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No. 76/2011 dated 10 May 2011

TOWARDS AN ASEAN VISION BEYOND 2015: Outcome of Jakarta Summit

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Synopsis

Though overshadowed by the Cambodia-Thai border conflict, the 18th ASEAN Summit in Jakarta was determined to achieve the group's vision of ASEAN Community 2015. Leaders also decided to achieve a common platform for ASEAN beyond 2015.

Commentary

THE ONGOING border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand overshadowed the 18th ASEAN Summit in Jakarta on 7-8 May 2011, as portrayed in the regional media. The prime ministers of the two countries exchanged strong statements of their positions on the dispute over the Preah Vihear temple while the president and foreign minister of Indonesia, the ASEAN chair, met separately with their Cambodian and Thai counterparts in an earnest effort to bring about an amicable resolution in the spirit of ASEAN solidarity.

While the dispute has not been settled, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, in his Chairman's statement, welcomed the commitment of both Cambodia and Thailand to peacefully resolve their differences through political dialogue and negotiations. The two sides would seek to achieve a mutually acceptable solution through the fullest use of their existing bilateral mechanism, with the appropriate engagement of Indonesia as the current chair of ASEAN. The ASEAN Heads appreciated that Cambodia and Thailand had agreed on the text of the Terms of Reference (TOR) on the Indonesian Observers Team (IOT). The Indonesian observers are to be deployed in the affected areas following the incidents in February 2011. The ASEAN Heads encouraged the attainment of an environment conducive to the assignment of the observers.

Concerns Over Border Conflict

Analysts wondered if this border conflict will affect the progress towards establishing an ASEAN Community in 2015. Another object of concern is whether the passing of the ASEAN chair to Cambodia and Myanmar in the next three years will weaken the momentum of ASEAN integration. They question how Cambodia will handle the chair if its dispute with Thailand continues to fester. As for Myanmar, the concern is whether it will continue to resist adapting to the ASEAN Way and Western pressure for a more liberal regime in the country. In this regard the ASEAN Leaders reiterated their support for the steady progress and political developments in Myanmar following the holding of general elections and the formation of a new parliamentary government.

According to Yudhoyono the Leaders considered Myanmar's proposal to host the ASEAN Summits in 2014, based on its firm commitment to the principles of ASEAN. The question remains whether the Western dialogue

partners of ASEAN will turn up for the ASEAN Plus One meetings hosted by Myanmar and especially the East Asia Summit. That will test ASEAN's resolve to be a cohesive and united body central to the trans-regional multilateral groups it has formed such as the EAS.

Timor Leste's membership

Another issue that was expected to be controversial was the application by Timor Leste for ASEAN membership this year. The ASEAN Heads, the Chair stated, came to an understanding that the discussion on Timor Leste's formal request to be a member of ASEAN needed further consideration. They have tasked the Foreign Ministers, as the ASEAN Coordinating Council, to look at this issue very closely and provide recommendations for the Leaders' consideration at a later stage with a view to a decision later in 2011.

The 18th Summit appears to have papered over cracks within ASEAN and deferred a decision on a potential pitfall in the road to ASEAN Community 2015. These problems were already evident when the ASEAN Six (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) admitted the CLMV Four (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) as members in the latter 1990s. Notwithstanding the major challenge of mutual adjustment presented by those countries, not least the development of a two-tiered ASEAN, the regional grouping had forged ahead to create a rules-based organisation with the ASEAN Charter and an integrated ASEAN Community by 2015.

Beyond 2015

The Jakarta Summit has gone further and launched deliberations on an ASEAN vision beyond 2015, namely an "ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations". The ASEAN Leaders agreed to work together to accelerate the undertakings towards the ASEAN Community in 2015 and to achieve a common platform for ASEAN beyond 2015 to address global issues and challenges of the 21st century.

The ASEAN Leaders issued a separate joint statement in which they agreed that by 2022 ASEAN would endeavour to have a platform for a common ASEAN position on global issues, an enhanced capacity to respond to those issues, a strengthened ASEAN Community centred on ASEAN as a rules-based organisation and a strengthened capacity of the ASEAN Secretariat. They tasked the Foreign Ministers to develop the Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations to be issued by the ASEAN Leaders at the 19th ASEAN Summit in Bali later this year.

Notwithstanding the road bumps and pitfalls in the road of regional integration, ASEAN seems determined to stay on course towards its vision of an ASEAN Community in 2015 and beyond.

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