

08/10/2003

Asean Concord II adopted at Bali

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LEADERS of the 10 Southeast Asian nations adopted the Declaration of Asean Concord II yesterday which calls for the establishment of an Asean Community which will, among other things, pave the way for the creation of a single market.

The leaders agreed that the AC should be established with three pillars of co-operation - political and security, economic and socio-cultural - to ensure durable peace, stability and prosperity.

The declaration was signed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Sultan of Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Laotian Prime Minister Bounnhang Vorachith, Myanmar Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai.

The leaders agreed that to achieve the AC, there should be an Asean Security Community (ASC), Asean Economic Community (AEC) and an Asean Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

The ASC is envisaged to bring Asean's political and security co-operation to a higher plane to ensure that countries in the region live at peace with one another and with the rest of the world.

The leaders agreed that the 10 Asean countries will fully utilise existing agencies and laws to counter transnational crimes such as terrorism besides tackling drugs and human trafficking.

Member countries will also exercise the right to govern their domestic affairs free from external interference.

"The ASC members shall rely exclusively on peaceful processes in the settlement of intra-regional differences."

Member countries should also abide by the UN charter and other international laws and uphold Asean's principles such as consensus-based decision-making and renounce the use of threat or force.

The ASC will also contribute towards the promotion of peace and security in the Asia Pacific region, with the Asean Regional Forum being the main platform for regional security discussions.

Asean countries will also use treaties and declarations such as ZOPFAN (Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality), the TAC (Treaty on Amity and Co-operation) and SEANWFZ (South East Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone) to ensure regional peace.

The AEC is the realisation of the end-goal of economic integration as outlined by the Asean Vision 2020.

It calls for the creation of a stable, prosperous and highly-competitive Asean economic region where there is a free flow of goods, services, investment and a freer flow of capital.

The declaration said the AEC shall establish Asean as a single market and production base, turning the diversity that characterises the region into opportunities for business.

The Asean Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) aims to create "caring societies" in Southeast Asia and foster closer ties in women, youth and communities development programmes.

Co-operation in public healthcare will also be enhanced, especially on prevention and control of infectious diseases such as AIDs and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

The ASCC will also nurture talented writers, artists, and the media to foster a regional identity.