

Postscript

Two significant events related to Myanmar's accession to ASEAN occurred in late 2003 and early 2004. In June 2003, unexpectedly, the 36th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting issued a joint statement in Phnom Penh, demanding the release of the opposition leader of Myanmar. Many ASEAN watchers consider this unprecedented for the regional organization which, for the first time in more than three and a half decades, was talking about other than non-interference in the domestic affairs of a member country. On the other hand, some analysts do not consider this as interference since the Myanmar government had given consent to the statement.

However, three months later, the ASEAN Summit at Bali changed the earlier joint statement of the ASEAN foreign ministers by hailing Myanmar's "Road Map to Democracy" on 7 October 2003 (*The Nation*, 8 October 2003). This was also unprecedented for ASEAN.

Almost three-quarters of a year later, another significant event occurred. As mentioned earlier in this book (p. 42), Myanmar has again become a bone of contention for the ASEAN-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the EU refused to attend the biennial summit in October 2004, in Hanoi, if Myanmar participated as a member of the Asian team (which would allow Myanmar to attain membership of ASEM). The EU stated that it would not attend because there had been no political reform in Myanmar. The EU even cancelled two earlier ministerial meetings, which were supposed to prepare the economic and commercial substance of the summit in Hanoi. In response to the EU's statement regarding Myanmar's participation, the ten Asian nations which belong to the eight-year-old ASEM insisted that Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos should be allowed to join the club since they were new members of ASEAN, if the EU brought its own ten new members to the meeting. The Asian team criticized the EU's double standards. According to Reuters (19 July 2004), in April 2004 the EU demanded the release of the opposition leader and the participation of the largest opposition party in the ongoing National Convention (where principles for drafting the new constitution are under discussion) as conditions for allowing Myanmar to participate in the

2004 ASEAN Summit. The Asian members of ASEM took offence at the EU's attempts to set conditions for Myanmar's participation in ASEM.

Most of the ten new EU members are from Eastern Europe, and acceded to the Union only on 1 May 2004. Currently, the Asian members of ASEM include seven ASEAN nations (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) and three East Asian nations — China, South Korea and Japan. Vietnam is a member of ASEM because it was already a member of ASEAN when ASEM was established in 1996.

In fact, the EU has sanctions on Myanmar by maintaining an arms embargo and targeting high officials of the military regime through an assets freeze and visa ban. However, as this book goes to press, both parties were seeking for an acceptable compromise since the meeting is crucial for cooperation between the two continents on political, security and economic issues.