
UNIT 27 REGIONAL CO-OPERATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASEAN

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27.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit introduces you to Regional Cooperation in general and Southeast Asian region in particular. After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Explain the genesis of the concept of the regional cooperation and circumstances leading to form such associations.
- Attempts to form regional cooperation in Southeast Asia and analyse its evolution and the emergence of ASEAN.
- Discuss the various objectives of the ASEAN, the problems faced by the organization in achieving those objectives, the role of outside powers and its achievements and problems.

27.1 INTRODUCTION

You have already learnt something about the composition of the Southeast Asian region, the names of the individual countries which come under this region, government and politics in Southeast Asia, patterns of economic and political development, ethnicity and nation building and dynamics of state-civil society relationship. In this unit we try to explain the circumstances leading to the formation of a regional cooperation by these countries and examine the aim and the problems before them to achieve their objectives, the role of outside powers, etc.

27.2 GENESIS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

The most conspicuous development in the field of international relations, beginning in the post-war period has been the proliferation of organisations for regional cooperation. The term region may be defined as a convenient geographical area controlled by sovereign governments whose interests in an particular subject are

sufficiently compatible for them to be able to enter into effective multilateral cooperation. Regional cooperation is a term covering any inter-state activity with less than universal participation for certain common goals.

Regionalism started to develop in the early 1960s, first in Latin America and later in other parts of the developing world. In the 1970s, a series of global economic crises, touched off by the first oil price adjustments, hit many developing countries very hard. The turbulent world economy of that period proved to be a great incentive to regional cooperation efforts in the Third World. The crisis clearly demonstrated that national economies were closely interdependent. At the same time developing countries being mostly small to medium-sized with weak economic structures, felt vulnerable to the deteriorating international environment. Hence they inclined to seek more autonomous means or greater self-reliant patterns of development. When national self-reliance policy was found difficult to pursue, self-reliance on a regional basis seemed to be an acceptable alternative. This idea was incorporated into the new international economic order.

Many developing countries were affected in varying degrees by the increasing number of global issues involving primary commodities, foreign investment, transfer of technology, protectionism, economic aid and so on. The idea to forge regional groupings was mooted in the belief that some of the fundamental problems of trade and economies found in most of the developing countries like foreign exchange and balance of payments problems, commitment to rapid development and industrialization etc. could be partially solved with regional cooperation especially in the light of economic predominance of the West and increasing protectionist tendencies in the developed countries. Regionalism also frequently helped in forging politically unified stands on international issues and for the security of the region. Regionalism was emerging as a counter to the activities of the superpowers. Regional organizations were becoming the best insurance for the security of developing countries against superpower interference.

There was therefore, a clear need for them to organize themselves to deal with those vital international economic issues collectively in order to secure a better leverage vis-a-vis the developed countries or other interest groups.

The bases and rationales for regional cooperation differ substantially from region to region or case to case. Hence the various schemes should therefore be judged for success or failure in accordance with the institutional conditions and economic problems specific to the individual regions. Above all, the progress of economic cooperation should not be measured in purely economic terms but should be put in the larger context of the political reality and historical circumstances from which such efforts have evolved.

Regional economic cooperation has by now become widely accepted as an important instrument and potentially an effective means of facilitating development in a group of Third World countries. Regional economic cooperation in the countries of ASEAN has stood out in recent years as a relatively successful experiment in the Third World. It has been actively pursuing its efforts to improve the regional cooperation.

27.3 SOUTHEAST ASIA AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

Southeast Asia has a much longer history of experiments with regional cooperation. Since World War-II, when Southeast Asia first came to be thought of as a regional entity. The thrust towards regional cooperation has often been marked by conflict and uncertainty than confidence and purpose. Partly this has been a consequence of the diverse motives that have given birth to regional bodies. For example, externally inspired offshoots of the Cold War and the desire of the United States of America to contain the influence of China-like the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and the Asia Pacific Council (ESCAP, formerly ECAFE) started. Finally, the indigenous regional bodies like the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), MAPHILINDO (Organisation consisted of Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia) and later their successor the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) came into

existence. As an indigenous grouping, ASEAN is the most significant and successful regional cooperative initiative to date. Most of the organizations of the Third World are ineffectual both politically and economically, with the possible exception of ASEAN.

