Overview

ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

"Today, ASEAN is not only a well-functioning, indispensable reality in the region. It is a real force to be reckoned with far beyond the region. It is also a trusted partner of the United Nations in the field of development...[full text]"

Kofi Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations
16 February 2000

ESTABLISHMENT

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok by the five original Member Countries, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined on 8 January 1984, Vietnam on 28 July 1995, Lao PDR and Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April 1999.

The ASEAN region has a population of about 500 million, a total area of 4.5 million square kilometers, a combined gross domestic product of almost US$ 700 billion, and a total trade of about US$ 850 billion.

OBJECTIVES

The ASEAN Declaration states that the aims and purposes of the Association are: (1) to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and (2) to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.

The ASEAN Vision 2020, adopted by the ASEAN Leaders on the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN, agreed on a shared vision of ASEAN as a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies.

In 2003, the ASEAN Leaders resolved that an ASEAN Community shall be established comprising three pillars, namely, ASEAN Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

ASEAN Member Countries have adopted the following fundamental principles in their relations with one another, as contained in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC):

- mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations;
- the right of every State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion;
- non-interference in the internal affairs of one another;
- settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful manner;
- renunciation of the threat or use of force; and
- effective cooperation among themselves.

ASEAN SECURITY COMMUNITY

Through political dialogue and confidence building, no tension has escalated into armed confrontation among ASEAN Member Countries since its establishment more than three decades ago.

To build on what has been constructed over the years in the field of political and security cooperation, the ASEAN Leaders have agreed to establish the ASEAN Security Community (ASC). The ASC shall aim to ensure that countries in the region live at peace with one another and with the world in a just, democratic and harmonious environment.

The members of the Community pledge to 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 has the following components: political development; shaping and sharing of norms; conflict prevention; conflict resolution; post-conflict peace building; and implementing mechanisms. It will be built on the strong foundation of ASEAN processes, principles, agreements, and structures, which evolved over the years and are contained in the following major political agreements:

- ASEAN Declaration, Bangkok, 8 August 1967;
- Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration, Kuala Lumpur, 27 November 1971;
- Declaration of ASEAN Concord, Bali, 24 February 1976;
- Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, Bali, 24 February 1976;
- ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea, Manila, 22 July 1992;
Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, Bangkok, 15 December 1997;
ASEAN Vision 2020, Kuala Lumpur, 15 December 1997; and
Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, Bali, 7 October 2003.

In recognition of security interdependence in the Asia-Pacific region, ASEAN established the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994. The ARF’s agenda aims to evolve in three broad stages, namely the promotion of confidence building, development of preventive diplomacy and elaboration of approaches to conflicts.

The present participants in the ARF include: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Indonesia, Japan, Democratic Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea (ROK), Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Thailand, the United States, and Viet Nam.

The ARF discusses major regional security issues in the region, including the relationship amongst the major powers, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, transnational crime, South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula, among others.

ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

The ASEAN Economic Community shall be the end-goal of economic integration measures as outlined in the ASEAN Vision 2020. Its goal is to create a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN economic region in which there is a free flow of goods, services, investment and a freer flow of capital, equitable economic development and reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities in year 2020.

The ASEAN Economic Community shall establish ASEAN as a single market and production base, turning the diversity that characterises the region into opportunities for business complementation and making the ASEAN a more dynamic and stronger segment of the global supply chain. ASEAN’s strategy shall consist of the integration of ASEAN and enhancing ASEAN’s economic competitiveness.

In moving towards the ASEAN Economic Community, ASEAN has agreed on the following:

- 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);
- accelerate regional integration in the following priority sectors by 2010: air travel, agro-based products, automotives, e-commerce, electronics, fisheries, healthcare, rubber-based products, textiles and apparels, tourism, and wood-based products.
- facilitate movement of business persons, skilled labour and talents; and
- strengthen the institutional mechanisms of ASEAN, including the improvement of the existing ASEAN Dispute Settlement Mechanism to ensure expeditious and legally-binding resolution of any economic disputes.

Launched in 1992, the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) is now in place. It aims to promote the region’s competitive advantage as a single production unit. The elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers among Member Countries is expected to promote greater economic efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness.

