

## GUEST EDITORIAL

# MEDICAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH EAST ASIAN NATIONS (MASEAN)

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The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) came into being when the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand agreed on the ASEAN Declaration or as it is more commonly known 'the Bangkok Declaration' on 08 August 1967. The formation of ASEAN was based on the premise that cooperation among nations in the spirit of equality and partnership would bring mutual benefits and stimulate solidarity which can contribute to building the foundation for peace, stability and prosperity in the world community at large and in the ASEAN region in particular.

Initial doubts and criticism combined with a host of teething problems to make for slow progress. Differences in culture, language, religion and historical past contributed to poor understanding and poor communications to delay early mutual cooperation projects ranging from economic matters, scientific and technological joint research projects to youth seminars and film festivals. Though the painfully slow quest for economic, social and cultural cooperation in the first ten years had no 'achievements' to speak of, on reflection today, the first decade allowed the evolution of the ASEAN identity and the development of an 'ASEAN SPIRIT' of mutual trust, solidarity, understanding and close cooperation.

It would not be unfair to state that ASEAN as a regional organisation for economic, social and cultural cooperation only gained recognition after the Bali Summit in February 1976 when the ASEAN Heads of Governments undertook to consolidate, expand and accelerate the ASEAN activities in all fields by drawing up new directions for the implementation of ASEAN projects. A permanent ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta as the central machinery for the Association was also established after the Bali Summit. Another historic event for ASEAN was the Kuala Lumpur Summit held on 04-05 August 1977 to celebrate the tenth anniversary. The Kuala

Lumpur Summit of ASEAN Heads of Governments reviewed the work and overall progress of the Association especially the resolutions adopted at Bali the year before. The continuation of ASEAN cooperative efforts toward peace, stability and progress in the region gained impetus and international awareness at this second summit when the Heads of Governments reaffirmed their commitment to the programme of development in the forthcoming decade; it further ensured that further exertions would be pursued to translate the ASEAN aspirations into concrete actions.

### ASEAN Development

From inception, a policy-making body and a number of Permanent, Special and Ad-Hoc Committees were established as the machinery to carry out ASEAN aims and activities and to look into all possible aspects of cooperation. Consequently, ASEAN has issued a great number of recommendations and has approved many cooperative projects.

The projects of ASEAN concern economic cooperation and development with the intensification of trade among member countries and between the region and the world; joint research and technological programmes; educational exchanges; cooperation in transportation and communications; the promotion of tourism and South East Asian Studies; developing beneficial dialogues and cooperation with other countries and regional and international organisations and cultural, scientific and administrative exchanges. Many of the approved projects have already been successfully implemented whilst others are underway and several agreements on different subjects were signed among member countries in the past.

In the realm of politics, the major initiative of ASEAN was the proposal to neutralise South East Asia. The collective scheme developed in 1971 at the initiative of the late Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdul Razak, who appealed for

the recognition of South East Asia as a 'zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality'. The result has been the signing of one of the most significant documents in the development of ASEAN - the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on 27 November 1971. Another historic attempt of ASEAN to secure more durable peace and stability in the region was the joint effort in 1973 to find a peaceful solution to the wars in Indochina by formulating the ASEAN Coordinating Committee for the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of Indochina States (ACCRRIS). Successful attempts were also made to normalise relations with China and other countries in East Asia and the Pacific region. Very recently, the European Economic Community (EEC) and ASEAN held their second meeting of ASEAN-EEC Foreign Ministers in Kuala Lumpur at which both the regional groups condemned the military intervention in Afghanistan and also urged the speeding up of the implementation of the United Nations' resolution on Kampuchea.

The practice of cooperation and consultation through ASEAN has succeeded in an increasing degree of political cohesion among the member countries of ASEAN. ASEAN can now claim to have grown over the years into a significant and constructive force in South East Asian politics, able to assume an appropriate role in finding indigenous solutions to many common problems and to promote peace, stability and strength to the region. To surmise, ASEAN is now at the stage where the habit of consultation on all matters of common interest has become normal practice among its member countries whose increasing collective efforts and responsibilities have thus enabled ASEAN to become a cohesive and dynamic regional organisation.

