

Cambodia-Asia Economic Forum kicks off



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PHNOM PENH: The 8th Asia Economic Forum kicked off here on Saturday, focusing on reviewing the ASEAN achievements in the past 45 years and looking at opportunities and challenges toward the realization of an ASEAN community by 2015.

The 2-day forum has been attended by some 300 economists, academics, researchers, and policy makers from Asian countries, Xinhua reported.

Haruhisa Handa, advisor to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and chairman of Asia Economic Forum, said the forum, under the theme "ASEAN in the Evolving Regional Architecture: Opportunities, Challenges and Future Direction", aimed at examining how ASEAN has been able to develop and transform itself in the past 45 years of its existence.

It would also look at ways to enhance ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional architecture and identify ASEAN's future priorities and challenges toward the realization of an ASEAN community by 2015, he said.

Moreover, the forum would deliberate on how ASEAN can strategically best engage its dialogue partners in the coming years, and at the same time to play a positive role in its relations with the major powers in the region.

Speaking at the opening of the forum, Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Keat Chhon, Minister of Economy and Finance, said the ASEAN has made tremendous progress in all areas of cooperation in the last forty-five years, but challenges are still ahead toward a community.

"Since its inception in 1967, the ASEAN has not only accelerated the pace of diplomatic prominence, the rise of its profile internationally, but has also had a great impact on major power relations in the region and the wider world," he said. "The bloc has achieved many goals, but with those successes, it does not mean there are no challenges."

He said ASEAN needed to strengthen its participatory capacity in global solution cooperation reflecting the contribution of ASEAN to global affairs, in which prestige and role of ASEAN will be further enhanced at international arena.

Those global affairs include economic crisis, climate change, natural disaster management, prevention and combat of contagious disease as well as fighting against crime and cross border terrorism, he said.

In addition, the minister said, ASEAN has to speed up the process of dividing development gap among ASEAN member countries, which is prerequisite requirement to ensure regional competitiveness and rationalization of regional integration and implementation of action plan of ASEAN integration initiatives.

“ASEAN is an important player in the region among other successful organizations in the world. I strongly believe that ASEAN community will be realized in next two years,” he said.

The forum was founded in 2004 by a Japanese Haruhisa Handa, advisor to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and president of International Foundation for Arts and Culture, and has been held every year in Cambodia, organized by the University of Cambodia and sponsored by the International Foundation for Arts and Culture.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.