As of 1 January 2005, tariffs on almost 99 percent of the products in the Inclusion List of the ASEAN-6 (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) have been reduced to no more than 5 percent. More than 60 percent of these products have zero tariffs. The average tariff for ASEAN-6 has been brought down from more than 12 percent when AFTA started to 2 percent today. For the newer Member Countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam (CLMV), tariffs on about 81 percent of their Inclusion List have been brought down to within the 0-5 percent range.

Other major integration-related economic activities of ASEAN include the following:

- Roadmap for Financial and Monetary Integration of ASEAN in four areas, namely, capital market development, capital account liberalisation, liberalisation of financial services and currency cooperation;
- trans-ASEAN transportation network consisting of major inter-State highway and railway networks, including the Singapore to Kunming Rail-Link, principal ports, and sea lanes for maritime traffic, inland waterway transport, and major civil aviation links;
- Roadmap for Integration of Air Travel Sector;
- interoperability and interconnectivity of national telecommunications equipment and services, including the ASEAN Telecommunications Regulators Council Sectoral Mutual
Recognition Arrangement (ATRC-MRA) on Conformity Assessment for Telecommunications Equipment;
- trans-ASEAN energy networks, which consist of the ASEAN Power Grid and the Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline Projects;
- Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) focusing on infrastructure, human resource development, information and communications technology, and regional economic integration primarily in the CLMV countries;
- Visit ASEAN Campaign and the private sector-led ASEAN Hip-Hop Pass to promote intra-ASEAN tourism; and
- Agreement on the ASEAN Food Security Reserve.

ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, in consonance with the goal set by ASEAN Vision 2020, envisages a Southeast Asia bonded together in partnership as a community of caring societies and founded on a common regional identity.

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 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 shall further intensify cooperation in the area of public health, including in the prevention and control of infectious and communicable diseases.

The development and enhancement of human resources is a key strategy for employment generation, alleviating poverty and socio-economic disparities, and ensuring economic growth with equity.

Among the on-going activities of ASEAN in this area include the following:

- ASEAN Work Programme on HIV/AIDS;
- ASEAN Work Programme on Community-Based Care for the Elderly;
- ASEAN Occupational Safety and Health Network;
- ASEAN Work Programme on Preparing ASEAN Youth for Sustainable Employment and Other Challenges of Globalisation;
- ASEAN University Network (AUN) promoting collaboration among seventeen member universities ASEAN;
- ASEAN Students Exchange Programme, Youth Cultural Forum, and the ASEAN Young Speakers Forum;
- The Annual ASEAN Culture Week, ASEAN Youth Camp and ASEAN Quiz;
- ASEAN Media Exchange Programme; and
- Framework for Environmentally Sustainable Cities (ESC) and ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The ASEAN Vision 2020 affirmed an outward-looking ASEAN playing a pivotal role in the international community and advancing ASEAN’s common interests.

Building on the Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation of 1999, cooperation between the Southeast and Northeast Asian countries has accelerated with the holding of an annual summit among the leaders of ASEAN, China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) within the ASEAN Plus Three process.

ASEAN Plus Three relations continue to expand and deepen in the areas of security dialogue and cooperation, transnational crime, trade and investment, environment, finance and monetary, agriculture and forestry, energy, tourism, health, labour, culture and the arts, science and technology, information and communication technology, social welfare and development, youth, and rural development and poverty eradication.

There are now thirteen ministerial-level meetings under the ASEAN Plus Three process.

Bilateral trading arrangements have been or are being forged between ASEAN Member Countries and China, Japan, and the ROK. These arrangements will serve as the building blocks of an East Asian Free Trade Area as a long term goal.

ASEAN continues to develop cooperative relations with its Dialogue Partners, namely, Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, the ROK, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, the United States of America, and the United
Nations Development Programme. ASEAN also promotes cooperation with Pakistan in some areas of mutual interest.

Consistent with its resolve to enhance cooperation with other developing regions, ASEAN maintains contact with other intergovernmental organisations, namely, the Economic Cooperation Organisation, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Rio Group, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the South Pacific Forum, and through the recently established Asian-African Sub-Regional Organisation Conference.

