



Special Message



As we commemorate the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN this year, it is indeed timely to reflect on just how far we have come as a fledgling regional association all those years ago. Although my country has only been a member of ASEAN for 33 years, I have had the privilege of being the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam for the same length of time that the Association has been in existence.

Therefore, as a leader that had at first observed with great interest, and later on participated, in ASEAN's meetings and activities, I have had the pleasure of witnessing first-hand the remarkable geopolitical and economic transformation of Southeast Asia, which in my view has largely been aided by ASEAN's work.

It is remarkable to conceive that only half a century ago the region was blighted with ideological conflicts, hostile confrontations and a palpable atmosphere of suspicion. But now these circumstances have completely changed.

Our part of the world is a stable and economically vibrant community, in which our dialogue partners have placed their trust and confidence in us to lead the way in furthering and facilitating East Asian cooperation. And even though we are a grouping of only ten countries, ASEAN is a community of more than half a billion people with ethnicities, cultures and religions as diverse as the tropical rainforest that the region is shrouded in.

In light of all of this, it is difficult to downplay the significance that ASEAN plays in Brunei Darussalam's engagement with the international community. As one of the cornerstones of my country's foreign policy, we recognize that the Association gives us a platform where we are able to voice our views and concerns clearly and effectively.

However, I also acknowledge that it has not entirely been smooth sailing for ASEAN over the years. Whether it is managing territorial disputes, convening talks to reduce tensions brought about by regional flash points, or coordinating a response to transnational problems such as financial crises and haze, ASEAN has faced, and continues to face, its fair share of challenges.

But when my colleagues and I sought to address these problems collectively by leveraging on our respective strengths, we came to realize that our countries were able to grow stronger together. In this regard, my deepest thanks goes to the ASEAN ministers, senior officials and officers that have been an integral part in making this happen. It is important that we all continue to recognize that a robust region that is united in overcoming the challenges of tomorrow needs an ASEAN Community that puts the people at the heart and centre of its work.

As I read through the perspectives and views shared by such distinguished individuals on ASEAN's history and future, I am struck by the range of opinions and thought-provoking arguments made by my friends and colleagues. If you are interested in what lies ahead for ASEAN, I am positive that you will find such assessments valuable.

In this regard, I would like to wholeheartedly congratulate the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) and the Government of the Philippines for putting together this five-volume publication on retrospectives and perspectives on the making, substance, significance and future of ASEAN.

This tremendous body of work is a testament to the valuable efforts and contributions made by ERIA in promoting ASEAN awareness and regional integration. I have no doubt that this publication will be one of the main reference points for ASEAN-related issues for years to come.

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah
Prime Minister
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