



What are the Cambodia's Achievements at the ASEAN Summit 2023?

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Prime Minister Hun Manet, the newly elected Prime Minister of Cambodia, participated in the 43rd ASEAN Summit and related summits which took place in Jakarta from 4th to 7th September 2023. The theme is "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth" under the chairmanship of the Republic of Indonesia. Notably, this is the first ASEAN Summit in which the newly elected Prime Minister attended. Prime Minister Hun Manet held bilateral, trilateral, and informal dialogues with the leaders of different nations, during his four-day visit to the ASEAN Summit and related events. Likewise, he discussed a range of topics and exchanged viewpoints with the goal of improving and broadening relations with all sectors. This paper summarizes the major accomplishments that Cambodia has obtained from the 43rd ASEAN Summit in terms of diplomatic advancement, and economic gains through economic deals and tourism cooperation.

Cooperation and Recognition

Diplomatic enhancement was identified as a key accomplishment of Cambodia to improve her relations with ASEAN member states and ASEAN dialogue partners. As a result, more than 20 heads of state and heads of international and regional institutions from all over the world shook hands and held both official and informal discussions with Prime Minister Hun Manet, including Southeast Asian countries, China, Japan, South Korea, India, the United States of America,

Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.¹ Personally, these meetings and discussions signal the legitimacy and recognition given to the Prime Minister on the international stage.

Submarine Power Cable Project

In terms of the advancement of economy and sustainability, Cambodia intends to purchase electricity (hydropower) from Laos and then export it to Singapore crossing Cambodia, Thailand, and Malaysia. Hence, Prime Minister Hun Manet has requested cooperation from the Malaysian government during the bilateral meeting between Malaysia and Cambodia at the 43rd ASEAN Summit in order to construct an undersea power line which will cross the Malaysian maritime boundary.² Likewise, Prime Minister Hun Manet also took the opportunity to discuss and seek cooperation on the construction of electricity network infrastructure with the Prime Minister of Vietnam and the Prime Minister of Laos during their trilateral meeting on September 4, 2023. Similarly, during the bilateral meeting between Cambodia and Vietnam at the 42nd summit on 9th May 2023, the former prime minister, Mr. Hun Sen also requested assistance from Vietnam in order to work together to make it easier to connect power lines from Laos to Singapore, and pleaded with Malaysians to support this project.³

Since Singapore's Keppel Energy Pte Ltd and Cambodia's Royal Group Power Co Ltd signed a Power Purchase and Export Agreement (PPEA) in March 2023 for the long-term import and sale of low-carbon power from Cambodian renewable energy sources, the plan to build an undersea power cable from Laos to Singapore is significant for the energy cooperation between Cambodia and Singapore. By attempting to export the entire 1 gigawatt of electricity from Cambodia to Singapore under the PPEA, the businesses want to meet 7.5% of Singapore's electricity needs in 2035.⁴ Additionally, undersea energy transmission functions as a kind of modern powerline

¹ Soth, Koemsoeun. "ASEAN Summit Successes Are Also Cambodians", Says PM." Khmer Times. Last modified September 10, 2023. <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501357926/asean-summit-successes-are-also-cambodians-says-pm/>.

² Ry, Sochan. "Manet Holds Bilateral Talks with ASEAN Counterparts." Phnom Penh Post. Last modified September 5, 2023. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national-politics/manet-holds-bilateral-talks-asean-counterparts>.

³ Kang, Sohear. "Cambodia Seeks Vietnam's Help for Power Export to Singapore." Khmer Times. Last modified May 11, 2023. <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501288183/cambodia-seeks-vietnams-help-for-power-export-to-singapore/>.

⁴ May, Kunmakara. "Cambodia Closer to Renewable Electricity Exports to Singapore." Phnom Penh Post. Last modified March 19, 2023. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/cambodia-closer-renewable-electricity-exports-singapore>.

highway connection between the nations in the area. Consequently, this energy initiative will lay the foundation for Cambodia to become a member of the "clean energy exporter club" in the future, allowing it to effectively harness its vast potential in clean energy, particularly solar energy.⁵

Stimulus for Tourism Industry

With regard to the development of the tourism industry, Prime Minister Hun Manet and President Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos Jr. of the Philippines both pledged to increase direct flights between the Philippines and Cambodia, during the 43rd ASEAN Summit.⁶ As both countries have already established direct flights between Phnom Penh and Manila in 2019, they are seeking to promote the addition of more flights from Manila to Siem Reap or from Cebu to Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.⁷

Cooperation in Agricultural Sector

Considering trade, in terms of rice imports, a secretary of state for the Ministry of Commerce and his Indonesian counterpart reached an agreement to extend the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on annual milled rice imports of 250,000 tons from Cambodia over the next four years. This is part of Indonesia's plan in order to maintain food security and, in turn, support the Cambodia's food security systems by supplying fertilizer and training to farming individuals.⁸

In addition to Indonesia's plan, Cambodian and Singaporean prime ministers discussed ways to strengthen existing partnerships while establishing opportunities for further cooperation. As a result, the Singaporean team will soon work with Cambodian authorities from the commerce and agriculture ministries. The discussions aimed at determining the viability of exporting Cambodian agricultural products to Singapore.⁹

⁵ Nhean, Chamrong. "PM Seeks ASEAN Cooperation to Construct Sea Cable." Khmer Times. Last modified September 6, 2023. <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501356208/pm-seeks-asean-cooperation-to-construct-sea-cable/>.

⁶ Geducos, Argyll C. "PH Boosts Food, People-to-people Ties with Cambodia." Manila Bulletin. Last modified September 7, 2023. <https://mb.com.ph/2023/9/7/ph-boosts-food-people-to-people-ties-with-cambodia>.

⁷ Nhean, Chamrong. "Cambodia, Philippines Agree to Expand Cooperation, Promote Mutual Tourism." Khmer Times. Last modified June 20, 2023. <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501311462/cambodia-philippines-agree-to-expand-cooperation-promote-mutual-tourism/>.

⁸ May, Kunmakara. "Indonesia Planning Increased Rice Order." Phnom Penh Post. Last modified September 5, 2023. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/indonesia-planning-increased-rice-order#>.

⁹ Van, Socheata, "Singapore Eyes Importing Agri-Goods; Talks to Begin Next Week," Phnom Penh Post, September 11, 2023, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/singapore-eyes-importing-agri-goods-talks-begin-next-week>.

On the last day of the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta, Cambodia's Prime Minister and the Philippines' President signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Cambodia-Philippines Partnership in Agriculture and MSME Development.¹⁰

Conclusion

The outcomes at the ASEAN Summit 2023 marked another significant achievement for Cambodia in terms of diplomatic relations, recognition, trade, and economic ties with the participating countries, including ASEAN member states and ASEAN's partners. As a result, Cambodia has renewed and signed Memorandums of Understanding with key member states, as well as deepened relations with other countries. By doing so, Cambodia will have more opportunities to excel on the international stage. The bilateral meetings between Cambodian delegates and various counterparts are part of the national development strategy of the new Royal Government of Cambodia (the Pentagonal Strategy) in fueling economic growth, making use of foreign relations to expand trade, and realizing the full potential of sectors Cambodia is well-endowed with such as hydropower, tourism, and agriculture.

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The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of their affiliations and CSEAS.

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¹⁰ "Cambodia and the Philippines Sign an MoU on Partnership in Agriculture and MSME Development." Khmer Times. Last modified September 6, 2023. <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501355867/cambodia-and-the-philippines-sign-an-mou-on-partnership-in-agriculture-and-msme-development/>.

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.