

09 OCT 2003

Asean-Summit (Wrap-up)

ASEAN SET TO MOVE TO HIGHER PLANE WITH BALI CONCORD II

From Salbiah Said and Openg Onn

NUSA DUA, Oct 9 (Bernama) -- ASEAN is poised to move to a higher plane with the signing of a new blueprint which will set a new course for the 10-member nations to achieve the ASEAN Community by 2020.

The blueprint, known as ASEAN Concord II or otherwise known as the Bali Concord II, provides the basic framework for cooperation among members of the regional grouping, comprising Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

The historic charter was sealed at the just-ended ASEAN Summit on the popular Indonesian island resort of Bali.

In the 10-point declaration, the leaders expressed their desire to create an ASEAN Community based on three main pillars - ASEAN Security Cooperation (ASC), ASEAN Economic Cooperation (AEC) and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Cooperation (ASCC).

These three elements are closely inter-twined and mutually reinforcing for the purpose of ensuring durable peace, stability and shared prosperity in the region.

The ASC comprises a 12-point framework which, among others, will take ASEAN's political and security cooperation to a higher plane. ASEAN leaders have reassured that this is not a form of military bloc or defence pact.

The AEC, which contains a five-point direction, is to realise the end-goal of economic integration as outlined in the ASEAN Vision 2020 which, among others, is to create a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN economic region.

The ASCC outlines a six-point guidance to ensure that ASEAN's workforce will be prepared for and benefit from the economic integration by investing more resources for basic and higher education, training, science and technology development, job creation and social protection.

The new blueprint is to nurture ASEAN's common values, such as the habit of consultation to discuss political issues and the willingness to share information on matters of common concern.

These include environmental degradation, maritime security cooperation, the enhancement of defence cooperation among member countries, developing a set of socio-political values and principles and settling long-standing disputes through peaceful means.

However, the Bali Concord II stresses the fundamental importance of adhering to the principles of non-interference and consensus in ASEAN cooperation and that the regional body remains to be bonded together in a partnership of dynamic development and of a caring community.

These principles, according to Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, must be honoured by fellow leaders in ASEAN and regarded as something special.

"The principles of non-interference, of consensus-based decision-making, national and regional resilience, respect for national sovereignty, the renunciation of the threat of the use of force in the settlement of differences and disputes, must always be upheld," he said in his remarks after the signing of the historic document.

Dr Mahathir said the creation of the ASEAN Community could be compared to a degree to the establishment of the European Union.

"But, it will never become the ASEAN Union," he said.

Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri has described the charter as a watershed in the history of ASEAN, which will be handed down to

posterity as the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II or Bali Concord II.

"This is the document that will make it possible for our children and their children to live in a state of enduring peace, stability, and shared prosperity," she said.

The Editor of The Indonesian Quarterly, Bantarto Bandoro, in his article published in the Jakarta Post titled "Drawing a new blueprint for ASEAN", said the Summit itself was historic for several reasons.

Firstly, it was held when ASEAN was facing tremendous political and strategic challenges as well as outside the region. Secondly, during the Summit, ASEAN was to decide new strategic and economic relations with China, India and Japan.

During the Summit, China and India signed the accession to Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) with ASEAN, aimed at providing the basis of good conduct for all countries bound under the agreement.

Thirdly, he said, an ASEAN collective leadership was expected to appear as a new modality to execute its new programme of action.

For Malaysia, the ninth Summit was significant as hosts Indonesia laid out the red carpet treatment for Dr Mahathir, who will no longer be in the front seat of the gathering of ASEAN leaders.

The Bali Summit was Mahathir's last ASEAN meeting before his planned retirement end of this month.

"This is the very last Summit to be graced by the presence of a dear colleague, who is also a steadfast friend to us all. Today, we take the opportunity to say a fond farewell to His Excellency Dr Mahathir Mohamad," declared Megawati.

In her glowing tribute to Dr Mahathir, she said the Malaysian Premier had always had strong and informed views on ASEAN and never hesitated to say the unpleasant.

The Summit is a sweet parting for him as it is not only his last but also the most successful ever held since its inception nine years ago.

-- BERNAMA

SS OPP HK SRI