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Southeast Asia **in a** **New Era**

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Southeast Asia **in a** **New Era**

Ten Countries, One Region in ASEAN

EDITED BY
RODOLFO C. SEVERINO,
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Foreword

Unlike most of the existing publications on ASEAN, this volume focuses not on ASEAN as a regional entity but on the ten countries that compose the whole. It is this approach that makes this an interesting and useful volume, and which complements well the recently published *Know Your ASEAN* (ISEAS, 2007) as up-to-date, informative and accessible resource materials suitable for students and the general public. With ten in-depth studies of the states that make up ASEAN, this volume offers the reader a useful ground-level view of the different and distinct parts that constitute the region and the regional grouping.

The country studies deal with historical evolution, development strategies, political systems and national characteristics (accompanied by useful statistical data and chronologies) of the member states of ASEAN. They reveal the similarities of regional environment and experience, as well as the commonness of purpose and challenges, that underpin the desirability of and, indeed, the need for tighter and deeper regional co-operation. At the same time, specific national interests and varying domestic priorities of the different states are the very factors that often come in the way of collective regional objectives.

ASEAN has indeed come a long way since its establishment in 1967. At forty years, it is on the threshold of a new era. An ASEAN Charter has entered into effect, reflecting a greater sense of common purpose and belonging among its member states, and there is high expectation for Southeast Asia to collectively become an essential part of Asia's inevitable economic and political ascendancy this century. Has ASEAN consolidated and defined Southeast Asia as one unified region? The answer lies not in the rhetorical expression for "ASEAN-ness" based on an imagined identity but in the realities embedded in the individual countries that make up ASEAN. Different levels of economic development, pace of liberalization and the state of governance of its members are challenges to the forging of a truly cohesive and effective ASEAN community. The fulfilment of effective regionalism will depend ultimately on finding congruence and complementarities among a range of sometimes incompatible economic and political structures, interests and priorities. To understand ASEAN and how it functions, one needs, therefore, to know its constituent parts. Herein lies the value of this compilation.

ISEAS must be congratulated for publishing in quick succession a number of useful and accessible volumes that will surely enhance knowledge of ASEAN and its composite parts and support that indispensable educational process that will contribute to greater understanding and awareness of what it means to be a citizen of ASEAN.

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Preface

This book arises out of the conjunction of several events and objectives. The events include the celebration of ASEAN's fortieth anniversary as well as ISEAS' own fortieth anniversary in 2008: what better way to commemorate these two significant anniversary years than a solid book on our region, published by ISEAS?

The aims of this book include our desire to contribute to ASEAN community building, as expressed in the declared objective to construct the three ASEAN communities — security, socio-cultural and economic — by 2015. Communities need to be founded on solid understanding, cooperation and trust between the peoples who comprise these communities. For that to happen, mutual knowledge and understanding have to exist and to grow. This book aims to enhance knowledge, especially amongst the youth, of the ten countries that make up ASEAN.

A second major aim, as stated by the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE), is to teach our students about our neighbours. ISEAS has thus aimed at achieving this national objective through this book, which has benefited from tapping the expertise of ASEAN scholars and national perspectives in writing and producing an accessible and interesting book.

Southeast Asia is a vibrant, rich and fast-developing region that dominates vital international sea-lanes. There are many fascinating stories to be told about each of the ten ASEAN members. This book delivers these narratives in a readable discourse about the struggles for independence, development, peace and prosperity undergone by each country. We hope that the public and the students will enjoy and learn from this user-friendly book.

Finally, I wish to thank the three editors, Mark Hong, Visiting Research Fellow at ISEAS, Rodolfo C. Severino, Head of the ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS, and Dr Elspeth Thomson, Senior Fellow at the Energy Studies Institute and Visiting Research Fellow at ISEAS, for their hard work in editing this book, ably assisted by Miss Stasia Stanislava, ISEAS intern,

and Benjamin Tang, ESI energy economist, as well as all the paper writers and the ISEAS Publications Unit.

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