



16TH ASEAN SUMMIT : CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

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The 16th Summit of Association of South East Asian nation's took place on 8-9 April, 2010 in Ha Noi, Vietnam under the theme "Towards the ASEAN Community: from Vision to Action" - The Summit Meeting was attended by the Heads of State/ Government of ASEAN states i.e. Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines. The Key Message from the Summit in Hanoi was that no one can forget that ASEAN is made up of 10 countries vitally important to its members and dialogue partners. The 16th Summit was an all ASEAN affair and the next Summit too would take place in Vietnam in October 2010 which will be open to all its members, dialogue partners and observers.

The 10 member organisation was founded on August 8, 1967 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration by the five founding states, the Indonesia, Malaysia, Phillipines, Singapore, Thailand . Brunei became the sixth member in 1984, Vietnam joined in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and lastly Cambodia in 1999. A product of the cold war days ASEAN has been transformed altogether from a security and political organisation to broader regional economic organisation connecting more than 27 countries through its myriad international forums such as ASEM, ARF, EAS etc.

ASEAN stretches 4.46 million square km in size and combined population of 592 million which is more than EU and NAFTA. The annual GDP of the organisation is US \$ 15 trillion , has emerged as the most powerful regional economic grouping in the era of globalisation. During the sixteenth Summit the Member Countries expressed their satisfaction with the progress in implementing the ASEAN Charter and the Road Map for an ASEAN Community and reaffirmed their strong commitments to speed up the effective implementation through concrete measures and activities. They also expressed their commitment to strengthen cooperation in deepening regional integration and in addressing global challenges with a view to building a resilient, dynamic and sustained ASEAN Community. ASEAN would act swiftly at national, regional and global levels to achieve sustained economic recovery and development for ASEAN in the aftermath of the global

economic and financial crisis. They agreed to focus their efforts on ensuring financial stability, fostering regional infrastructure development and connectivity, promoting sustainable development and narrowing the development gap .

The ASEAN leaders emphasised the priority to enhance intra - ASEAN connectivity including the need to complete the missing air, sea, and land transportation links in Mekong and other sub- regions of ASEAN building on achievements of existing frame work. They also unveiled the future plans of connecting East Asia and beyond. The leaders affirmed that ASEAN should actively continue to make contributions to the global efforts to achieve a comprehensive legally binding global agreement on climate change .

ASEAN leaders agreed that education and human resources development should be given a priority in the process of community building, given their crucial role in achieving a resilient, dynamic, and sustained ASEAN community and a people oriented ASEAN community. The leaders also expressed their satisfaction with the progress in the implementation of the ASEAN Charter, which would provide legal and institutional framework for the ASEAN Community and beyond. The leaders agreed to establish new ASEAN bodies such as ASEAN coordinating Council (ACC).

The Community Councils, the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) and ASEAN Inter Governments Commission of Human Rights. (AICHR)³ The Significant achievements of the Summit were the progress in developing legal documents necessary for the implementation of the Charter, notably the signing of protocol to the ASEAN Charter on Dispute Settlement Mechanism and the Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of ASEAN, the Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Rights of Women and Children.⁴

The ASEAN leaders expressed their satisfaction with the progress in implementing the Road Map for an ASEAN community by 2015 comprising the Blue Prints for the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and

the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) and the second Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) work plan (2009-2015).

It is to be remembered that the ASEAN community vision was signed during the 9th ASEAN summit at Bali Indonesian in October 2003, whereby the member countries agreed to pursue closer integration by 2020. But during the Cebu (Phillippine) Summit in January, 2007, the target of ASEAN community was decided to be obtained by 2015. A flurry of activities have been started since then. The ASEAN Charter was signed during the 13th Summit at Singapore in November, 2007. The ASEAN Countries also hailed the role played by East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum to promote the East Asian Cooperation and dialogue towards the building of a community in East Asia.

ASEAN also welcomed all international efforts to promote nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament and peaceful use of nuclear energy including the NPT Review Conference, and Nuclear Security Summit in Washington D.C. They also urged for a nuclear weapon free Korean peninsula. On the

economic front ASEAN welcomed the adoption of ASEAN Economic community blue print in November 2007. Significant progress has been made towards achieving AEC. Beginning 1st January, 2010 99.5% tariff lines in ASEAN's inclusion lists under the Common Effective Preparation Tariffs for ASEAN free trade Area (CEPT- AFTA) stood at 0.5%, making this the most tangible high impact outcome for ASEAN. Intra-ASEAN trade almost tripled to 458.1 billion in 2008 as compared to 2000 when all ten members states joined the CEPT-AFTA. Together with progress made in the removal of non-tariff barriers to trade, this process underscored ASEAN's commitment to facilitating free flow of goods in ASEAN.

Thus ASEAN has made effective progress in the field of economy and finance whereby 95 of goods move between ASEAN countries without tariffs. Thus ASEAN is moving ahead in direction of becoming a strong, vibrant and impeccable regional entity. The strength of ASEAN augur well not only for the future of Asia-Pacific region but also to attain the goal of making 21st century as an Asian century.

R E F E R E N C E

1. www.aseansec.org 2. Ibid 3. Ibid 4. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/30330608/thayerASEAN16summit-assessment>.