

2000 PRESS STATEMENT BY CHAIRMAN, THE FOURTH ASEAN INFORMAL SUMMIT

Adopted in Singapore on 25 November 2000

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THE WAY FORWARD: INITIATIVE FOR ASEAN INTEGRATION

1. The ASEAN Leaders had a very good meeting. They agreed to launch an Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI). The IAI is to narrow the divide within ASEAN and enhance ASEAN's competitiveness as a region. Essentially, it provides a framework for regional cooperation through which the more developed ASEAN members could help those member countries that most need it. This initiative is guided by Dr Mahathir's principle of "prosper thy neighbour" and, by so doing, to "prosper ASEAN".
2. The IAI will focus on education, skills development and worker training. These will be key factors of competitiveness in the New Economy. To catalyse the IAI, ASEAN members will contribute what they can.
3. To kick off the IAI, Singapore offered, under a five-year technical assistance programme, several training institutes in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, provide IT "Train-the-Trainers" courses and training attachments to its educational institutions. Singapore will also increase the number of existing Singapore Scholarships given to ASEAN nationals.

TRAINING INSTITUTES

- These institutes in Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar will provide vocational training and consultant/researchers in such areas as trade development/export promotion; HRD; agriculture and food business; technical training and tourism.

IT "TRAIN-THE-TRAINERS"

- These courses will contribute towards improving the IT skills of the ASEAN countries to better prepare them to meet the challenges of the New Economy.

TRAINING ATTACHMENTS

- ASEAN nationals who are teachers or lecturers at their national vocational institutes, polytechnics and universities will be offered training attachments to Singapore institutions to work with their Singapore counterparts in developing teaching curriculum and methods [Note: a total of 60 vocational, polytechnic and university lecturers annually].

SINGAPORE SCHOLARSHIPS

- The number of existing Singapore Scholarships given to ASEAN nationals will be significantly increased [Note: the existing number is 30 annually; the total under the IAI will be 60]. These full-time undergraduate scholarships are tenable at the National University of Singapore (NUS) or at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES

- As part of the educational development programme for ASEAN integration efforts, student and youth exchange programmes at both secondary school and youth levels will be introduced.

IDENTIFY GAPS IN INTRA-ASEAN COOPERATION

4. The ASEAN Leaders agreed that for ASEAN to be competitive and achieve regional integration, ASEAN countries must adopt a holistic approach and view the region as a single economy. They agreed that ASEAN should identify gaps in its present level of cooperation, particularly sectors that are critical to ASEAN's competitiveness in the New Economy. These include telecommunications and air, sea, road, rail and river transportation.
5. They also emphasized the importance of English language usage within member countries in order to meet the demands of the New Economy.

SUPPORT FOR THE IAI BY CHINA, JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA

6. China, Japan and South Korea supported the IAI. They agreed to work towards an "Asian IT Belt" to link up cities of IT excellence in Asia. This will create an environment of opportunities that would engage our best talents to develop Asia. To implement this "Asian IT Belt", the Leaders agreed to give their support to the "IT in Asia" Conference in Tokyo next year.
7. China announced it will raise its contribution to the ASEAN-China Cooperation Fund by an additional US\$5 million while Japan pledged to give priority to ASEAN countries in the disbursement of its US\$15 billion "Comprehensive Cooperation Package" on IT for Asia. South Korea, wishing to participate in the e-ASEAN Framework Agreement, has offered training programmes in human resource development and IT. This will also help to narrow regional economic disparities and the digital divide.

E-ASEAN FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

8. The E-ASEAN Framework Agreement is aimed at moving ASEAN into the New Economy. It is a major milestone in ASEAN's economic development. The Agreement constitutes a broad framework to develop a free trade area for goods, services and investments for the information communications and telecommunications industries within ASEAN.

ON-GOING ASEAN PROJECTS

9. The Leaders also stressed the importance of pushing ahead with existing initiatives such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the ASEAN Investment Area (AIA). They also endorsed the proposal of an ASEAN Trade Fair by Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai. They also endorsed the broad thrust of the feasibility study of the Singapore-Kunming Railway Link project and directed that the project should be moved forward. They also agreed to convene a Special Session on HIV/AIDS at the next ASEAN Summit in Brunei Darussalam in 2001.

POLITICAL UNITY

10. The Leaders reaffirmed the fundamental importance of political unity within ASEAN and acknowledged the importance of having all 10 ASEAN countries participating together in APEC and ASEM. They agreed that Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar should be involved in APEC Working Groups, with a view to eventual membership.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

11. The Leaders of ASEAN, China, Japan and South Korea emphasized the importance of closer cooperation among the countries of East Asia. They supported the proposal by South Korean President Kim Dae Jung for an East Asia Study Group. They also supported the proposal by Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji to set up an expert group to study how economic cooperation and free trade relations between ASEAN and China can be deepened.
12. The Leaders also congratulated President Kim on being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his historic contribution to inter-Korean reconciliation. The Leaders hoped that the momentum would continue, leading eventually to peaceful unification that would contribute to the stability of East Asia.