

Speech by ASEAN Secretary-General at Launch of ASEAN COCI Portals



(Singapore, 16 November 2007)

Southeast Asia is home to more than 500 million people and has some of the world's richest and most diverse cultures. It spans three time zones and ten countries that are multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual. It is not only the peoples of ASEAN but also those outside who are interested to gain an insight into ASEAN, its culture and heritage. This is especially as ASEAN, which is 40 this year, becomes more well-known.

There are numerous books, documents, references and other forms of materials that you can draw from to seek a better understanding of the region. But there is no easy or convenient point of entry on the internet for people to get reliable information, knowledge and appreciation about the region and its myriad cultures.

Over the years, the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information or COCI has set up several websites with the aim of raising public awareness about ASEAN through the internet, and to maintain a database on ASEAN culture and information. Most of them have gone offline; they also are out of date. With ASEAN celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, this is perhaps an appropriate time to launch the revamped COCI website or what's known as the ASEAN Culture and Information Portal, together with the new ASEAN Media Portal. The aim is to provide one-stop destination for the public seeking information and understanding of ASEAN, its culture and heritage. This is a work in progress; more content will be provided in future.

The two portals complement each other. The ASEAN Culture and Information Portal showcases the richness and diversity of the region through its traditional festivals and cuisines for example, as well as the activities by COCI to promote ASEAN. The COCI also has teamed up with ASEAN Dialogue Partners in some of the activities. Earlier this year, in April, ASEAN and China collaborated to hold a joint cultural performance and symphony orchestra in Angkor, Cambodia. Audio and visual materials of the ten Member Countries are made available through the new ASEAN Media Portal. Among other things, the visitor can view heritage and arts video clips, and even digitized manuscripts from libraries in ASEAN.

The portals have been made more appealing to tech-savvy youths - with interactive games that they can play and at the same time, allow them to learn more about the region they live in. Through the use of multimedia, ASEAN youths also get to showcase their talents via the COCI website and the media portal.

Some of you may know about the ASEAN Television News exchange. This is where the national broadcasters of member countries contribute stories about what's happening at home to the exchange and broadcast stories from other member countries. Now, if you'd missed these stories, you could find them on the COCI website. In time to come, radio programmes to promote ASEAN under the ASEAN-In-Action programme also may be made available.

In conclusion, ASEAN is 40 this year - middle-aged as some would say - but after 40 years, ASEAN awareness among the peoples in the region is still low. This is where we hope that the ASEAN Culture and Information Portal, enriched with audio/visual content from the ASEAN Media Portal, will strengthen their knowledge and understanding of the region they are living in, the diversity yet similarities in their cultures and heritage, the talents of the youths of today who will be our leaders of tomorrow, as well as provide a source of inspiration for future endeavours. It'll bring us one step closer to realising ASEAN's objectives - to bring ASEAN closer to the peoples and to forge a common identity and community.

Thank you.