#### **1979 & 1976 Summit of medical presidents**

The medical fraternity in ASEAN has not been idle. The "ASEAN spirit" had also infected medical practitioners and in early 1976 a summit of the presidents of national medical associations in ASEAN was convened in Jakarta after which a Statement of Intent was issued whereby the national medical associations pledged to study the feasibility of establishing the individual medical organisations of their countries into a

cooperative association. They envisaged that the proposed cooperative association would serve as a forum for the exchange of views, information and resources which would in turn lead to a pooling of talent and resources to formulate programmes and researches culminating in projects and joint efforts designed and agreed upon to improve the services in health care delivery to the people of ASEAN.

#### **ASEAN Congress of Anaesthesiologists**

Though the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA) holds a World Congress once in every four years (on a leap year) and the Asian and Australasian Region of the WFSA also has a regional congress once in every four years so that biennially there is a Congress for anaesthesiologists to attend to update their knowledge of recent advances in anaesthetic drugs and techniques and the anaesthesiologic care of patients, very few anaesthesiologists in ASEAN actually attend such events. Opportunity, the high cost and time would appear to continue to preclude participation in these meetings in far-off places. To overcome this lack of opportunity to meet with each other and to exchange scientific information, concerned anaesthesiologists in ASEAN met in Kuala Lumpur in 1977 to discuss the organisation of a regular meeting among ASEAN anaesthesiologists.

Thus, the anaesthesiologists in ASEAN held the First Asean Congress of Anaesthesiologists in Manila from 02 to 05 December 1979 in which 'Training and certification of anaesthesiologists in ASEAN' was the main theme. This symposium allowed participants an insight into the different educational systems in practice in the different member countries of ASEAN. It also provoked an interesting discussion on the objectives and results of postgraduate training in anaesthesiology in ASEAN member countries. Over fifty papers on different aspects of anaesthesiology and intensive care were presented and this very successful meeting ended with the establishment of a Confederation of Asean Societies of Anaesthesiologists which aims to promote closer ties amongst ASEAN anaesthesiologists and to effect and maintain high standards in the training of anaesthesiologists and in the practice of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care in the ASEAN region.

The very evident desire amongst the medical fraternity to forge closer ties was manifest at the recent "preparatory meeting" of ASEAN medical associations hosted by the Indonesian Medical Association in Jakarta from 29 February to 01 March 1980. The chief representatives of all the five national medical associations in ASEAN agreed to call the Confederation 'MASEAN', drew up its Constitution and Bye-Laws, discussed ways of making MASEAN viable and meaningful to medical practitioners and the people of ASEAN and assigned a project to each member-association to undertake in line with the objectives of the Confederation. A pro-tem committee was also elected to serve the Confederation until the Inaugural Meeting of MASEAN on 10 April 1980 in Penang, Malaysia when designated office-bearers will be elected to serve two-year terms.

The successful permeation of the 'ASEAN SPIRIT' of mutual trust, solidarity, understanding and close cooperation has led the medical associations in ASEAN to realise the establishment of MASEAN. It is hoped that MASEAN will not confine itself to cooperation and ex-

change of views and facilities at inter-medical association level. Identification of common problems in medicine (and their solutions), joint studies on controversial issues such as quality control of drugs, availability of drugs, traditional medicine, etc, are just as needed as practical schemes for the continuing education of doctors, utilisation of recognised centres in postgraduate training in the different medical specialities, elevation of the standards of practice, standardisation of ethics and laws and regulations affecting medical practice and programmes to assist the Governments in the delivery of health care to the people of ASEAN. May MASEAN live up to expectations in the years to come ....

## REFERENCES

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- Statement of Intent, 1976, Berita MMA Vol 7 No 6 (March/April 1976)
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