Most ASEAN Member Countries also participate actively in the activities of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and the East Asia-Latin America Forum (EALAF).

STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS

The highest decision-making organ of ASEAN is the Meeting of the ASEAN Heads of State and Government. The ASEAN Summit is convened every year. The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (Foreign Ministers) is held annually.

Ministerial meetings on the following sectors are also held regularly: agriculture and forestry, economics (trade), energy, environment, finance, health, information, investment, labour, law, regional haze, rural development and poverty alleviation, science and technology, social welfare, telecommunications, transnational crime, transportation, tourism, youth. Supporting these ministerial bodies are committees of senior officials, technical working groups and task forces.

To support the conduct of ASEAN's external relations, ASEAN has established committees composed of heads of diplomatic missions in the following capitals: Beijing, Berlin, Brussels, Canberra, Geneva, Islamabad, London, Moscow, New Delhi, New York, Ottawa, Paris, Riyadh, Seoul, Tokyo, Washington D.C. and Wellington.

The Secretary-General of ASEAN is appointed on merit and accorded ministerial status. The Secretary-General of ASEAN, who has a five-year term, is mandated to initiate, advise, coordinate, and implement ASEAN activities. The members of the professional staff of the ASEAN Secretariat are appointed on the principle of open recruitment and regionwide competition.

ASEAN has several specialized bodies and arrangements promoting intergovernmental cooperation in various fields including the following: ASEAN Agricultural Development Planning Centre, ASEAN-EC Management Centre, ASEAN Centre for Energy, ASEAN Earthquake Information Centre, ASEAN Foundation, ASEAN Poultry Research and Training Centre, ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation, ASEAN Rural Youth Development Centre, ASEAN Specialized Meteorological Centre, ASEAN Timber Technology Centre, ASEAN Tourism Information Centre, and the ASEAN University Network.

In addition, ASEAN promotes dialogue and consultations with professional and business organisations with related aims and purposes, such as the ASEAN-Chambers of Commerce and Industry, ASEAN Business Forum, ASEAN Tourism Association, ASEAN Council on Petroleum, ASEAN Ports Association, Federation of ASEAN Shipowners, ASEAN Confederation of Employers, ASEAN Fisheries Federation, ASEAN Vegetable Oils Club, ASEAN Intellectual Property Association, and the ASEAN-Institutes for Strategic and International Studies. Furthermore, there are 58 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which have formal affiliations with ASEAN.

More information on ASEAN can be found at the ASEAN Internet homepage at www.aseansec.org.
Overview

The ASEAN declaration of 1967 exhorts the association to attain its economic, social and cultural aims through “joint endeavours” and “active collaboration and mutual assistance.” Regarding its political objective of regional peace and stability, however, the Declaration contains no equivalent exhortation. It speaks only of “respect for justice and the rule of law” and “adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.” It makes no impassioned call for the ASEAN member states to take common political positions.

The restraint with which ASEAN’s founders expressed the political aim of their brainchild was understandable. They did not want their intentions to be misunderstood. They did not want ASEAN to be mistaken for a military grouping among political allies—as some of its predecessors had been.

Moreover, at the time of ASEAN’s conception, Southeast Asia was beset by instability aggravated by underdevelopment. The ASEAN pioneer states themselves were just beginning to learn to trust one another, while nursing the hangover of bitter disputes of recent years. The newborn ASEAN was, therefore, presented as a subregional grouping for economic, social and cultural cooperation. But security concerns and political purposes were never far from the ASEAN founders’ intentions.

As a key figure in ASEAN diplomacy, former Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas has pointed out, “The truth is that politics attended ASEAN at its birth. It was the convergence in political outlook among the five original members, their shared convictions on national priority objectives and on how best to secure these objectives in the evolving strategic environment of East Asia which impelled them to form ASEAN.”

ASEAN spent almost the whole first decade of its existence developing and refining the concepts that form the basis of its work and methods of cooperation. In those early years its ministerial and other meetings became occasions for fostering trust and goodwill, for developing the habit of working together informally and openly.

In the process ASEAN leaders realised that their countries could never attain national stability and socioeconomic development if Southeast Asia—afflicted with strife and Cold War rivalry—remained in political turmoil. The ASEAN member states strove for resilience, both individually as nations and collectively as a subregional grouping, for they knew the association would not amount to much if external powers regularly intervened in Southeast Asian affairs.

