

Creating an Asean community

TWO days ago, Asean turned 45 and there has been much to celebrate since its inception in 1967. While its achievements so far have had a great impact on the people in the region, something more significant is set to happen in slightly more than two years' time – the establishment of the Asean Community in 2015.

The vision of an Asean Community was established by the leaders when they signed the Bali Concord (II) nine years ago where they envisaged the evolution of the grouping into a community. They realised that on our own, we would only too easily fall within the sphere of influence of the big and powerful as we were too small to compete effectively against the global economic giants.

The Bali Concord (II) envisages an Asean Community built on three pillars of cooperation: the Asean Political Security Community (APSC), Asean Economic Community (AEC) and Asean Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

The community was originally to be established by 2020 but the plan was brought forward to 2015 when three years ago the leaders agreed on the Roadmap for an Asean Community at Cha-am, Thailand.

All this is by way of background –

Malaysia is ready to take over the Asean chair in 2015 when the grouping is set to form a single community and much needs to be done.

but how will this impact on the lives of the citizens of Asean members?

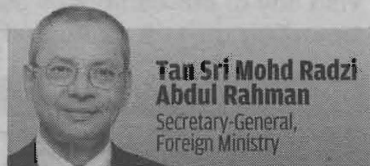
Under the APSC, the member states have pledged to regard their security as fundamentally linked to one another and bound by geographic location, common vision and objectives.

Working together with our neighbours to combat such threats as drug trafficking, terrorism and human trafficking augurs well for the Government's efforts to reduce crime as stated under the National Key Result Areas.

When we have an Asean Economic Community, we shall see a free flow of goods, services, investment and capital, equitable economic development through reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities.

The objective is to turn Asean into a single market and production base by harnessing the diversity that characterises the region into opportunities to turn it into a stronger segment of the global supply chain.

As a result of deepening integration, intra-Asean trade, which stood at US\$376.2bil (RM1.1 trillion) in 2009, leapt to US\$519.8bil (RM1.6



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trillion) in 2010. Foreign Direct Investments into the region have been rising, too, from US\$38.3bil (RM118.6bil) in 2009 to US\$76.2bil (RM236.1bil) in 2010.

The ASCC envisages a South-East Asia bonded together in a partnership founded on a common regional consciousness and identity. Fostering these require us to know one another better. Promoting tourism is one way of achieving this.

Of the 73.8 million tourists who visited member countries in 2010, 47% came from within the region. In comparison in 2007, of the 62.3 million tourists, 43.8% were from the region. So the trend is clear – more Asean citizens are travelling, and destinations within South-East Asia are the destinations of choice.

Indeed, for the past number of years, Malaysia has been the desti-

nation of choice. Of the 34.8 million tourists from Asean visiting other regional countries, more than half, close to 19 million, chose to visit our shores.

Come 2015, Malaysia will be the chairman of Asean and this means that we will have a significant role to play in the achievement of the community beyond 2015. Further, as our region becomes more developed, it will also increasingly become the object of attention. Recognising this, the Foreign Ministry is currently in the advanced stage of formulating a strategy for our chairmanship.

As part of the effort to formulate this strategy, Wisma Putra has had sounding-outs with various stakeholders, policymakers, the academia, NGOs, the private sector as well as the man in the street.

We have found that there are two main issues – the lack of awareness of Asean among people in the region and how best to get full involvement of people in the core processes of the grouping. Indeed, the Asean Charter speaks of the aim of promoting “a people-oriented Asean in which all sectors of society are encouraged to

participate in and benefit from, the process of Asean integration and community building”.

This is not to say that no efforts in this regard have been made. We have, for example, the Asean Social Forum, the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and Malaysia's own – the Asean Civil Society Conference/ Asean Peoples' Forum which is held on an annual basis.

But as our sounding-outs have indicated, more needs to be done.

Indeed, it is all too clear that the best impetus for moving the grouping's integration agenda forward is to utilise its best asset – its people.

Therefore, one of the main aims of Malaysia's Chairmanship in 2015 is to create not only a “People-Oriented Asean”, but a “People-Centred Asean”. As we move towards 2015, Wisma Putra and other relevant agencies will consult very closely with all stakeholders to achieve the goal of a “People-Centred Asean”.

Two thousand years ago, when the Roman Empire held sway, the proudest boast was *Civis romanus sum* (I am a Roman citizen). At the beginning of a New Asian Century, it is hoped that it would not be too ambitious to expect the peoples of Asean to one day proudly say in their own language, *Saya warga Asean*.