

*Background Guide*

**Association of South East Asian Nations**  
**Mekong River Crisis**

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**JACKRABBIT MUN VIII**

**L.B. POLY - MAY 23th, 2026**

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# CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS

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Hello Delegates!

My name is Sela and I am very excited to be one of the co-head chairs for this committee, serving alongside our wonderful dais! I am currently a junior and have been in the Model UN club for the past couple of years. MUN has truly helped me step out of my comfort zone and gain a deeper appreciation for the world around us. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunities I've had to build friendships and learn more about diverse perspectives, as well.

Outside of MUN, I am a part of Poly's choral music program and serve on the Advisory Board of our UNICEF club. In my free time, I also love reading, crafting, traveling, playing piano, and watching k-dramas (let me know if you have any good recommendations!)

The crisis facing the Mekong River today is such a significant issue because of its social, environmental, and economic impacts—not only within its surrounding nations, but globally. As we share insights and delve deeper into the topic together, my hope is that this will be a meaningful and enriching experience, and that it will inspire you to learn even more.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or any of our other dais members—we would love to hear from you! Best of luck and I look forward to meeting you all in May!

Sincerely,

Sela Hacegaba

Association of Southeast Asian Nations | Co-Head Chair

[selahace@gmail.com](mailto:selahace@gmail.com)

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# CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS

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Welcome esteemed delegates!

My name is Mia Winkler and I'm ecstatic to be one of your co-chairs for Poly's Jackrabbit MUN VIII! Currently at Poly I am a junior and have been involved in Model UN since my freshman year. Throughout these past few years that I've been involved with Model UN I have shared so many memories with delegates from both my own school and from all over California. I've gained vast experiences that have helped me gain a greater understanding of diverse perspectives along with the significance of diplomacy.

Outside of Model UN I am in our schools Vocal Jazz one group as well as our Chamber choir, I also perform annually in our schools Musical production, and am on the swim team. When I am at home I love to draw, sing and play guitar, watch tv, read, and do fun crafts.

With the current challenges being faced along the Mekong River, future actions will have significant influences towards the livelihoods of individuals who live along the river, the development of such areas, and the survival of the ecosystems within. I cannot wait to observe both, what direction our committee will move forward in, along with the creative solutions that each delegate will pursue.

If any delegates have any questions or problems that they wish to discuss feel free to reach out and contact me. Our dais members and I will do our very best to ensure that you enjoy our committee to its fullest. With that said thank you for joining our committee and I can't wait to meet you all in May!

Sincerely,

Mia Winkler

Association of Southeast Asian Nations | Co-Head Chair

[mwinkler0113@gmail.com](mailto:mwinkler0113@gmail.com)



# POSITION PAPER GUIDELINES

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- Position Papers are due at 11:59 PM on **Sunday, May 17th**.
- Delegates **must** submit position papers to be eligible for **research AND committee awards**.
- Position Papers can be submitted through a Google form:
  - <https://forms.gle/H3ruhahP2SQUEPs38>
- At the top of each paper, include your character/country name, first and last name, school name, and appropriate committee.
  - United States
  - First Last
  - School Name
  - ASEAN
- Papers should be emailed as a PDF file
  - Paper content should also be copied and pasted into the body of the email so it can still be graded in the event of any technical difficulties
  - Please name the file and subject line of the email [Committee\_Country]
    - Ex. **ASEAN\_United States**
- Papers should be 1-2 pages in length with an additional Works Cited page in MLA format
- Papers should be single-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font and include no pictures or graphics
- Please include the following sections for each committee topic:
  - Background & ASEAN Involvement
  - Position of your Character
  - Possible Solutions

If you have any questions or concerns, please email one of your chairs.



# TOPIC SYNOPSIS

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With raging waters that unite and support much of Southeast Asia, the majestic Mekong River extends over 4,800 km, making it the largest in the area. With thousands of diverse plants and fish species, the Mekong River is often referred to as the “Mother of Water,” serving as a prosperous environmental hub and a staple for commerce. People in the region depend on its fish stocks and rice farms for their livelihoods, making it a vital part of local economies. However, as developing technologies have advanced to renewable sources of energy, attention has been drawn to the prospects of the river. In the 1990s, the Chinese government established hydropower dams and sand-mining developments, aiming to provide energy, irrigate crops, and prevent flooding. This also presented a major concern for the well-being of the river, as natural resources have been depleted and sediments have accumulated over time, disturbing the delicate balance of the ecosystems.

