

US offers to host Apec forum in 2023 to engage region

Announcement signals US recognition of group's role in bringing economies together

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The United States has offered to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum in 2023, recognising the group's role in bringing together dynamic economies on both sides of the Pacific.

Announcing this in a speech at Gardens by the Bay yesterday, US Vice-President Kamala Harris said: "Through Apec, the US has long worked with our partners in

Asia and Latin America to build an interconnected region that advances our collective economic prosperity."

This vision is critical to the US' optimistic outlook for its partnership with the region, she said.

The offer to host the 21-member grouping – which includes Australia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, Singapore and Vietnam and whose chairmanship is rotated annually – signals the importance the US places on the region and on multilateral cooperation, Ms Harris' senior adviser Symone Sanders said.

New Zealand is Apec chair this

year, and Thailand, next year.

The US has chaired Apec twice before – in 1993, then President Bill Clinton hosted the first Apec leaders' summit in Seattle; and in 2011, then President Barack Obama hosted Apec leaders in Honolulu.

In her speech, Ms Harris said the US economy is growing faster than it has in nearly 40 years.

"We believe that our growth should not stop at the water's edge, but it can and will also benefit our partners. Our economy shares so much with South-east Asia, from supply chains to a steady flow of two-way trade," she said, noting that South-east Asia represents the US' fourth-largest export market, and trade with the region supports more than 600,000 US jobs.

She also said the world is now

more interconnected, and nations must be more willing to take on challenges and create opportunities together.

The United States' partnerships will be grounded in openness and inclusiveness, and it will pursue a free and open Indo-Pacific that promotes its interests and those of its partners and allies, she said.

"In addition to deepening close bilateral relations, we will also work multilaterally through long-standing institutions like Asean, which remains central to this region's architecture. We will also work with new results-oriented groups like the Quad and the US-Mekong Partnership," she said.

"I believe that when the history of the 21st century is written, much of it will be centred right here in

the Indo-Pacific. There should be no doubt: We have enduring interests in this region, and we have enduring commitments as well."

The Quad, or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, involves the US, Japan, Australia and India; while the Mekong-US Partnership includes Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

In her speech, Ms Harris reiterated the US' security commitment to the region and its vision of freedom of navigation, which is vital to the livelihoods of millions who depend on trade that flows through sea lanes each day.

Yet China, she said, continues to "coerce" and "intimidate", and make claims to the vast majority of the South China Sea.

"These unlawful claims have been rejected by the 2016 arbitral tribunal decision, and Beijing's actions continue to undermine the rules-based order and threaten the sovereignty of nations. The US stands with our allies and partners in the face of these threats."

She also stressed that the United States' engagement of the region is not directed against any one country, nor is it designed to make anyone choose between countries. The

US vision is one of peace and stability and commitment to the international rules-based order, and it recognises that countries' common interests are not zero-sum, she said.

Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, executive director of the Apec Secretariat, said the US offer to host Apec in 2023 reflects a strong vote of confidence in multilateralism and the Apec process, and members will now seek consensus to endorse the offer. "We hope to hear more about this in November when ministers and leaders meet," she said.

"For more than 30 years, we have all shared the belief that our economic successes and growth do not... stop at the water's edge. Our engagements should only strengthen, our trust in each other only deepen, if the Asia-Pacific is to build back better, grow in resilience, and become a region of collective economic prosperity and opportunity for everyone."

Ms Harris also discussed supply-chain resilience with business leaders before leaving for Vietnam last night for the next leg of her trip.

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US ‘laser focused’ on evacuating citizens, those who have helped

Hariz Baharudin

The United States is “laser focused” on evacuating its citizens, as well as international partners and those who have helped it, from

Afghanistan, US Vice-President Kamala Harris said yesterday.

US President Joe Biden had made the “courageous and right decision” to end the war in Afghanistan because the US had achieved what it went there to do, she added.

Ms Harris, who is in Singapore

on an official visit, addressed the issue of Afghanistan at the start of her speech on US policy and partnerships in the region.

“We were at war in Afghanistan for 20 long years. Many members of our military gave their lives in Afghanistan, as did many from our

allies and partners,” she said.

“The United States has been focused on safely evacuating American citizens, international partners, Afghans who worked side by side with us, and other Afghans at risk.”

She also thanked American soldiers and international partners involved in the ongoing evacuation operation, which comes as the Taliban regained control of much of the country.

“We are extremely grateful to our men and women in uniform and embassy staff who are on the ground, as we speak, making this

historic airlift happen in an incredibly difficult and dangerous environment,” she said.

Ms Harris’ speech at Gardens by the Bay was hosted by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and the US Embassy in Singapore.

The Vice-President also expressed America’s gratitude to its international partners – including Singapore – for their help with the evacuation.

On Monday, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that Singapore would be offering the Republic of Singapore Air Force’s

A330 Multi-Role Tanker Transport to help with airlifting efforts.

Thousands of people have been trying to get into Kabul’s international airport in the hope of getting on an evacuation flight, after the Afghan capital fell to the Taliban on Aug 15. These include Afghans who had helped the US and its allies by working as translators.

Since then, the Taliban has sought to get the situation under control by firing guns into the air and using batons to force people to form queues outside the airport.

After her speech, senior mem-

bers of Ms Harris’ delegation took part in a discussion moderated by Ambassador-at-Large Chan Heng Chee, who asked them if the US would have a harder time persuading other nations to work together with it given the “unfortunate” images coming out from Afghanistan.

Responding, Mr Kin Moy, senior official for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the State Department, pointed out that the US is an Indo-Pacific nation and is already investing in the region more than any other coun-

try in the world.

“If you look at the foreign domestic investment, if you look at how many jobs we help create in the region, I think that the track record is actually very, very good,” he said, noting that it shows the US is committed to the region.

America’s presence in Southeast Asia has created an opportunity for all countries here to thrive, Mr Moy said, adding that it is looking to create even more opportunities in the region.

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