At the First ASEAN Summit in Bali in February 1976, the member countries signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, which spelled out the basic principles for their relations with one another and the conduct of the association’s programme for cooperation:

- Mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations;
- The right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion;
- Noninterference in the internal affairs of one another;
- Settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means;
- Renunciation of the threat or use of force; and
- Effective cooperation among themselves.

The treaty envisaged these principles as the foundation of a strong Southeast Asian community. It stated that ASEAN political and security dialogue and cooperation should aim to promote regional peace and stability by enhancing regional resilience. And this resilience shall be achieved by cooperation in all fields among the member countries.

Following these principles and guidelines, Southeast Asia embarked on a journey towards regional solidarity that has been steady and sure. Through political dialogue and confidence building, ASEAN has prevented occasional bilateral tensions from escalating into confrontation among its members. And by 1999 the vision of an ASEAN including all the countries of Southeast Asia as members had been achieved.

Achievements in Political Collaboration

Since 1967 ASEAN has forged major political accords that have contributed greatly to re-gional peace and stability, and to its relations with other countries, regions and organisations. Foremost among these are:

Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality. On 27 November 1971 the foreign ministers of the then five ASEAN members met in Kuala Lumpur and signed the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) Declaration. It commits all ASEAN members to “exert efforts to secure the recognition of and respect for Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, free from any manner of interference by outside powers,” and to “make concerted efforts to broaden the areas of cooperation, which would contribute to their strength, solidarity and closer relationship.”

ZOPFAN recognises “the right of every state, large or small, to lead its national existence free from outside interference in its internal affairs as
this interference will adversely affect its freedom, independence and integrity."

Another five years passed before the next major development in political cooperation came about-the First ASEAN Summit in Bali, when the ASEAN leaders signed three major documents: the Declaration of ASEAN Concord, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, and the Agreement Establishing the ASEAN Secretariat.

Declaration of ASEAN Concord. Departing from the more circumspect Bangkok Declaration, the Declaration of ASEAN Concord stated for the first time that the member countries would expand political cooperation. It also adopted principles for regional stability and a programme of action for political cooperation. The programme called for holding ASEAN summits among the heads of government; signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia; settling intraregional disputes “by peaceful means as soon as possible”; improving the ASEAN machinery to strengthen political cooperation; studying how to develop judicial cooperation including the possibility of an ASEAN extradition treaty; and strengthening political cooperation. The programme also called for the harmonisation of views, coordinating positions and, where possible and desirable, taking common action.

Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia. TAC raised the provisions of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration to the level of a treaty to which other Southeast Asian countries could accede and with which the nonregional countries could associate themselves. The treaty enshrines the following principles: mutual respect for one another’s sovereignty; noninterference in internal affairs; the peaceful settlement of intraregional disputes; and effective cooperation.

The treaty also provides for a code of conduct for the peaceful settlement of disputes. And it mandates the establishment of a high council made up of ministerial representatives from the parties as a dispute-settlement mechanism.

To this day, TAC remains the only indigenous regional diplomatic instrument providing a mechanism and processes for the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone. At the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok on 15 December 1995, the leaders of all the ten Southeast ASEAN countries signed the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ). As a key component of ZOPFAN, the SEANWFZ treaty ex-presses ASEAN’s determination to contribute to-wards general and complete nuclear disarmament and the promotion of international peace and security. It also aims to protect the region from environmental pollution and the hazards posed by radio-active waste and other toxic materials.

The SEANWFZ treaty came into force on 27 March 1997. ASEAN is now negotiating with the five nuclear-weapon states on the terms of their accession to the protocol which lays down their commitments under the treaty.

ASEAN has put in place the SEANWFZ Commission and the Executive Committee of the commission to oversee implementation of the treaty’s provisions and ensure compliance with them. The association adopted procedural and financial rules governing the work of the treaty bodies at the second meeting of the SEANWFZ Commission in Bangkok in July 2000.