Overreliance on the river for transportation has also had a negative impact on international commerce and led to the displacement of its many inhabitants. Today, countries along the lower areas of the basin of the Mekong River suffer significantly from its environmental degradation. Fortunately, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) have been working to combat this issue by advocating for sustainable development efforts, based on extensive research and understanding of the construction of hydropowered energy sources and specific knowledge correlating to the river.

In this committee, delegates will examine the environmental, economic, and social impacts that these modern projects have had, as they discuss ways to mitigate the loss of biodiversity, essential water resources, fish stocks and rice farms,

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displacement of communities, and the desired direction this project will go in—and whether local communities, international leadership, or some other body has the right to take initiative for the future of this ongoing project.



# COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

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ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, was established on August 8, 1967. In the midst of the Vietnam War, it was developed as a means to support governmental and economic diplomacy among the nations of Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos,

Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Following the Cold War, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was formed in 1994; as a multilateral dialogue, it was focused on maintaining diplomatic ties among ASEAN and participating nations, mainly relating to political and military affairs.

Guided by the core ASEAN Declaration of 1967 and the slogan “One Vision, One Identity, One Community,” ASEAN is upheld by three foundational pillars: Political-Security Community, Economic Community, and Socio-Cultural Community.

In addition to forming trade relations and alliances with many countries across East Asia, South Asia, Western Europe, and Oceania, ASEAN also seeks to defend human rights, while working towards environmental conservation, promoting progress in agriculture and industry, and maintaining unity and harmony among its culturally diverse nations. Originated in 1976 and still continuing today, participating countries host ASEAN Summit Meetings twice a year to discuss current issues and preserve peace.



# BACKGROUND

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## HISTORY

During the fifteenth to nineteenth century, the Mekong River served as a crucial waterway to many countries throughout that region. For the Khmer Empire in particular, the river supported trade, agriculture, and transportation. In the first century CE, ancestors of the Khmer people, the Funanese, established the Kingdom of Funan and settled on the river's banks. The Funanese used the strategic positioning



between India and East Asia to form maritime trade connections, relying on the Mekong Delta's convenient and natural canal system to establish mercantile monopolies that would later be emulated by the Khmer people.

However, the Kingdom of Funan was not the only kingdom to control the Mekong River, as it was succeeded by the Empire of Chenla, which maintained a presence in the Mekong Delta for centuries. There could have also been other kingdoms who depended on the Mekong River as well—archaeological discoveries in Oc Eo (located in present-day Vietnam) and other Funan sites have revealed that these sites once bustled with trading ports and canals, present as early as the first century CE. Extensive human settlement in the region may have also been present as far back as the fourth century BCE.



Despite all the time that has passed, the Mekong River has remained a “sustainer of life” across Southeast Asia. More recently, however, its ability to support



its diverse ecosystems and the livelihoods of local communities has been under much threat. Beginning with the Manwan Dam, located in Southwest China and completed in 1995, the Chinese government established many additional developments along the river. Aiming

to irrigate crops, strengthen flood production, and spark energy production (especially renewable energy), hydropower dams were constructed. Sand-mining also began to emerge, with natural sands, mineral sands, and aggregates (crushed rock, sand, and gravel) being extracted and processed for use in industrial manufacturing. As the number of these projects has only increased over time, it has not only altered the condition of the river, but also transformed the communities and economies of its surrounding states as well.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

With an abundance of genetic diversity, the Mekong River carries sediments that are an essential source of nutrition for the influenced ecosystems. The river itself provides an ecosystem service for the surrounding locals as it maintains the irrigation of vital crops to tens



of millions of people, while simultaneously supporting the Tonlé Sap Lake, which is recognized as one of the most productive inland fisheries across the world.

Despite these many benefits, the river's natural ecosystems have been profoundly transformed by industrial activities. Already exacerbated by overfishing, the construction of dams and reservoirs have led to the dwindling of sediments within its waters. The lack of nutrient cycling has ultimately triggered an accelerating decline in fish biodiversity, hindering their movement and migration, as well as threatening the livelihoods of forests, mangroves, and local fishers. Sand-mining developments have also amplified the issue of pollution and lowered the water table, diminishing the



water supply that can be used for agriculture. River erosion, with the flow of water decaying the natural landscape, has reduced the amount of land that is available for the cultivation of crops.