27.4 ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA (ASA)

The first experiment which was more largely and genuinely Southeast Asian and did not have politico-military objectives was ASA. ASA came into being with the Bangkok Declaration of 31 July, 1961. Its prime mover was the Prime Minister of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman, who had been chasing such a dream since 1958. It consisted of Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines. The objective of the ASA was to promote cooperation in economic, social, cultural, scientific and administrative affairs. The ASA was first of its kind, for it was organized exclusively by Asians unlike other regional organizations, which included outside powers. Its stated objectives emphasised cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, scientific and administrative fields while its unstated aim appeared to be keeping as low a political profile as possible. An approach, at once both practical and modest, it was with slight differences, to be the forerunner of ASEAN's modus operandi.

With the incorporation of Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo (later renamed Sabah) was about to become the Federation of Malaysia but the Philippines objected to this, claiming that Sabah was part of its territory. But with the blessings of the United Nations, Malaysia got formed, an event which enraged not only the Philippines but also President Sukarno of Indonesia who launched an aggressive policy of "confrontation" with Malaysia. Ultimately the association became inactive because of Indonesia's "confrontation" with Malaysia and the dispute between Malaysia and the Philippines over Borneo. It could not survive also because of fierce opposition of the Indonesian President, at that time Sukarno, and to the American military connections of Thailand and the Philippines.

27.5 MAPHILINDO

But the next major experiments largely rooted in Southeast Asia was MAPHILINDO. MAPHILINDO was the short form for Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. Its aim appeared to be to bring together the three Malay majority countries of Southeast Asia. To this extent its objective was political, but it was not military; nor very much was it economic. It was formed in 1963. Amidst the growing turbulence, another try was launched in 1963 to attempt to defuse the growing tensions over the formation of Malaysia. In a meeting in Manila between the foreign ministers of Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines; the idea of a Pan-Malay Union of the three nations, the Greater Malay Confederation was born. In any case MAPHILINDO was short lived because of two limitations. First, since its emphasis was on bringing together the three Malay countries, it did not have much appeal for non-Malay Southeast Asia, such as Thailand and Singapore, not to speak of the Indo-China states. Second, it still contained the differences over the Sabah issue. Thus the formal establishment of Malaysia (16 September, 1963) saw the demise of the Pan Malay organization.

The Post-Maphilindo period was marked by a high degree of suspicion and mutual distrust among the member nations. It was against this backdrop that the ASEAN got formed.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space provided below each question to give your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the Unit.

- 1) Name the two early regional organizations of Southeast Asia.
- 2) Which were the member countries of these organizations?
- 3) Which of the following would you regard as true?

- A) Regional Organization emerged mainly due to
 - a) Social reasons
 - b) Political reasons
 - c) Economic reasons
- B) Regional Organizations were started in
 - a) 1960s
 - b) 1970s
 - c) 1980s
- C) Regional Organizations were first started in
 - a) Africa
 - b) Latin America
 - c) Asia

27.6 ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN)

By the time ASEAN came to be thought of, Southeast Asia had been clearly divided into two sub-regions. First, the smaller but politically conspicuous sub-region of the Indo-China states, (viz., Laos, Cambodia and both Vietnams) and second the larger, politically more diverse but decidedly anti-communist Southern sub-region consisting of the countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines which were later to form ASEAN.

This divide within Southeast Asia was a reflection of a larger divide in the world as a whole between the communist and anti-communist powers. The 1960s saw US military offensive to fight the so-called communist menace and expansion in the Indo-China region was in full fury. There were also clear indications that the US was fighting a losing battle. The five countries which had opted for a pro-western and anti-communist foreign policy stance were in a jittery state. Their fear psychosis coincided with the US strategy—the need for bringing the pro-US regimes together. Hence in regard to the formulation of ASEAN by the five countries, the development were not natural and independent. It was more a reaction to the tensions and turmoil in the area generated by extra-regional factors that led to its formation.

In 1967 ASEAN was formed as a successor to the ASA. The basic difference was the membership of Indonesia and Singapore in the new organization. Brunei became the new member country of ASEAN in the year 1984 when it gained independence. The total population of ASEAN countries at present is roughly 316.651 million and its total GNP per capita is US \$984. The ASEAN has its secretariat stationed at Jakarta. The ASEAN organization was not formed as a military alliance nor as a political bloc.

The objectives of ASEAN as stated in the Bangkok Declaration of 1967 was to bring forth economic, social and cultural cooperation among the member states with the aim of speeding economic development and socio-cultural progress in the region. But the transformation of ASEAN over the years into an organization with broader aims and objectives is now beyond dispute. Member states no more confine cooperation in spheres of socio-cultural and economic activities but also extend these to political security and strategic fields.

