, Moe. 2017. “Singapore | 2 June 2017 What Does It Take to Join ASEAN?,” no. 2017. https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2017_36.pdf

Ishak Institute, the perception of ASEAN member states regarding Timor-Leste's membership in ASEAN is varied.²⁴ It is worth noting that the strongest expression of support comes from Cambodia (93.3%) and the Philippines (69.7%), while Myanmar (48.7%) and Brunei (45.0%) show the strongest opposition.²⁵ Laos's perception on Timor-Leste's membership in ASEAN is uncertain, with 38.3% of respondents being unsure about a new member joining. This indicates a lack of consensus among Laotian respondents regarding Timor-Leste's admission. However, Laos did not express outright opposition to Timor-Leste's membership.²⁶

Not different from the previous Chairs, Laos will face the delicate task of balancing ASEAN's principles of non-interference and consensus-building with external pressures from countries that have expressed concerns about Timor-Leste's readiness for membership. This could put Laos in a difficult position, potentially undermining its ability to lead the bloc effectively.

Opportunities

Enhancing its reputation and profile on the international stage

As one of the two communist countries in Southeast Asia, Laos has a record of human rights issues, including serious restrictions on free expression and media, detention of dissidents outside the legal system, arbitrary killings by government soldiers, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and government censorship on social media.²⁷ In 2019, a female Lao environmentalist was arrested due to her criticism of the Laotian government over the dam collapse in Attapeu province, causing homelessness and widespread damages in the local community.²⁸ In recent years, the government of Laos has ordered the registration of social media platform operators and also established a task force monitoring all social media platforms in the country to prevent

²⁴Seah, S. et al.,2023. "The State of Southeast Asia: 2023 Survey Report". Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/The-State-of-SEA-2023-Final-Digital-V4-09-Feb-2023.pdf>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ U.S Department of State. 2021. "2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Laos".

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/laos#:~:text=Significant%20human%20rights%20issues%20included%20credible%20reports%20of%3A,r%20on%20political%20participation%3B%20and%20serious%20government%20corruption.>

²⁸ Bangkok Post. 20 February 2020. "In Laos, price of free speech a heavy one".

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1861639/in-laos-price-of-free-speech-a-heavy-one>

misinformation and the spread of fake news.²⁹ The Lao government has also passed a number of laws that restrict freedom of expression and assembly. For example, the Law on Cybercrime, which was passed in 2015, makes it a crime to "disseminate information that is false, distorted, or fabricated and can cause harm to national security, public order, social morality, or the rights and interests of others."³⁰

Therefore, 2024 is a perfect timing for Laos to restore its images and improve the records above by performing well in the capacity of the chair. By potentially successfully chairing ASEAN, Laos can show the world that it is a capable and responsible country that is committed to regional cooperation and integration. This can help to improve Laos's reputation and credibility regionally and internationally. The ASEAN chairmanship will provide Laos with an opportunity to deepen its ties with its ASEAN neighbors and to build new relationships with other countries in the region and beyond. This can help to improve Laos's diplomatic standing and increase its influence in the international arena. The ASEAN baton from Indonesia will become an important milestone for the Lao PDR. This signifies a big responsibility for a small developing nation like Laos due to the expectation from the ASEAN members that Laos will make progress in various issues, starting from the Myanmar crisis to the long-decade unsolved South China Sea dispute. The centrality and unity of ASEAN and the prospect of developing a stable, peaceful, and developed region were predicted to be reinforced by the Lao chairmanship. Rarely does a nation of modest size, such as Laos, receive significant attention as the chair of an organization encompassing over 600 million individuals and representing the world's seventh largest economy. The current series of meetings, along with the previous one held in September, present a favorable occasion for the nation to bolster its global standing.³¹

²⁹ Global Voices. 10 June 2021. "Laos social media task force: Will it target 'fake news' or censor online criticism?". <https://globalvoices.org/2021/06/10/laos-social-media-task-force-will-it-target-fake-news-or-censor-online-criticism/>

³⁰ Laos National Assembly. 2015. "Law on Prevention and Combating Cyber Crime". https://laocert.gov.la/ftp_upload/Cyber_Crime_Law_EnVersion.pdf

³¹ Parameswaran, Prashanth. "Laos in the ASEAN Spotlight: Opportunities and Challenges." Accessed October 11, 2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/laos-in-the-asean-spotlight-opportunities-and-challenges/>.