In addition, global threats to the environment have also had an effect on the river. Namely, climate change has increased temperatures and altered the natural patterns of monsoon rains, lowering the oxygen levels in the waters and leading to sudden droughts—which then pose harm to the variety of species that call the river home.

Ultimately, the over-exploitation of natural resources and disturbances to the ecosystems of the Mekong River has had an impact on the niches—the habitats and interactions—of the species that live within it, as well as on the livelihoods of individuals who rely on the services the river provides.



## ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The fisheries and, more recently, the hydropower sectors of the Mekong River have played a key role in supporting the economies of the Southeast Asian states surrounding it, with the economic value of the Upper Mekong Basin estimated to be around \$4 billion (in USD) per year. However, it is important to address the emerging economic inequalities that are present: although the hydropower sector generates much wealth, most of it is distributed to the developers and financiers of the projects, leaving little for the local communities who are most impacted by the construction and operation of the dams. While such projects



allow for inexpensive electricity to be spread and expanded across the region, they have also led to a decline in fish populations, threatening the Mekong River's fisheries that sustain more than 40 million people. A report released by the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Council Study in 2017

revealed that the losses in the fishing and agricultural industries (amounting to about \$17 billion) have outweighed the revenue gained from hydropower generation. While this is not a major concern for Laos, this has especially affected the states of Vietnam and Cambodia, as they are located further downstream along the Lower Mekong Basin—and this disparity indicates the necessity for diplomatic cooperation among the



members of ASEAN. If such constructions continue, negative effects will persist, diminishing the livelihoods of locals in an effort to meet the energy demands of nations set towards a progressive future through renewable energy.

## SOCIETAL IMPACTS

Inspiring a myriad of cultural traditions and instilling a sense of pride for local



communities, the many names of the Mekong River reflect its vibrant heritage. Known as Mae Nam Khong (Mother of Water) in Thai and Tonle Than (Great Lake) in Khmer, these names symbolize the peoples' deep appreciation for the abundance of services the river provides, from its source of water to its

fisheries—over 60 million people depend on the fish caught from within the waters of the Mekong River, as this accounts for more than half of their animal protein.

Despite this, the Mekong River has been facing a deep decline in recent years. Neighboring communities are especially vulnerable to the persistent droughts, floods, and landslides that have caused devastation upon numerous homes, buildings, fisheries, and agricultural lands across Southeast Asia.



With 6.9 million people involved in farming and depending on irrigation in the Lower Mekong River Basin, the dwindling crop yields and diminished supply of water resources have affected not only farmers' livelihoods, but also the livelihoods of those





whom they support. In addition to food insecurity and poverty being exacerbated, about 73,900 households residing in Vietnam’s Mekong River Delta have been confronted with minimal access to water. Floods and landslides have also led to widespread displacement among local

inhabitants—in 2023, about 1.1 million displacements along the Lower Mekong River Basin were reported.

The construction of hydropower dams may also lead to the violation of human rights, one being the possibility of displacement for the ethnic communities who have resided along the Mekong River for centuries. By denying indigenous communities these lands, this also strips them of



their cultural traditions and suppresses them of their rights to deep connection and reverence for their ancestral homes. In 2014, in the Areng Valley of Cambodia, upon hearing of the proposed construction of the Stung Cheay Areng Dam, the Areng people (also known as the Chong, or Chorng, people) raised their voices and peacefully advocated for the protection of their lands and the threatened animal species that would be affected. Their protest efforts were ultimately met with success, as the plan was halted.

Since the Mekong River is such a core part of Southeast Asian identity across its many diverse communities, it is imperative that it be conserved with utmost care.



## CURRENT SITUATION

Currently, the droughts, landslides, and floods spurred by climate change and developments of dams, overfishing, and sand mining have significantly harmed the freshwater ecosystem. In just the past 25 years, the Mekong River has lost about \$55 billion in the ecosystem services it provides—from its water resources to its fish populations—as a result of anthropogenic (human-caused) activity.