Settlement of the Cambodian Conflict. One of the most important chapters in the history of ASEAN diplomacy took place during the Cambodian conflict. The ASEAN-sponsored resolutions at the UN General Assembly, which called for a durable and comprehensive political settlement in Cambodia, received consistent support from the international community.

With Indonesia as interlocutor, ASEAN maintained its dialogue with all parties to the conflict. This eventually led to the Jakarta Informal Meetings at which the four Cambodian factions discussed peace and national reconciliation.

The process proved to be protracted, requiring the help of many states and the United Nations. It extended to the early 1990s, culminating in the 19-nation Paris Conference on Cambodia, which was chaired by France and Indonesia.

On 23 October 1991 the Paris Conference on Cambodia produced the Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodian Conflict. This settlement paved the way for the formation of the Cambodian Supreme National Council, in which four factions participated, and the holding of elections supervised by the United Nations Transitional Authority on Cambodia.

ASEAN 10. Nineteen ninety-nine will be remembered as the year when the vision of ASEAN’s founders to build an association comprising all the Southeast Asian countries was fully realised. The admission of Cambodia to ASEAN on 30 April 1999 in Ha Noi completed the association’s efforts towards regional cohesion, 32 years after the original five members-Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand-first got together.

Insular and peninsular Southeast Asia and all of mainland Southeast Asia are now joined in one association. The region is no longer divided between ASEAN and non-ASEAN, between mainland and maritime Southeast Asia.

The Dialogue System

At the Second Summit in Kuala Lumpur the ASEAN heads of government agreed that the association’s economic relations with other countries or groups of countries needed to be expanded and intensified.
On that occasion, the ASEAN heads of government met with the Prime Ministers of Australia, Japan and New Zealand, the first time that they had held consultations as a group with the leaders of non-ASEAN countries.

The next year, the first Postministerial Conference took place immediately after the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting. This was a gathering among ASEAN and its dialogue partners, which were then Australia, Canada, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand and the United States.

Every year since then, the foreign ministers of dialogue countries have met at these postministerial conferences with their ASEAN counterparts. Between these conferences, dialogues are held at various levels and wide-ranging projects are undertaken. These relationships have become models for mutually beneficial relations between North and South as well as for South-South cooperation.

Four more countries have since joined the ASEAN dialogue system: China (1996), India (1996), the Republic of Korea (1991) and Russia (1996). The United Nations Development Programme (1977) is the only dialogue partner that is not a sovereign state.

ASEAN Regional Forum

It was only a matter of time before ASEAN’s regular interaction on economic cooperation with states and multilateral agencies outside Southeast Asia would evolve to include other concerns—primarily regional security.

At the 1992 Singapore Summit, the ASEAN leaders declared that “ASEAN shall move towards a higher plane of political and economic cooperation to secure regional peace and prosperity.”

By this time, the end of the Cold War had altered the configuration of international relations in East Asia. The new environment presented historic opportunities for the relaxation of tensions in the region through multilateral consultations, confidence building, and eventually the prevention of conflict. Thus, in 1994, ASEAN and its dialogue partners decided to create the ASEAN Regional Forum for this purpose. Initially, Forum participants included the ASEAN members, the other Southeast Asian states that were not yet ASEAN members, ASEAN’s then seven dialogue partners, Papua New Guinea, an ASEAN observer, and China and Russia, then still “consultative partners” of ASEAN. India became a participant on becoming a dialogue partner in 1996. Mongolia and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea were admitted in 1999 and 2000.

As a major venue for carrying out ASEAN’s objectives of regional harmony and stability, ARF adopted two main objectives: first, to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern and, second, to contribute to efforts towards confidence building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region.

At the Twenty-seventh ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in 1994, the Foreign Ministers agreed: “ARF could become an effective consultative Asia-Pacific Forum for promoting open dialogue on political and security cooperation in the region. In this context, ASEAN should work with its ARF partners to bring about a more predictable and constructive pattern of relations in the Asia Pacific.”

