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ASEAN makes headway

The five foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), who met in Pattaya, Thailand, from June 14 to 16, had good reason to pat themselves on the back. Their Eleventh Ministerial Meeting was an occasion for counting gains.

The general feeling of satisfaction and optimism among the foreign ministers of the five member countries—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand—was reflected in the opening address of the conference host, Thailand's Prime Minister Kriangsak Chomanan. Noting the positive progress ASEAN had made in various fields, Chomanan said he and his government were particularly pleased with the expansion of ASEAN Preferential Trading Arrangements. Increased intra-ASEAN trade, said Chomanan, would result in economic strength through integration and that would provide a firm basis for even more meaningful external relations.

The continuing cohesiveness of ASEAN member countries, continued Chomanan, had enabled the "Association to gain wide international recognition. ASEAN's aims and objectives were finally receiving the increasing support of major powers, and this was lending ASEAN members to even greater mutual trust and confidence.

Despite the general atmosphere of optimism, however, there persisted areas of common concern. The foreign ministers were one in expressing anxiety over the conflict between Vietnam and Kampuchea and the tensions between China and Vietnam. Philippine Foreign Minister Carlos P. Romulo said that unless these problems were soon solved, regional uncertainties would grow. The Philippine government, he said, hoped that these conflicts could be brought to the negotiating table on terms acceptable to all parties and settled through peaceful means.

There seemed at least some reason to hope, for while ASEAN's relations with its communist neighbors had originally posed a delicate diplomatic problem,



The five ASEAN heads-of-state at the Bali summit meet.

Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea had been positively responding to ASEAN's aims and overtures. In noting this, Thai Prime Minister Chomanan expressed hope that ASEAN could bring to all other Southeast Asian countries the same spirit of mutual trust and confidence that animated its members.

The resettlement of Indochinese refugees continued to pose problems. Despite pleas by the ASEAN heads of government urging relevant United Nations agencies to take immediate measures to resettle the

refugees to ASEAN countries has gone unavailed, imposing heavy burdens on the countries concerned.

But these problems are purely external and do not proceed from within the Association itself; insofar as ASEAN unity and cooperation is concerned, there need not be fears or misgivings. Indeed, there have been indications pointing to the increasing determination of the members to pursue common objectives to their logical conclusions and to adhere to declared policies.

Trading arrangements

The main thrust of ASEAN's efforts is toward increasing production and arranging with developed nations for more advantageous terms of trade. ASEAN has been particularly successful in this area during the past year.

In reviewing progress on ASEAN cooperative relations with other countries, especially Australia, Canada, Japan and New Zealand, the foreign ministers noted with satisfaction that encouraging results had been achieved in many areas. Specifically cited were the offer of the Australian government to host the First ASEAN Australia Industrial Conference and the offer of the European Economic Community to assist in the holding of a second ASEAN-EEC Industrial Conference in Jakarta in February 1979. These efforts

constitute a happy augury of the future success of its other ventures.

Denying reports that Japan was sabotaging ASEAN programs, a ranking official of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the Japanese government was most anxious to provide assistance and to cooperate with ASEAN countries in whatever way it could. He mentioned several projects involving Japanese assistance to ASEAN members that had already been approved by the Tokyo government.

The strides made by ASEAN during the past year in implementing projects ranging from economic cooperation to education, from transport and communication to labor, from trade to socio-cultural activities, constitute a happy augury of the future success of its other ventures.

News briefs

Warn on fake recruiters

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs again cautioned Filipinos seeking jobs abroad to deal only with those offices and agencies authorized to recruit for foreign employment. The MFA said it had received reports from the Philippine embassy in Tripoli, Libya, about Filipinos whose contracts, signed in Manila, turned out to be fraudulent.

Curbing urban migration

President Ferdinand E. Marcos ordered an immediate study of the problem of provincial migration to Manila with a view not only to stopping the exodus from the provinces but reversing it, that is dispersing the metropolitan population to the rural areas. The First Lady, Human Settlements Minister Imelda R. Marcos, had earlier expressed concern over the same problem. She noted that about 500,000 people move into Metro Manila yearly, causing the sprouting of slum and squatter areas and confounding the peace and order problem in the metropolis.

'Tanodbayan' set up

The Ministry of Justice announced the creation of an

independent *Tanodbayan* to effect the people's constitutional right to petition the government for redress of grievances. The *Tanodbayan* (ombudsman) is assisted by four deputy *tanodbayans* and will have the power to investigate, on complaint, any administrative agency, including government-owned or controlled corporations. In his investigative work, the *tanodbayan* is empowered to call on any administrative agency for assistance, to examine government records and to inspect premises. He can be stopped only by a presidential certification that a particular effort will prejudice the national interest.

Tuition hikes used defined

The Bureau of Higher Education announced that tuition hikes granted to private schools must be used only for the upgrading of the salaries and benefits of school personnel or for the improvement of school facilities. No part of the increase, the BHE emphasized, could be used for returns on investments. The BHE also announced that while the BHE head office issued pertinent guidelines, BHE regional offices would act on the actual applications for fee increases.

Judges phased out

The Supreme Court phased out 123 municipal court judges as part of a circuitization program aimed at achieving economy and efficiency of operations. The high court abolished 533 municipal courts, leaving only 917 in existence.

Flood control program progress

The 10-year Metro Manila flood control and drainage program is now 36.5 percent complete. The cost of the P3-billion program is being shouldered by the Philippine government, with substantial financial help from Japan's Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF). To make the program functional, local governments in the Metro Manila area must spend about P2.5 billion for the construction of related projects.

Mentors' minimum pay now P574

The Budget Commission has approved a P574 minimum monthly salary for public school teachers who hold B.S. in education. Increases in the salaries of superintendents, district supervisors, and school principals were also approved. In Metro Manila, Human Settlements Minister and Metro Manila Governor Imelda R. Marcos authorized a P600 minimum monthly salary for high school teachers and a P1,000 basic pay for doctors serving in barangay health centers. The increases took effect July 1, 1978.

New health centers

The Metro Manila Commission inaugurated 15 new Bagong Lipunan health centers in Metro Manila on July 2 to bolster health and medical services for residents of depressed areas. These were presented as a birthday gift to Human Settlements Minister and Metro Manila Governor Imelda R. Marcos. There are now 323 health centers in Metro Manila.