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Commentary

ASEAN's Energy Security: Need for Regional Cooperation

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Summary

The 44th ASEAN Ministers on Energy Meeting in Manila underscores a shift in Southeast Asia's approach to energy security.

The 44th ASEAN Ministers on Energy Meeting (AMEM) was held in Manila on 7 October 2026 under the chairmanship of the Philippines.[1] The meeting comes at a critical point for Southeast Asia's energy security amid the prolonged war in the Middle East and the disruptions to the global energy supply chains. Uncertainties around maritime transit routes have further exposed the vulnerabilities of a region whose economic growth depends on reliable energy.

The AMEM emphasised resilience, regional connectivity, the energy transition, and the need for increased investments, reflecting ASEAN's recognition that energy security is not just a domestic concern but is also linked to geopolitical stability, maritime security and strategic autonomy. One of ASEAN's prevailing challenges is managing the immediate consequences of global energy disruptions while developing a diversified, resilient energy system for the future. To do so, cooperation with partners like India and Japan may play a significant role.

ASEAN's Energy Vulnerabilities

Southeast Asia's exposure to the Middle East conflict stems from its dependence on imported oil and its vulnerability to disruptions in international shipping routes. In 2025, around 56 per cent of ASEAN's crude oil imports originated in the Middle East, which highlights the region's vulnerability to geopolitical instability and disruptions along critical maritime routes, especially the Strait of Hormuz.[2] Disruptions caused by the conflict have heightened concerns about oil supply continuity, rising prices, and the availability of refined petroleum products.

These disruptions have economic and social consequences, including higher prices, increased transportation and electricity costs, and added pressure on households. These effects can intensify inflation in developing economies and undermine industrial competitiveness. Countries like the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia, which import energy, are vulnerable to price shocks, though the scale and exposure vary across ASEAN. The following table shows ASEAN dependence on crude oil from the Middle East from 2021 to 2025.

Table 1. ASEAN Crude Oil Imports from the Middle East, 2021–2025

Year	Imports from the Middle East (thousand barrels/day)	Total ASEAN crude oil imports (thousand barrels/day)	Middle East share
2021	~1300	~2500	52 %

[1] **"44th ASEAN Ministers on Energy Meeting (AMEM) and AEBF-26 Open in Manila, Marking New Milestones in ASEAN Energy Cooperation"**, ASEAN Centre for Energy, 7 October 2026.

[2] Elbinsar Purba, **"The War Against Iran and the Fragility of Southeast Asia's Energy Responses"**, Asia Link, 16 April 2026.

2022	~1500	~2800	54 %
2023	~1600	~3150	51 %
2024	~1650	~3200	52 %
2025	~1800	~3250	56 %

Source: ASEAN Centre for Energy (ACE), ASEAN Centre for Energy on the Situation in the Middle East and the Impact on ASEAN Energy Security[3]

The crisis has also revealed a structural contradiction in Southeast Asia's energy landscape: domestic oil production has declined from its peaks, increasing the importance of external suppliers. For instance, Malaysia, despite being an oil-producing country, consumes around 700,000 barrels of oil daily while producing around 350,000 barrels, which makes it dependent on imports to bridge the gap.[4] During the Hormuz disruption, Malaysia's Pengerang refinery shut down a crude-processing unit amidst constrained supplies, showcasing how domestic refining infrastructure remains vulnerable when imported crude cannot arrive reliably.[5]

At the same time, the region's economic growth, industrialisation and urbanisation are expected to sustain demand for transport fuels and electricity. Vulnerabilities to geopolitical disruptions will remain even after the conflict subsides. The meeting in Manila offers ASEAN an opportunity to shift from crisis management to a more comprehensive framework for energy resilience. The objective is to reduce excessive dependence on particular suppliers and vulnerable transit routes.

After the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the Philippines, one of the most exposed economies in ASEAN, declared a national emergency. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed an order on 25 March 2026 about the imminent danger posed to the availability and stability of the country's energy supply.[6] This measure also gave the government expanded legal authority to stabilise the country's energy sector and trigger a coordinated response. The Philippines imports around 98 per cent of its oil from the Middle East.[7]

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[3] **"ASEAN Energy Security Insights: Implications of the Middle East Situation"**, ASEAN Centre for Energy, April 2026.

[4] **"Malaysia Consumes 700,000 Barrels of Oil Per Day, Double the Daily Production"**, Ministry of Finance, Malaysia, 18 April 2026.

[5] Trixie Sher Li Yap, **"Southeast Asian Refineries Curb Output as War-tightened Crude Supply Bites"**, *Reuters*, 10 March 2026.

[6] Luisa Cabota, **"Marcos Declares State of National Energy Emergency"**, *Inquirer.net*, 24 March 2026.

[7] John Lester Naguna, **"How the Strait of Hormuz Closure Affects Our Oil Prices"**, Philippine Information Agency, 5 March 2026.

Strengthening ASEAN's Energy Security

One significant outcome of the ASEAN Energy Meeting is the renewed emphasis on translating commitments into practical mechanisms. ASEAN has established an institutional foundation through the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC) 2026–2030, the ASEAN Power Grid (APG) and the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Petroleum Security (APSA). APAEC is ASEAN's five-year blueprint which guides regional energy policy and integration. It also focuses on strengthening cross-border energy connectivity and enhancing resilience.

