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Asean-Charter

ASEAN SEALS HISTORIC BALI CONCORD II

By: Salbiah Said and Openg Onn

NUSA DUA (Bali), Oct 7 (Bernama) -- Asean leaders today inked a historic charter, which will provide the framework to achieve a dynamic, cohesive, resilient and integrated Asean Community.

The charter, called the "Bali Concord II" or otherwise known as the "Declaration of ASEAN Concord II", based on the three pillars of economic integration, security and socio-cultural development, which will provide the framework to achieve a dynamic, cohesive, resilient and integrated ASEAN Community.

The charter refers to the concepts of the ASEAN Security Community (ASC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. ASEAN groups Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar.

Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri, in her speech, described the event as a watershed in the ASEAN history.

The document, which is aimed at establishing an ASEAN Community, would make it possible for "our children and their children to live in a state of enduring peace, stability and shared prosperity," she said after the signing.

The charter states that ASEAN member countries shall share primary responsibility for strengthening the economic and social stability in the region and ensuring their peaceful and progressive national security from external interference in any form or manner, to preserve their national interests in accordance with the ideals and aspirations of their people.

It also reaffirms the fundamental importance of adhering to the principles of non-interference and consensus in ASEAN cooperation.

It also recognises sustainable economic development requires a secure political environment based on a strong foundation of mutual interests generated by economic cooperation and political solidarity.

It also reaffirms that ASEAN is a concept of South-East Asian nations, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies, committed to upholding cultural diversity and social harmony.

The charter also spells out the need to nurture common values, such as habit of consultation to discuss political issues and the willingness to share information on matters of common concern, such as environmental degradation, maritime security cooperation, enhancement of defence cooperation, developing a set of socio-political values and principles and resolve to settle long-standing disputes through peaceful means.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), it says, will remain the primary forum in enhancing political and security cooperation in the Asia Pacific region as well as the pivot in building peace and stability in the region.

The ASEAN Security Community (ASC) is envisaged to bring ASEAN's political and security cooperation to a higher plane to ensure that countries in the region live in peace with one another and with the world at large, in a just, democratic and harmonious environment.

It also states that the ASC members shall rely exclusively on peaceful processes in the settlement of intra-regional differences and regard their security as fundamentally linked to one another and bound by geographic location, common vision and objectives.

It also recognises the sovereign right of the member nations to pursue their individual foreign policies and defence arrangements and taking into

account the strong interconnections among political, economic and social realities.

It also subscribes to the principles of comprehensive and social realities, political, economic, social and cultural aspects in consonance with the ASEAN Vision 2020 rather than to a defence pact, military alliance or a joint foreign policy.

ASEAN, according to the document, shall continue to promote regional solidarity and cooperation, and that member nations shall exercise their rights to lead their national existence free from outside interference in their internal affairs.

The ASC also states that ASEAN shall abide by the United Nations Charter and other principles of international law and uphold ASEAN's principles of non-interference, consensus-based decision-making, national and regional resilience, respect for national sovereignty, the renunciation of the threat or the use of force and peaceful settlement of differences and disputes.

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) strives to realise the end-goal of economic integration as outlined in the ASEAN Vision 2020 to create a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN economic region.

It states that the AEC shall establish ASEAN as a single market and production base, turning the diversity that characterises the region into opportunities for business complementation, making the region a more dynamic and stronger segment of the global supply chain.

In moving towards the AEC, ASEAN, it says, shall institute new mechanisms and measures to strengthen the implementation of its existing economic initiatives including the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS) and ASEAN Investment Area (AIA).

It also calls for the acceleration of regional integration in the priority sectors; facilitate movement of business people, skilled labour and including the improvement of the existing ASEAN Dispute Settlement Mechanism to ensure expeditious and legally binding resolutions of any economic disputes.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), in consonance with the goal set by ASEAN Vision 2020, envisages a Southeast Asia bonded together in partnership as a community of caring societies.

In line with the programme of action set by the 1976 Declaration of ASEAN Concord, the Community shall foster cooperation in social development aimed at raising the standard of living of disadvantaged groups and the rural population, and shall seek the active involvement of all sectors of society, in particular women, youth and local communities.

ASEAN, it states, shall ensure that its work force shall be prepared for, and benefit from, economic integration by investing more resources for basic and higher education, training, science and technology development, job creation, and social protection.

ASEAN, it adds, shall further intensify cooperation in public health, including in the prevention and control of infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and support joint regional actions to increase access to affordable medicines.

It also states that it shall intensify cooperation in addressing problems associated with population growth, unemployment, environmental degradation and transboundary pollution as well as disaster management in the region to enable individual members to fully realise their development potentials and to enhance the mutual ASEAN spirit.

The signatories of the Bali Concord II were the Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Philippines President Gloria Arroyo and Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Others are Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Laos Prime Minister Bounnhang Vorachith, Myanmar Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and Vietnam Prime Minister Phan Van Khai.

-- BERNAMA

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