

New Zealand May Announce New Initiatives At Commemorative Summit With ASEAN Bernama

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 20 (Bernama) -- New Zealand Prime Minister John Key is expected to announce several new initiatives, including a plan to increase capacity-building investment in ASEAN, during the ASEAN-New Zealand Commemorative Summit on Sunday, said New Zealand High Commissioner to Malaysia Dr John Subritzky.

He said New Zealand, which celebrated its 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations with ASEAN this year, currently contributed NZ\$50 million (about US\$32.68 million) annually for ASEAN capacity building, mostly through scholarships.

"Obviously, we want to celebrate the 40th anniversary of ties between ASEAN and New Zealand during the summit. We want to look at furthering and expanding relations with ASEAN in the future," he told Bernama in a recent exclusive interview at the high commission here.

The initiatives are part of the ASEAN-New Zealand Plan of Action post-2015 that will be approved by the leaders at the summit as a continuation to the ASEAN-New Zealand Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership for 2010-2015.

Key has confirmed his attendance at the ASEAN-New Zealand Commemorative Summit and the East Asia Summit, both of which are to be held on the sidelines of the 27th ASEAN Summit this weekend.

Subritzky said the Plan of Action for post-2015 would, among others, focus on the people of ASEAN and prosperity of the 10-member bloc.

"With people, we are looking at what we could offer in terms of educational links and scholarship. As for prosperity, we are looking at how we can provide experience in terms of trade, agriculture and disaster management," he said.

Meanwhile, New Zealand Ambassador to ASEAN Stephanie Lee said ASEAN-New Zealand relations had grown immensely since 1975, from a focus on security and development assistance to being much broader and for mutual benefit.

"In trade, ASEAN and New Zealand are now trading in a week what we used to trade in a year in the 1970s," she said in a written response to Bernama when asked to comment on the 40-year relations between New Zealand and ASEAN.

ASEAN is now New Zealand's fourth largest trading partner and fifth largest source of tourists. Two-way trade with ASEAN for year ended June 2015 amounted to nearly NZ\$15 billion (about US\$9.82 billion) in ASEAN's favour.

Lee said that among the highlights of the linkages between ASEAN and New Zealand was the country's participation in many ASEAN-centred forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit.

The close ties were further manifested when all 10 ASEAN members supported New Zealand when the country vied for a non-permanent seat last year on the United Nations Security Council, said Lee, who is New Zealand's first dedicated ambassador to ASEAN.

She said the decision to have a dedicated ambassador to ASEAN was one of the outcomes of the New Zealand Inc ASEAN Strategy to help the country to be better positioned in the region.

According to Lee, the New Zealand Inc ASEAN Strategy, a plan of action initiated by the New Zealand government, would ensure concerted and consistent engagement with ASEAN across many issues.

"We are looking for opportunities to support ASEAN's community-building and integration through the ASEAN Community. We have some ideas about that, which Prime Minister John Key will announce at our commemorative summit," Lee said.

New Zealand became ASEAN's dialogue partner in 1975. Along with Australia and Japan, New Zealand was among the first dialogue partners to hold summits with ASEAN in 1977.

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