

01 NOV 2000

Brunei-Apec (Special Report)

BRUNEIANS COMMITTED TO MAKING APEC 2000 A NATIONAL SUCCESS

By: Jackson Sawatan

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Nov 1 (Bernama) -- A roadside food stall not far from a five-star hotel here proudly displays a banner welcoming delegates to the meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum which Brunei is hosting this month.

Definitely not part of the Apec 2000 facilities in Jerudong, the stall looks Apec-friendly nevertheless and can expect business to pick up when delegates, officials and journalists from half of the world arrive here for the meeting.

The stall, owned by a Brunei Malay, exemplifies the excitement among 324,000 citizens of this oil-rich Sultanate playing host to arguably the country's largest and most internationally-significant political meeting ever.

Elsewhere in and around this town, similar banners and even bigger semi-permanent billboards have come up while some shops are already selling Apec 2000 merchandises and mementos.

"This is an important event for us, there will be many people, important people coming to our country and we have to show that we are capable of hosting such a big event," a taxi driver said.

He himself is looking forward to the Apec meeting as -- like the roadside stall-owner -- it would mean having more customers.

"No doubt the organisers will be providing many cars, hundreds of them, to ferry the delegates but they will surely need taxi drivers like us to take them around when travelling in their personal capacity," he said.

A booklet on Apec 2000 says the event will "showcase Brunei to the world as never before" especially when 5,000 delegates and close to 2,000 journalists will be in town during week-long meeting beginning Nov 10.

Brunei is so far the smallest Apec economy to host the upcoming meeting but its smallness has inspired Bruneians even more to make Apec 2000 a success.

Apec, which seeks to promote growth and economic development in the Asia-Pacific region, was formed by 12 founding members namely Brunei, Malaysia, Australia, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and the United States.

Since 1989, the year Apec was created, other economies such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Chile, Russia, Peru and Vietnam have joined the economic forum.

Canberra hosted the inaugural Apec meeting in 1989 followed by Seattle (1993), Bogor (1994), Osaka (1995), Manila (1996), Vancouver (1997), Kuala Lumpur (1998) and Auckland (1999).

Apec founders, recognising the increasing inter-dependence of the region's economies, wanted to create a stronger regional voice on trade issues.

From the early years of defining Apec's vision of "stability, security and prosperity for our people", the forum had since moved on to tackle various issues and to meet the objective of free trade and investment between member countries by 2010 for developed nations and 2020 for developing ones.

At the Vancouver meeting, Apec identified 15 economic sectors, including toys, fish and fish product, gems and jewellery, medical equipment and instruments and civil aircraft, for EVSL or early voluntary sectoral liberalisation to accelerate free trade.

A year later in Kuala Lumpur, agreement was reached on EVSL for the first nine sectors namely toys, fish and fish product, environmental goods and services, forestry products, gems and jewellery, energy, chemical, telecommunications and medical equipment and instruments.

Topping the agenda in last year's meeting in Auckland were people's prosperity as well as the active participation of women and business in Apec's work.

If the speech by Sultan Hassanah Bolkihah at the Auckland meeting is any indication of what to expect at the forum's meeting here, then Apec 2000 will pay particular attention to three specific areas -- small and medium enterprises, human resource development and information and communication technology.

The Apec 2000 leaders' meeting on Nov 15-16 will be preceded by an informal senior officials meeting on Nov 10-11, followed by a ministerial meeting (Nov 12-13), the Apec Business Advisory Council (ABAC) meeting (Nov 13-15) and a business summit on Nov 13-14.

While here for the annual consultation with Sultan Hassanah Bolkihah, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told reporters here over the weekend that he expected the leaders' meeting to discuss globalisation issues.

"I think it will still be globalisation issues because many are worried whether globalisation will bring good or bad to developing countries. Developed countries consider globalisation as something good but it may not be so for us," Dr Mahathir had said.

The stage is already set for another interesting encounter between member countries at Apec 2000 Brunei Darussalam.

-- BERNAMA

JS RYN