Forging Deeper Ties: The ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit

By Yu Myung-hwan

Leaders pose for a group photo before the first session of the ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit on June 1, 2009.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Dato’ Sri Mohd Najib, Prime Minister of Malaysia; Thein Sein, Prime Minister of the Union of Myanmar; Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines; Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore; Abhisit Vejjajiva, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand; Lee Myung-bak, President of the Republic of Korea; Nguyen Tan Dung, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam; Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, Sultan of Brunei Darussalam; Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia; Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, President of the Republic of Indonesia; Bouasone Bouphavanh, Prime Minister of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.
OVER THE LAST TWO decades, tremendous progress has been made in relations between the Republic of Korea and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on a wide range of issues. In particular, Korea and ASEAN upgraded their relations with the adoption of the “Joint Declaration on the Comprehensive Cooperation Partnership” in 2004. Our economic partnership has been further developed through the conclusion of the ROK-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement on Trade in Goods and the Agreement on Trade in Services, which came into effect in 2007 and 2009 respectively. Yet, we are not simply satisfied with what we have achieved so far. We recognize that there are limitless possibilities for an even stronger partnership. Indeed, this was clearly demonstrated by the adoption of the Joint Statement as the outcome document at the conclusion of the ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit, which includes a variety of initiatives for future cooperation.

The summit was particularly meaningful in that it offered an opportune occasion to promote the implementation of the “New Asia Initiative” that was announced by President Lee Myung-bak in March 2009. In recognition of the growing importance of Asia, this initiative aims to enhance our

In celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Korea-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership, the “ASEAN-Republic of Korea Commemorative Summit” was held June 1–2 on Jeju Island. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea Yu Myung-hwan outlines how the summit could prove to be a milestone in ushering in a new era of even stronger cooperation between Korea and ASEAN.
substantial cooperation with all the countries of the region and with ASEAN in particular. ASEAN leaders also welcomed this initiative and committed their support at the summit. Henceforth, the Korean government will further implement the outcomes of the summit in the following ways with the “New Asia Initiative” as a main vehicle for cooperation with ASEAN countries.

First, President Lee announced the Korean government’s plan to further strengthen development cooperation, thereby laying the foundation for common prosperity and an even more valuable role in the international community. To this end, we have formulated a policy guideline to expand our Official Development Assistance (ODA) towards ASEAN countries. This is now reflected in the policy document of the government’s Initiative for Development Cooperation. Korea’s development assistance will be provided in the form of projects and programs tailored to the needs of recipient countries, taking into account the differing stages of development in each country and their priorities.

Furthermore, additional specific programs will be designed to share Korea’s invaluable development experience, which it gained in overcoming poverty and underdevelopment in a relatively short period of time. As a part of these efforts, we intend to invite 7,000 trainees from ASEAN countries to visit Korea, while we will dispatch a total of 10,000 Korean volunteers to the ASEAN region by 2015, under the “World Friends Korea” initiative. Also, with a view to supporting ASEAN’s efforts to build the envisioned “ASEAN Community” by 2015, the Korean government will bolster its contributions to the “Initiative for ASEAN Integration” with the aim of narrowing the development gap between ASEAN members.

Second, Korea and ASEAN agreed to promote substantial cooperation in a number of fields, including economic and socio-cultural issues. In particular, the Korean government will strengthen its economic relations with other Asian countries with an emphasis on forging FTA networks - one of the three main objectives of the New Asia Initiative. In this regard, the ROK-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement on Trade in Investments signed on the sidelines of the summit holds great significance because it will establish an institutional framework for Korea and ASEAN to move toward a full-fledged economic partnership. Furthermore, the CEO Summit, attended by more than 700 CEOs from Korea and ASEAN, has provided a useful forum to explore business opportunities and establish private sector networks. Based on the outcomes of the CEO Summit, the Korean government will continue to support various programs to forge networks between the businesses of the two sides.

In addition, in order to enhance mutual understanding between the peoples of Korea and ASEAN, and to nurture even stronger ties, the leaders at the summit agreed on the need to pro-
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Remote cultural and people-to-people exchanges. This will serve as a solid foundation to sustain thriving economic relations also. In this regard, President Lee presented Korea’s policy document for the Initiative on Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges with ASEAN. One of the main elements of this initiative is the goal of doubling the number of students from ASEAN countries invited to Korea under the “Global Korea Scholarship” program by the year 2012. In addition, the Korean government will increase the ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Fund to $5 million annually from the current $3 million. Furthermore, the leaders agreed to make optimum use of the ASEAN-Korea Centre, established in Seoul as an international organization last March, so that it develops into a key focal point for the expansion of cultural exchanges.

Third, Korea and ASEAN leaders used the summit to identify efficient ways to address such issues as the global economic and financial crisis and climate change. In addition, one of the main pillars of the “New Asia Initiative” is to enhance cooperation with other Asian countries in international forums, forming multi-layered networks to deal with key global issues. In this regard, the eleven leaders at the summit agreed that more integrated efforts are essential to tackle a host of current global challenges.

In particular, President Lee elaborated upon our vision of “Low Carbon, Green Growth” as a way to strengthen cooperation with ASEAN in response to climate change and to ensure sustainable growth. We believe that we should work together to turn the challenges posed by climate change into new opportunities for common prosperity. The Korean Government has pledged to provide $100 million out of the planned $200 million budget of the “East Asia Climate Partnership” for the coming four years to assist ASEAN countries in their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change. The Korean government’s pledge was also reflected in the Policy Document on Korea-ASEAN Low Carbon Green Growth Cooperation.

Many people believe that Asia will be the world’s growth engine in the 21st century. Our cooperation with Asian countries is assuming ever greater importance not only due to the region’s increasing significance as a center of the global economy but also because regional cooperation is needed to solve global challenges. In the process of cooperation with Asian countries, ASEAN, in particular, is one of the most important partners for Korea.

Under the theme of “Partnership for Real, Friendship for Good,” the Commemorative Summit and the series of bilateral talks held on the sidelines of the summit provided an invaluable opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the interests of ASEAN and Korea and to consolidate friendly ties among the peoples of the two sides. Building on this, I firmly believe that translating the vision of the leaders and the agreements they reached at the summit into concrete action will indeed strengthen the deep bonds of friendship between Korea and ASEAN, benefiting both sides in a whole range of areas.

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