

ASEAN Day Message
H.E. Deputy Prime Minister PRAK Sokhonn
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
Kingdom of Cambodia
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1. On 8th August, we are celebrating the 53rd anniversary of the establishment of ASEAN in the shadow of unfolding global multiple crises, marked by the Covid-19 pandemic and intense super powers' confrontation. Back in 1967 when ASEAN was formed, the Cold War loomed over all and the region was as well rife with tensions. Since then, ASEAN has grown from strength to strength, expanding both in size and scope. Driven by the desire to safeguard and advance the peaceful development for the region, ASEAN have been able to prevent the escalation of frictions and conflicts into wars through peaceful means and diplomacy.
2. Under the wise leadership of Samdech Techo Prime Minister HUN SEN, Cambodia was able to put an end to the civil war in 1998 and became the last member of the ASEAN family in 1999. The ASEAN Charter which entered into force on 15 December 2008 has given root to a new ASEAN and we moved steadily toward establishing the ASEAN Community in 2015.
3. With the inclusion of Cambodia, ASEAN is spread across 10 countries with unique and diverse social, economic and political structures and it is in fact this so cherished "Unity in Diversity" that has contributed to ASEAN's resilience and its deep sense of togetherness. One of ASEAN's defining features is the consensus-based approach, which ensure an equal voice for every single Member State, regardless of size or economic strength. ASEAN had not spared its efforts to bridge the development gap within ASEAN, through programmes like the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI). Cambodia, for its part, has contributed remarkably in the ASEAN community building process, in line with Cambodia's foreign policy principle of promoting an open, inclusive, and rules-based regionalism.
4. ASEAN has pursued regional and global issues and had ensured that it remains relevant and constructive within the wider international discourse. It has provided its member states an umbrella of security and strategic space to meaningfully engage with various competing partners that seek mutual interest with ASEAN, based on mutual respect and acceptance of ASEAN centrality. ASEAN will continue to deepen its

engagement with external powers, both regionally and outside the region. As populism, protectionism, and nationalism are on the rise, and the major powers are caught up in a tussle for dominance, ASEAN has become a new focus for the great geo-political confrontation and its unity is actually under stress. ASEAN should not be shy in upholding and advancing ASEAN Centrality by playing a constructive neutral role in this evolving regional architecture. After all, ASEAN is non-threatening and it does enjoy good relations with all the major and middle powers.

5. Guided by this year's theme "Cohesive and Responsive", ASEAN stood united in its efforts to confront a fresh set of challenges. It has taken concrete measures to coordinate regional emergency responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in order to save lives and livelihoods of people. Its decades-old multi-sectoral and multi-layered mechanisms have enabled ASEAN to manage and coordinate effectively regional policy responses. The Covid-19 ASEAN Response Fund and the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases, as well as a comprehensive economic recovery plan are such great examples.

6. Particularly on the economic front, ASEAN is one step closer to the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement later this year and will work on expediting negotiations on the newly-launched ASEAN-EU FTA. ASEAN is embracing its steadfast partnership with the United Nations to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ASEAN is harnessing opportunities emerging from the digital technology and the increasing regional connectivity.

7. As we raise the ASEAN flag high on this special occasion to celebrate our achievements so far, we do realize that our work is far from complete. We have built a diverse yet stable community, we have grown as a strong region that engages the world and shapes the regional and international order, we have forged a credible and effective organisation, trusted and respected by our development partners, we have come a long way to secure a place in the world, and a brighter future for all our peoples. We have all the fundamentals to realize our Community Vision 2025, which envisions an ASEAN that is a peaceful, stable and resilient outward-looking region within our global community of nations.

Happy ASEAN Day!!
