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Ramos: Chance for Asean to reshape itself

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THE currency problems affecting Southeast Asian nations provide opportunities for corporate restructuring and phasing out of distortions brought about by unrestricted growth, Philippine President Fidel Ramos said yesterday.

He said the situation was inevitable as the increase in economic integration vis-a-vis technological developments in telecommunications and information technology had resulted in "our societies (becoming) increasingly porous and the global economy borderless".

In urging Asean to maintain a positive outlook, he said member countries should reshape their infrastructure by making information transparent and by aligning disclosure mechanisms with present standards of global capitalism.

"The financial problem in the region was triggered by the impact of rapid integration of global financial markets, and its adverse effects on our economies attest to the interdependence of all economies.

"This is not the first major challenge for the region. We overcame the oil shock in the 1970s to become the fastest growing region in the world," he said, adding that East Asia's competitive edge lay in its high savings rate.

Ramos was speaking at the closing session of the Private Sector Salute to Asean conference. The four-day forum, opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Saturday, was jointly organised by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute and the Bangkok-based Brooker Group Ltd.

The event was held to commemorate Asean's 30th anniversary and in conjunction with the Informal Asean Leaders' Summit which ended on Monday.

Ramos also called on the grouping to conduct an indepth study with the assistance of its dialogue partners, private analysts, academic institutions, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations, to find out the causes and effects of the current economic problems.

"Such a study, and the knowledge and policy-guidance that will emerge from it, are extremely necessary to measure the precise nature and degree of the impact of such manifestations of globalisation on our economies, peoples' livelihood, region's security and peace of the world."

On the Asean Vision 2020 which was approved by member countries yesterday, Ramos expressed optimism that it would chart the way for a prosperous economic community.

"The vision embraces the pressures, risks and opportunities of globalisation.

"Our vision anticipates the increased openness and tolerance of Asean societies with raised social expectations, awareness and active political participation of its citizens in issues that concern their lives.

"It believes in one Asean community with a shared identity and a common destiny," he added.

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