The APG is an infrastructure initiative designed to connect the national electricity networks of ASEAN member states, enabling cross-border power trading and supporting high-voltage grid integration. APSA is a regional emergency mechanism that coordinates petroleum and strategic fuel during shortages and minimises member states' exposure to oil and energy supply disruptions through cooperative measures. The challenge remains ensuring these initiatives deliver tangible benefits during crises rather than remaining policy aspirations.

ASEAN could enhance emergency preparedness through greater information-sharing, more effective petroleum security arrangements, and closer coordination in monitoring implementation. APSA has a framework for voluntary cooperation and mutual assistance during oil supply disruptions. APSA, originally signed in 1986, was updated and revised in late 2025 and now expands cooperation to include natural gas and LNG. However, its effectiveness depends on implementation and clearly established procedures for delivering assistance. ASEAN members could also further develop common emergency response protocols and conduct supply-disruption simulations to improve preparedness.

ASEAN member states should prioritise expanding strategic petroleum reserves by exploring shared storage facilities, coordinated procurement, and arrangements to exchange refined petroleum products during emergencies. ASEAN Power Grid also offers a vital opportunity to address energy insecurity through regional interdependence. Greater cross-border electricity flows would enable countries with surplus electricity to support those facing shortages. These initiatives must also focus on energy transition.

ASEAN's 2030 targets under APAEC include a 30 per cent renewable energy share in total primary energy supply and a 45 per cent renewable share in installed power capacity.[8] Furthermore, expanding renewable energy, electric mobility and energy efficiency would subsequently reduce exposure to international oil and gas price volatility.

[8] Alena Mae S. Flores, **"ASEAN Sets 45% RE Target for 2030"**, *Manila Standard*, 12 October 2026.

Building Regional Resilience

India is a vital partner in diversifying energy cooperation beyond fuel supplies. India's growing renewable energy capacity, expertise in electricity transmission and technological capabilities create opportunities for collaboration beyond trade in energy commodities. A priority area of cooperation is electricity connectivity. At the 20th East Asia Summit Energy Ministers' Meeting, which was held in Manila on 8 October 2026, India highlighted regional power transmission and the ASEAN Power Grid.[9] It also highlighted support for training 400 professionals in grid connectivity and proposed a 2,000 MW electricity interconnection between India and Singapore.[10]

Other cooperation initiatives, such as the ASEAN–India Plan of Action 2026–2030, the ASEAN Power Grid, multilateral power trade, energy security, and clean energy, were also emphasised during the 20th East Asia Summit Energy Ministers' Meeting. India could also contribute through technical training, renewable energy forecasting and battery storage. Partnerships with Indian institutions like POWERGRID, NTPC, and the National Institute of Solar Energy could help ASEAN member states integrate renewable electricity into their grids.

Moreover, cooperation on emergency preparedness and strategic reserves could complement ASEAN's efforts to manage immediate disruptions. India and ASEAN could establish regular exchanges between energy agencies and explore commercial arrangements for crude oil and refined products.

Apart from India, Japan is also well positioned to support ASEAN's energy resilience through advanced technologies and established industrial partnerships. Japan's longstanding economic presence in Southeast Asia provides a foundation for cooperation on energy infrastructure and low-carbon development. One recent initiative is Japan's Partnership on Wide Energy and Resources Resilience Asia (POWERR Asia), announced in April 2026 by Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi.[11]

This framework envisages around US$ 10 billion in financial cooperation for emergency energy procurement, supply-chain continuity, diversification of energy resources, and energy-saving initiatives.[12] Japan has identified cooperation with ASEAN on national and regional petroleum stockpiling as a priority. These initiatives also create an opportunity to connect immediate crisis management with

[9] **"India Highlights Regional Energy Cooperation and Energy Security at 20th EAS Energy Ministers' Meeting"**, Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Power, Government of India, 8 October 2026.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Luke C. Hahn, **"Japan's Energy Diplomacy in Southeast Asia Needs to Go Greener"**, East Asia Forum, 13 August 2026.

[12] Ibid.

long-term investments in regional resilience. Japan and ASEAN could perhaps use this framework to improve access to financing for energy procurement. Japan's technology and investment could further accelerate the deployment of battery storage, smart grids and energy-efficient industrial systems.

Conclusion

The 44th ASEAN Ministers on Energy Meeting in Manila underscores a shift in Southeast Asia's approach to energy security. The Middle East conflict has shown that dependence on imported fuels and vulnerable maritime routes can become a source of strategic and economic insecurity. ASEAN's response must therefore include immediate preparedness along with structural reforms. Operationalising APSA, diversifying suppliers and accelerating the ASEAN Power Grid are essential initiatives.

India can contribute expertise in technical capacity-building and electricity connectivity, while Japan can support regional resilience through advanced energy technologies. ASEAN's energy security will depend on building a system that can absorb disruptions without compromising economic growth or energy affordability. A partnership with India and Japan, anchored in ASEAN centrality and practical implementation, can help transform crisis into an opportunity to build a diversified and resilient Indo-Pacific security architecture.

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