In July 1996 ARF adopted the following criteria for participation:

- Commitment. All new participants, as sovereign states, must subscribe to the key goals of ARF and work cooperatively to help achieve them. Before their admission, all new participants should agree to abide by the decisions and statements already made by ARF. All ASEAN members are automatically ARF participants.
- Relevance. A state should be admitted only if it can be shown that it has an impact on the peace and security of the “geographic footprint” of key ARF activities (i.e. Northeast and Southeast Asia and Oceania).
- Gradual expansion. To ensure the effectiveness of ARF, efforts are made to control the number of participants to a manageable level.
- Consultations. All applications for participation should be submitted to the ARF chairman, who will consult all the other ARF participants and ascertain whether a consensus exists for admitting the applicant. Actual decisions on participation would be approved by the ASEAN ministers.

Although ARF is relatively new, it has become an invaluable contributor to the maintenance of harmony and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Its work is complemented by a nonofficial “Track Two” process led by nongovernment institutes.

Since its inaugural meeting in Bangkok in July 1994, ARF has taken an evolutionary approach extended over three broad stages: the promotion of confidence building among participants; the development of preventive diplomacy; and the elaboration of approaches to conflicts. This approach enables ARF participants to deal constructively with political and security issues that bear on regional peace and stability, including new issues that have emerged as a result of globalisation.
Recent Issues and Concerns

It is in ASEAN’s ability and readiness to resolve political differences affecting its members and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region that the association’s commitment to political co-operation is put to the test. More often than not, that commitment has been affirmed and the ASEAN approach to solving potentially explosive issues vindicated.

These issues include territorial and jurisdictional disputes in the South China Sea; self-determination for East Timor; nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia and South Asia; weapons of mass destruction; and the impact of globalisation.

South China Sea. Like many other parts of the world, Southeast Asia faces territorial disputes among its members and nearby states. In these disputes ASEAN has consistently pursued a policy of cooperation in seeking the peaceful settlement of differences.

In 1992, recognising that any conflict in the South China Sea could directly affect peace and stability in the region, ASEAN issued a declaration “urging all parties concerned to exercise restraint in order to create a positive climate for the eventual resolution of all disputes.” ASEAN further “emphasised the necessity to resolve all sovereignty and jurisdictional issues about the South China Sea by peaceful means, without resort to force.”

The Manila Declaration of 1992, which proposed a modus vivendi in the South China Sea, represents one of the most remarkable demonstrations of political solidarity among ASEAN members on strategic issues of common concern.

On the suggestion of ASEAN, ASEAN and China have been working on a Code of Conduct to govern state behaviour in the South China Sea.

The ASEAN-China Senior Officials’ Consultations Working Group on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea met four times this year to negotiate a working draft code of conduct covering principles and norms of state-to-state relations, peaceful settlement of disputes and cooperation.

East Timor. ASEAN supported the implementation of the agreement between Indonesia and Portugal on the question of East Timor and the 5 May 1999 agreements between the United Nations and the Indonesian and Portuguese governments about the modalities for the popular consultations of the East Timorese. The consultations were held on 30 August 1999.

As violence rocked the territory following the referendum, the ASEAN leaders who were in Auckland for the APEC Economic Leaders’ Meet-
Enlightened Regionalism

ASEAN is widely recognised in the international community as an exemplar of enlightened regionalism. But what makes up the nature and measure of its achievements?

It is remarkable that ASEAN has survived for more than three decades because, at the time of its birth, many political observers had predicted that, like previous attempts at regional organisation, it would soon wither in the blast of the complex and hostile regional situation.

Given the wide divergence of views among its founding members, besides the differences in their political and economic systems, ASEAN at the beginning offered little cause for optimism that it would ever attain its goal of regional cooperation. The Southeast Asian security situation was so grim during ASEAN’s early years that the international media often likened the region to the Balkans. Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar of Singapore recalls that the Western press then described the countries in the region as forming a row of dominoes, which were about to fall on one another.

Three decades later, the situation is vastly different. Despite pockets of instability and economic difficulty, the countries of Southeast Asia now make up one of the most stable and prosperous regions in the developing world.

ASEAN has proved its critics wrong. It is now a vibrant reality, a subregional grouping recognised not only in its own region but also in the world as one of the most successful regional cooperative schemes.

