

Historical Background

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, was formed in Bangkok in 1967. ASEAN began its work in January 1968. The original objectives of ASEAN as stated in the Bangkok Declaration were: (1) to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region, and (2) to promote regional peace and stability. A major ASEAN accomplishment, over the years, has been to moderate the antagonistic attitudes between the countries of the region. They have succeeded in preventing the escalation of conflicts which had been a major cause of regional disputes such as Indonesia's "Confrontation" with Malaysia and the Philippines' claim to the Malaysian state of Sabah.

In 1971, the Foreign Ministers of the five founding members of ASEAN signed the Kuala Lumpur Declaration calling for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), with the aim of keeping the region free from any power rivalries. The idea has developed as an important objective of ASEAN in the view of the committee members in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in 1978. In February 1978, at - 2 - the summit meeting of the ASEAN Heads of Government was held in Bali where they signed a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation which established mechanisms for settling disputes.

**ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST  
ASIAN NATIONS: A PROFILE**

The second ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in 1977, reaffirmed the directions established in Bali. The Kuala Lumpur Summit also affirmed the importance of "dialogue" with countries outside the region, particularly Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan and the U.S.

The third ASEAN Summit was held in Manila in December, 1981. The Manila Declaration gave new impetus to regional economic cooperation and approved amendments to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation to facilitate greater contacts and cooperation between ASEAN and other countries, particularly within the Asia-Pacific region.

Political Cooperation

It is in the area of political cooperation that ASEAN has had its most remarkable success. Regular meetings of Foreign Ministers, Economic Ministers and other senior political and government officials have been institutionalized. ASEAN cooperation now extends to various international fora such as the UN and the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as to the activities of ASEAN missions in foreign capitals.