Even though there are challenges for Laos to deal with, hosting the meeting will also give Laos the opportunity to showcase its leadership and diplomatic skills, promote its image and tourism industry, and enhance its regional and global profile. The ASEAN Summit is the highest-level meeting of the ASEAN member states and their dialogue partners, where they discuss regional and global issues of common concern and interest. The summit provides the host nation with a chance to outline its goals and projects for the ASEAN community-building process through its agenda-setting power.

By creating the National Steering Committee on Preparation and Implementation of the ASEAN Chairmanship of Laos 2024 and its 14 subcommittees, Laos has already begun preparing for the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2024.³² Laos has also pledged to ensure a successful ASEAN Summit by providing adequate facilities, security, and hospitality to the participants. Laos also received support from neighboring countries like Cambodia.

To successfully overcome the challenges and seize the opportunities of its ASEAN chairmanship, Laos will need to focus on the following:

- i). Building consensus and unity among ASEAN member states, Laos will need to work closely with other ASEAN members to develop a common agenda for its chairmanship. Laos will also need to be flexible and willing to compromise to reach consensus on important issues.
- ii). Maintaining ASEAN's neutrality and centrality: Laos will need to resist pressures from major powers to take sides in their geopolitical rivalry. Laos should also focus on promoting ASEAN's own interests and values, rather than those of any individual member state.
- iii). Projecting ASEAN's voice on the international stage: Laos will need to use its chairmanship to raise ASEAN's profile and ensure that ASEAN's voice is heard on important regional and global issues. Laos can do this by hosting major international events,

³² The Star. 02 June 2023. "Laos prepares for 2024 ASEAN chairmanship; promises a very successful Asean Summit". [Laos prepares for 2024 Asean chairmanship; promises a very successful Asean Summit | The Star](#)

by engaging with other countries at a high level, and by using social media and other communication tools to reach a wider audience.

So far, Laos has received many congratulatory messages and support in various forms from other nations regarding her chairmanship. Thailand contributed its expertise and exemplary methods in effectively facilitating media and managing messages and communication as the host of APEC2022.³³ Additionally, the US ambassador to ASEAN has discussed ongoing cooperation with ministries in Laos including Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and Ministry of Communication and Technology, and offer its support for Laos to achieve a successful chairmanship next year.³⁴

Attracting Economic Benefits

The tourism industry holds significant economic promises for Laos. The government of Laos is presently preparing for the next event, known as Visit Laos Year 2024. The objective is to entice a total of 4.6 million tourists to the country over the course of 2024, with the aim of generating a revenue of USD 712 million.³⁵

In addition, the Laotian government has undertaken infrastructure renovations, generated diverse promotional materials for tourism, implemented QR codes carrying comprehensive information on tourist destinations in Laos, and compiled a tourism handbook. These initiatives are in accordance with the tourism development plan spanning from 2021 to 2023.³⁶ Moreover, its government has put down policies to address economic challenges and create favorable conditions

³³ “Information Department warmly welcomes a delegation from the Lao PDR on a visit as part of preparations to host ASEAN2024.” Accessed October 17, 2023. <https://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/lao-press-visit-2?cate=5d5bcb4e15e39c306000683e>.

³⁴ The Laotian Times. 29 May 2023. “US Ambassador to ASEAN Affirms Strong Support for Laos 2024 Chairmanship”. <https://laotiantimes.com/2023/05/29/us-ambassador-affirms-strong-support-for-laos-asean-chairmanship-emphasizes-economic-engagement/>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Network, Asia News. “‘Infrastructure, Tourism Key for Laos’ Economic Growth’.” Accessed October 17, 2023. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/infrastructure-tourism-key-laos-economic-growth>.

for investor to improve the country's investment climate by modernizing the banking system and its transaction process.³⁷

Conclusion

In all, this is the third time that the Laotian government has had the chance to chair ASEAN. According to its experience in the past (2004 and 2016), Laos is predicted to host the meetings and its related summit in accordance with the ASEAN Ways and is also expected to play out its leadership and diplomatic role with the support of many international friends. Overall, the Laotian ASEAN chairmanship in 2024 presents both challenges and opportunities. By focusing on building consensus and unity among ASEAN member states, maintaining ASEAN neutrality and centrality, and projecting ASEAN's voice on the international stage, Laos can successfully overcome the challenges and seize the opportunities of its chairmanship.

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³⁷ The Star. 08 July 2023. "Laos govt to step up efforts to attract high-quality foreign investment". Available at: [Laos govt to step up efforts to attract high-quality foreign investment | The Star](#)

affairs to catalyze progress and advance prospects of positive integration, peace, and development. With its pool of high-caliber researchers, IISPP's CSEAS aims to be an alternative to ad-hoc research, training, and policy dialogue arrangements with limited or short-lived national and regional impacts.