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## Widening regional integration

THE campaign against terror in Southeast Asia has been further strengthened with the welcome addition of Thailand as a member of the Asean anti-terror pact. Even though it carries the innocuous title of an "Agreement on Information Exchange and Establishment of Communications Procedures", the pact will help detect, disrupt and cripple the terrorists' regional network.

Terrorists survive on uncertainty and fear. If we don't know where they are likely to strike next, this will ex-trapolate the psychological panic they create among the population. Furthermore, if they are able to plant bombs and instigate incidents, even thinly, over a wide geographical area, this will exaggerate the impact of their violent acts.

If the countries fighting terrorism in the region do not work more closely and share intelligence, this will play into the hands of the terrorists. With Thailand joining the pact, the noose will tighten around the perpetrators of terror who may try to slip across borders and national boundaries. Counter-terrorist measures must include isolating the terrorists in the region so that they can be more easily eliminated. Isolating them, of course, requires the type of co-operation the pact is designed to achieve.

Apart from the anti-terror pact, the biggest leap forward at the Eighth Asean Summit in Phnom Penh was the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Co-operation between Asean and China. The accord is not only the first step in the establishment of the largest free trade area in the world, combining Asean's 500 million with China's 1.7 billion people, but a substantial elevation in the level of trust between the two.

Asean's widening embrace had probably provoked Australia's attempt to gatecrash the summit. It was rightly rebuffed, since the grouping must focus on Asian integration. In the first place, Australia is not Asian, especially when it acts as America's regional deputy, although it has tried to identify itself as such for reasons of expediency and selfinterest. It may be impolite to say this, but Australia is not in the same league as Japan and Asean's other dialogue partners of China, India and South Korea. The Asean conference almost unanimously turned down the Australian move, with at least two of the biggest members emphatically opposing it. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said in Phnom Penh that unlike the Asean countries, Australia has become unsafe for Muslims.