Despite this, many political bodies have recognized the issue and initiated efforts to respond to it. Namely, the Mekong River Commission (MRC), an



intergovernmental organization

established in 1995 with the Mekong River Agreement, joined hands with Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam to prioritize a sustainable plan amidst the development of the River Basin, while also addressing any issues following the construction of

the dam. Moreover, in a letter addressed to the prime minister in 2024, the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRC) underscored key concerns regarding the construction of the dams within the country—ranging from the public safety of locals to the potential of territorial disputes—as well as suggesting future actions that can be taken to mitigate and resolve them.

When partnering with other agencies and developing solutions, delegates must consider the multifaceted impacts the Mekong River has on the global economy, worldwide community, and the environment.



# PAST ACTION

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## **COMMITTEE FOR COORDINATION OF INVESTIGATIONS (1957)**

In 1957, the Committee for Coordination of Investigations on the Lower Mekong River Basin was established with assistance from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. Guided by a dedicated team of scientists and engineers and financed by a number of grants, loans, and technical services from partnering countries, UN agencies, and business organizations, the committee originally focused on producing new infrastructure to best support the fishing industry, mitigate the effects of flooding, and spark the creation of electric power. With a reservoir placed between Thailand and Laos, extending over 200 miles, and a dam constructed across the Tonlé Sap Lake (northwest of Cambodia), these funded projects supplied water to local fisheries and reduced sediment accumulation. During this time, this was the largest developmental project being undertaken by the United Nations, but has since evolved into the Mekong River Commission (MRC).

## **MEKONG RIVER AGREEMENT (1995)**

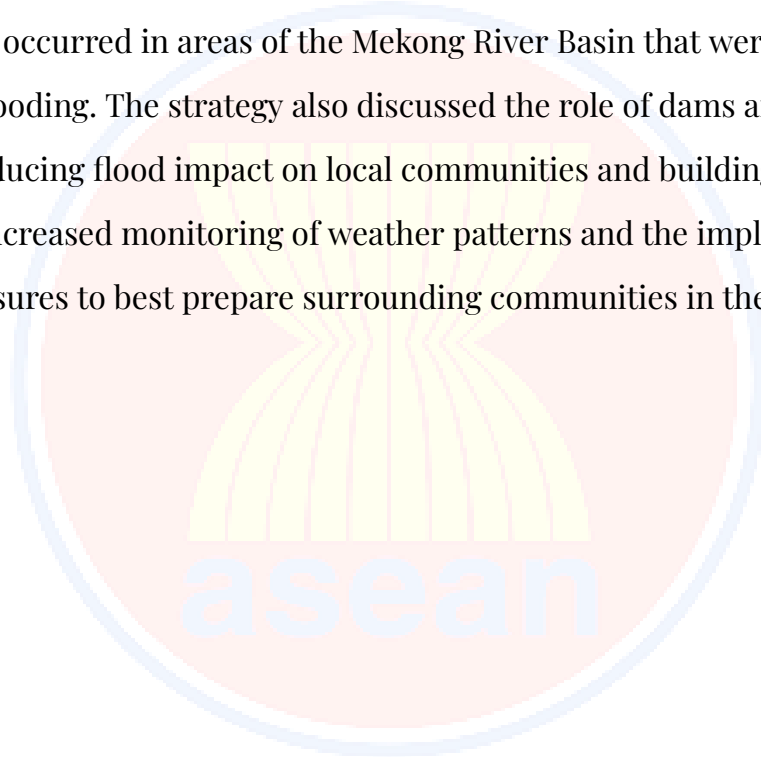
Signed by Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam (all in the Lower Mekong Basin) and leading to the inception of the Mekong River Commission (MRC), the Mekong River Agreement of 1995 was created with the goal to promote regional cooperation and sustainability within the Mekong River Basin, ensuring that its surrounding nations would use it in an environmentally conscious manner and would also receive equitable access to it. The agreement set regulations in place regarding any infrastructure (such as irrigation and hydropower dams) or recreational activities



that would impact the Mekong River. In addition, it signified the countries' commitment to preserving the aquatic life and natural resources of the river by managing pollution and monitoring water utilization and quality.

