

25 JUL 1997

Asean-Communique

ASEAN TO FIGHT INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY AGAINST ITS CURRENCIES

KUALA LUMPUR, July 25 (Bernama) -- Asean today made an unprecedented call for intensified cooperation to fight against an "international currency manipulation" to destabilise Asean currencies.

Wrapping up their annual meeting here today, Asean foreign ministers expressed serious concern at what they described as "well-coordinated efforts to destabilise Asean currencies for self-serving purposes thus threatening the stability of all Asean economies."

In a 14-page joint communique issued at the end of the two-day 30th Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM), they called for further intensification of Asean cooperation to safeguard and promote Asean's interests in this regard.

This is the first statement by Asean in the wake of the severe speculative attack on the currencies of Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia since July 2 causing them to decline in value against the US dollar.

The currency issue was a last-minute addition to the communique after an effort by Thailand. It was discussed between Malaysia's Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Asean foreign ministers who called on him before he opened the AMM yesterday and spoke strongly on the subject.

In the communique, the ministers also stated that they would reconfirm with Cambodia on Phnom Penh's position over Asean's role to help find a peaceful solution in Cambodia to fulfil the vision of an Asean 10.

The ministers agreed that upon reconfirmation, the Asean ministerial delegation led by Indonesia's Foreign Minister Ali Alatas would continue its effort in Cambodia.

This followed conflicting statements from Cambodia's Second Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Foreign Minister Ung Huot on Asean's mandate in the peace effort.

The ministers expressed the hope that the situation in the troubled state would return to normalcy and that a solution could be found in the spirit of the 1991 Paris Peace Accord.

The ministers, who had turned down a plea by Cambodia to be admitted into the regional grouping two days ago, took pains to stress Asean's commitment to non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

The ministers noted that Asean had "offered its good offices to Cambodia in light of the recent unfortunate developments and in view of Cambodia's interest in joining Asean."

Welcoming Laos and Myanmar as full members of Asean, the ministers called on the grouping's dialogue partners that included the United States, Japan and the European Union to accord equal status to all Asean member countries their collaboration and cooperation.

The rest of Asean would continue their commitment to help Laos and Myanmar to integrate into the mainstream of Asean that is among the economic-booming regions of the world.

In the communique covering a wide-range of political and economic issues, the ministers also hoped that the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) mooted by Malaysia in 1990 would soon be formally instituted in view of the increasing cooperation among potential members.

Concern was raised over the emerging trend of state, provincial and other local authorities in countries outside Asean seeking to impose trade sanctions against other states on grounds of alleged human rights

violations and non-trade related issues.

The ministers said that the international trading system would be undermined if the trend persisted and called on all national governments to adhere to World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules.

They supported Vietnam's admission into the WTO and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (Apec) and indicated their willingness to help prepare Vietnam for the membership. Vietnam joined Asean in 1995.

Asean now groups Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar.

Other highlights of the communique:

ASEAN

*The Asean Citation, the highest form of recognition in Asean, be conferred on the five signatories of the 1967 Asean (Bangkok) Declaration. It would consist of a gold medallion and a citation signed by all the Asean heads of government.

POLITICAL AND SECURITY ISSUES

*Call upon nuclear powers to accede to the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANFWZ) Treaty to demonstrate their support for nuclear-weapon-free zones;

*Expedite the drafting of amendments to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) to facilitate association with the TAC by non-Southeast Asian states;

*Asean Regional Forum (ARF) would move from confidence building to preventive diplomacy stage; Asean to remain primary driving force of the ARF process.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

*Call upon the international community to alleviate the severe food crisis in North Korea;

*Demand that Israel take steps for immediate and full cessation of the construction of a new settlement at Jabel Abu Ghaeim, to the South of occupied East Jerusalem, and of all other Israel settlement activities, as well as of all illegal measures and actions in Jerusalem;

*Call for full implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement on Bosnia Herzegovina and to bring indicted war criminals to justice, and that the international community to continue assisting in the reconstruction of the Balkan state;

*Underline that new permanent members should enjoy the same rights as current permanent members and agreed that the use of the veto should be curtailed with a view to its eventual elimination; Periodic review of the Security Council;

*Call on effective implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and ratification by leading states of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as soon as possible.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

*Reiterate commitment to open regionalism and a rules-based multilateral system;

*Need to promote greater inter-regional trade, investment and technology flows and to bring together the private sectors of Asean and regional groupings i.e. the North American Free Trade Area, the Southern American Common Market (Mercosur) comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, the European Free Trade Association and the Southern African Development Community;

*Commended new initiatives to achieve competitiveness in food production including the General Guidelines for the Preparation and Handling of Halal Food and to further enhance intra-Asean food trade;

*Convene an Asean Roundtable on multimedia;

*Support an early elaboration of an Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework that outlines the principles and mechanisms for cooperation in agreed areas.

FUNCTIONAL COOPERATION

*An Asean Foundation to be established to promote Asean awareness and to address unequal development, poverty and socio-economic disparity;

*An Asean Award be established and conferred on individuals and organisations in recognition of outstanding contribution; Award to be conferred every three years during Asean summit meetings beginning with the sixth Asean Summit in Vietnam in December 1998;

*Support the establishment of the Asean Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation in the Philippines as a flagship project on the occasion of Asean's 30th anniversary;

*Urge for creative approaches in science and technology cooperation, promote greater private and public sector collaboration and to continue active cooperation with Asean dialogue partners;

*Encourage studies to develop the Asean satellite channel. -- BERNAMA

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