A former ASEAN secretary-general, Narciso G. Reyes of the Philippines, once suggested that to really measure the association’s worth, one should ask what could have happened to South-east Asia without ASEAN. “Southeast Asia minus ASEAN,” Reyes said, “equals greater political instability, more widespread economic deterioration and, almost surely, the ascendancy of expansionist forces that thrive on the weakness, isolation and disunity of others.”

ASEAN’s achievements, however, do not just end in preventing regional disaster. In the political and security sphere, ASEAN has transformed itself from a small subregional organisation into a major voice for peace, justice and moderation in the Asia-Pacific and world affairs. In its 33-year history, ASEAN has maintained peace and stability among its member countries despite territorial disputes and other issues among them. It is today the only subregional organisation in Asia that provides a political forum where Asian countries and the world powers can discuss and consider problems about security, political issues and military concerns.

The relative peace, security and stability that ASEAN has helped maintain in Southeast Asia, as well as in the Asia-Pacific region, have been good for development. They have created a political environment where rapid and sustained economic growth has become possible. Economic development in turn has brought about social progress and human development.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi of Malaysia points out: “ASEAN has been successful because its members have a very strong commitment to cooperation. Cooperation for the benefit of all and cooperation for stability and peace of the region. This is a very important hallmark of ASEAN.”

ASEAN, he said, also has “a very strong commitment to pragmatism.” Ideology has never been a problem to ASEAN. It has not allowed theoretical political differences to interfere in its efforts to cooperate for the common good. ASEAN’s leaders and ministers never tire of seeking consensus. They work hard to seek it on issues and programmes that the association develops and carries out.

ASEAN has come to realise that periods of rapid social and economic progress are often accompanied by basic shifts in power relations among states. If not managed well, such realignments could lead to conflict. At the same time, increased economic globalisation, accompanied by structural adjustments of national economies, could create challenges to social order.

With its rapid economic development, ASEAN also faces some issues of resource conservation, including environmental protection. Greater mobility of people, goods and capital also demands more sophisticated management of flows across borders and closer collaboration among ASEAN members. Southeast Asia’s leaders are convinced that ASEAN must continue to deal with all these concerns.

It helps that the nations of the Asia-Pacific region appreciate their prosperity and realise that tensions and armed conflict make bad economics. It helps that the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and the recent Asia-Europe Meeting processes-in both of which ASEAN is the core element-are effectively promoting a more constructive and cooperative approach to international relations in the region.

The establishment of ARF also represented a breakthrough in the region’s turbulent history and signified the opening of a new chapter of peace, stability and cooperation for Southeast Asia.
Most important, the expansion of ASEAN to include all ten countries of Southeast Asia represents a watershed for the organisation as well as a new challenge. “It shall pave the way for a new synergy, maximising the cooperation and potential for growth of the entire region,” Viet Nam’s former Foreign Minister and now Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Manh Cam said in 1999. But he cautioned that “[in] the face of a Greater ASEAN, which comprises countries at different levels of economic and technological development and which have different cultures and historical backgrounds, a need emerges on how to keep those differences from slowing down ASEAN’s growth and from creating difficulties for developing countries.”

**Outlook**

Realising the vision of ASEAN’s founding fathers of an association of all Southeast Asian countries is thus hardly the end of ASEAN history. It is rather a call for a renewed commitment to broader regional solidarity among the peoples of Southeast Asia.

ASEAN has learned to draw strength from unity not only among governments but also among its diverse peoples. “The ASEAN experience and the ASEAN process must reach out to all spectra of our societies,” said former Foreign Minister Prachaub Chaiyasan of Thailand in 1997. “Through ASEAN this region will become a grassroots-supported and close-knit community bound together not only by common interests but by shared values, identity and aspirations among our peoples.”

ASEAN faces the future with confidence. Its strong foundation and remarkable achievements will serve Southeast Asia well as it pursues higher goals in the new millennium.

ASEAN’s leaders have reaffirmed that co-operative peace and shared prosperity should be the association’s basic goals. Towards these goals ASEAN shall remain a driving force in building a more predictable and constructive pattern of relationships among nations in the Asia-Pacific region.

ASEAN will move towards greater economic integration, emphasising sustainable and equitable growth. ASEAN will nourish a caring and cohesive Southeast Asian community, whose strength lies in fostering a common regional identity and a shared vision of the future.