### **FLOOD MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION STRATEGY (2000)**

As a result of severe flooding in 2000, the MRC implemented the Flood Management and Mitigation (FMM) Strategy. One of its policies included the regulation of activities that occurred in areas of the Mekong River Basin that were especially susceptible to flooding. The strategy also discussed the role of dams and other structures in reducing flood impact on local communities and buildings. A third focus was placed on increased monitoring of weather patterns and the implementation of emergency measures to best prepare surrounding communities in the event of a flood.



# CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

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## **Dr. Kao Kim Hourn**

Diplomat Dr. Kao Kim Hourn is the current Secretary-General of ASEAN, as well as having served as a Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for Cambodia. Playing a central role in the Mekong River crisis, Hourn has expressed support for the ASEAN Community Vision of 2045 and the MRC Strategic Plan of 2026–2030, working closely with the CEO of the Mekong River Commission Secretariat, H.E. Busadee Santipitaks. While considering the future of the Mekong River in these proposals, Hourn emphasizes regional collaboration, the management of water resources, protection of the surrounding environment, and preparedness in the midst of natural disasters.

## **H. E. Bendito Dos Santos Freitas**

East Timorese politician Benedito Dos Santos Freitas is the current Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, having served his nation since July of 2023. While not directly affected by the Mekong River crisis, Freitas understands the importance of solidarity with the rest of Southeast Asia, especially in the face of larger nations. With the desire to retain sovereignty for all small nations, Freitas raises concerns about the politicized nature of the river's damming in addition to an ecological concern for the region's wellbeing.

## **H. E. Mohamad Hasan**

Previously the Minister of Defence, Mohamad Hasan currently serves as Malaysia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Member of Parliament for Rembau and

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member of the Negeri Semblian State Legislative Assembly for Rantau. Mohamad has shown consistent commitments to environmental efforts, for instance redirecting farming sectors to be downstream as to not contaminate water supplies. As for the Mekong River, Mohamad holds concerns over Chinese involvement with the region, and seeks to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict, reflecting the opinions of many Malaysians who are similarly concerned over armed conflict.

### **H. E. Le Hoai Trung**

Politician and diplomat Le Hoai Trung currently serves as Vietnam's 14th Minister of Foreign Affairs. Spanning throughout his years working in foreign diplomacy, he has served his country in many positions, including as a national representative to the United Nations and Head of the Central External Relations Commission. With the worsening condition of the Mekong River, Trung looks to a friendly collaboration with China as a solution, having met with President Xi Jinping in February 2026 to discuss the future of Chinese-Vietnamese relations.

### **H. E. Maria Theresa Parreño Lazaro**

Maria Theresa Parreño Lazaro is a Filipino diplomat and lawyer serving as the 29th Secretary of Foreign Affairs after a career across multiple posts in the government of the Philippines. Her straightforward approach to diplomacy has gained her approval even from opposing sides, proving especially useful in her negotiations with China concerning disputes in the South China Sea. While open to dialogue with China, she maintains that national sovereignty should be a top priority for ASEAN.

### **H. E. Prak Sokhonn**

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Cambodian politician, journalist, and diplomat Prak Sokhonn has had a long and storied career, working as a general in the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Armed forces to overthrow Pol Pot. From there, he began his career in foreign affairs serving as an ambassador in Europe, then later as his current position of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. In 2025, met with Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, discussing developments within Thailand and Cambodia, and affirming ASEAN's commitment to Southeast Asian solidarity.

#### **H. E. Sihasak Phuangketkeow**

Having worked in international affairs since 1979, Sihasak Phuangketkeow is Thailand's incumbent Minister of Foreign Affairs, previously working at other various offices in the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs and before that as Thailand's ambassador to the United Nations office in Geneva. Having chaired the 27th Ministerial Conference of the Greater Mekong Subregion, Phuangketkeow has re-avowed his position in support of the Lacang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism, recognizing the importance of international cooperation.

#### **H. E. Srinivas Gotru**

Indian Foreign Service Officer Srinivas Gotru is the Ambassador of India to ASEAN, recently appointed to his position. Meeting with the President of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) in September 2025, he underscored the importance of strategic collaboration between India and ASEAN with particular interest towards supply chain resilience and public infrastructure. Thus, Gotru approaches the situation cautiously, concerned with the potential negative environmental and economic impacts of the degradation of the river.



### **H. E. Sugiono**

Politician and diplomat Sugiono is the current Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs as well as the Secretary-General for Indonesia's Gerindra Party, previously serving as a member of the House of Representatives and secretary to the incumbent Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto. Although his appointment was controversial, he has since made moves to increase Indonesia's involvement with foreign politics, particularly through the nation's membership in BRICS, which China is additionally a member state of. Although not directly on the Mekong River, Sugiono has stated that food security is a top concern for Indonesia, and concerns have been raised over the impact of the dams on food availability and affordability.

### **H. E. Thongsavanh Phomvihane**

Laotian politician and diplomat Thongsavanh Phomvihane is the current Minister of Foreign Affairs of Laos, previously serving as the Laos People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee External Relations Committee Head. His work in international relations has spanned over 35 years, with much of his early work in the 1990s focusing on Laos-China relations. From there, he also served as Ambassador to Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Vietnam throughout various points in his career. Phomvihane favors a continuation of the collaborative approach taken with China through the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, and believes that maintaining positive relations between ASEAN and China is key for the future of the Mekong River.

### **H. E. U Kyaw Tin**



Myanmar's current Foreign Minister to ASEAN, Kyaw Tin, has worked in foreign service since the 1980s, working as a diplomat to UN missions in New York and Geneva, Myanmar's Foreign Ambassador to Canada, as well as serving in multiple roles in foreign affairs across Southeast Asia. Despite the military coup of Myanmar in 2021, Tin has retained his position as Foreign Minister to ASEAN and has since stressed the importance of protecting vulnerable groups from the effects of environmental degradation, with the Mekong River serving as a major resource to Southeast Asia.

#### **H. E. Vivian Balakrishnan**

Vivian Balakrishnan is a Singaporean politician, diplomat, and former ophthalmologist who currently serves as the nation's Minister for Foreign Affairs, a position which he has held for over a decade. Previously he served as ministers in various other parts of Singapore's government including in trade and industry, information, communications, and the arts, and environment and water resources. Balakrishnan has remained firmly committed to following international law in regards to the Mekong River damming issue, strictly focusing on the facts of the case.

#### **H. E. Wang Qing**

Chinese diplomat Wang Qing is the nation's Ambassador to ASEAN, and has maintained that China's relationship with ASEAN is an essential and important part of the foreign affairs of all nations involved. As reaffirmed with his meeting with ASEAN in January 2026, Qing intends to continue closely working with Southeast Asia, noting the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation as a great feat of international diplomacy. With regards to the dams along the Mekong River, Qing maintains that the hydropower



produced by the dams are essential to sustainable development in the region, and that alternative solutions to removing the dams should be explored.

### **H. E. Yonetani Koji**

Serving in foreign affairs for over 20 years, Yonetani Koji is the current Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN, previously having served as the Japanese Ambassador to Indonesia. Yonetani is part of an over 50-year-long partnership between Japan and ASEAN, with the former being a major trading partner with Southeast Asia. Although Japan is a massive supporter of ASEAN's clean energy initiatives, donating large monetary sums to support new infrastructure, there are concerns about the maritime issues that disruption of the river could cause.

### **The Hon. Erywan Pehin Yusof**

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Erywan Yusof is the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brunei, having been involved with ASEAN for over 30 years, starting in 1994 when he became involved in ASEAN Agriculture and Forestry meetings. From 2005-2007, he served as the Chairman for the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement until its completion, and in 2021, he served as ASEAN's first special envoy to Myanmar during the coup d'état crisis. Regarding the Mekong River dams, Yusof acknowledges the region as critical for trade, both locally and internationally, and the need for careful regulations to ensure that all stakeholders remain content.

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# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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1. How can the natural ecosystems of the Mekong River be preserved, while it is also being used to help fuel trade?
2. What measures can be taken to protect homes, buildings, and farmlands along the Mekong River basin, in the event of heavy monsoon rains or natural disaster?
3. How can countries in ASEAN partner and collaborate with countries in other blocs to mitigate the Mekong River crisis?
4. What role do technology and innovations play in forecasting weather events and regulating flood levels in the Mekong River?
5. How can countries that cross through the Mekong River—from China to Vietnam—utilize and manage it in an equitable manner?
6. In what ways can local communities support their livelihoods while also adapting to the changing conditions of the Mekong River?



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