All the ASEAN countries except Thailand, were former colonies with experience of British, Dutch, French and American rule. These different socio-economic background had affected their economics. Till the mid-sixties, the ASEAN region was in an atmosphere of political instability. By the early 1960s the US was deeply entangled in the Vietnam War and there were popular mass uprisings all over Southeast Asia. Indonesia, the largest country in the region, had adopted “guided democracy” with a strong anti-colonial and anti-imperialist posture. The confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia, the ethnic problems in Malaysia and the dispute over Sabah, with the

Philippines and their involvement in the Vietnam War, the political alliance between Jakarta and Beijing basically directed against the West, all made Southeast Asia one of the most volatile regions of the world. The Americans had considered the Southeast Asian countries vulnerable dominoes. There was a general shift in the US policy in the mid-sixties, from purely defence parameters to socio-economic consolidation in Southeast Asia.

In 1967 strong indications started coming from Indonesia toward regional cooperation and it wanted talks to be centered around ASA with an idea of expanding ASA to involve Indonesia and some other countries of Southeast Asia. ASEAN, in view of earlier failures adopted a cautious move with a neutralist posture. Two patterns evolved gradually from the position of neutrality and ambivalence. Firstly, multilateralism on an expanded scale offered the legitimate basis for the continued Western presence and support. Secondly, given the limitations of reconciling limited resources, ASEAN saw itself not in terms of contributing to intra-regional self-sufficiency but in terms of intensifying its dependence and stronger trade links with the West. Western guidelines for modernization came to be the underlying principles for regional economic development, and private enterprise started taking a leading role in this process. Ultimately it became a forum of economic self-reliance to economic alignment with the West. While the Communist countries sharply criticised the formation of ASEAN, the US and Japan supported it.

ASEAN leaders in their official pronouncements have time and again denied that ASEAN was meant not for military purposes but for economic and cultural cooperation.

27.7 NEUTRALIZATION PLAN

ASEAN had endorsed a proposal originally formulated by Malaysia in 1971 (known as the Kuala Lumpur Declaration) that Southeast Asia be declared "a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) free from any form or manner of interference by outside powers."

27.8 SOUTHEAST ASIAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREE ZONE (SEANFZ)

In the 1987 Manila Summit, the ASEAN members urged for efforts towards the early establishment of a Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. Indonesia explained it as an expansion of ZOPFAN. ASEAN member nations shared the view that SEANFZ would only be effective if it covered the whole region, including non-ASEAN countries such as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

ASEAN recognised that security and stability of Southeast Asia are the collective responsibility of the countries of the region. Hence the member countries should resolve their differences among themselves through peaceful means. Though member countries have no dispute regarding the concept, they differed in their views about its implementation because of their linkages with big powers.

Initially ASEAN was looked upon by the countries of Indo-China, namely Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, as pro-West and anti-communist organization because they were formed by anti-communist countries and supported by the United States. Hence till very recently the two groups of Southeast Asian region viz, the ASEAN and the Indo-China countries were critical of each other and they held entirely divergent views towards the regional and global issues.

ASEAN countries agreed on 15 February, 1973 in its Foreign Ministers Meeting to hold an Asian Forum and to expand its membership to cover all countries of Southeast Asia viz., the three Indo-China countries and Burma.

But the overthrow of Pol Pot's Government and the subsequent Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia caused great uneasiness in the ASEAN countries. The

ASEAN countries adopted critical attitude towards the Vietnamese action in Cambodia and Soviet Union's support. The event also deepened the split in the communist world.

They called for the early establishment of an independent and neutral Cambodia with a genuinely independent government, free of all foreign military presence and maintaining friendly and peaceful relations with all countries in the region.

27.9 ROLE OF BIG POWERS IN THE REGION

Southeast Asia has been a cockpit of big power rivalries in local conflicts. Given the critical importance of the major powers, role on the question of peace and stability in Southeast Asia, their perceptions vis-a-vis the region and vice versa are important.

Till very recently while welcoming Moscow's interest in forging links with states in the region for the benefits of peace and stability in the region, ASEAN called for Moscow's efforts in a search for a peaceful settlement of Kampuchean problem and its support to Vietnam. Lingering fear and mistrust of China's motives were there in some countries. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a consensus that as a friend or foe, China was a "permanent" factor in the region's political and economic development. Economically stronger China had both positive and negative consequences for the region.

Given the memory of the Second World War, the prospect of Japan's expanded security was still a sensitive issue in Southeast Asia. Japan, however, was recognised as the economic dynamo of the region. ASEAN thus preferred that Japan should continue to focus on its contribution to regional development and co-operation.

The US military presence in the region symbolised US commitment to its own as well as the security of Southeast Asia. Hence any weakening of that capability became a matter of security concern. Equally important was ASEAN's trade with the US and trade related disputes.

Due to their increasing desire to accelerate their economic growth, the major powers were becoming more attracted to Southeast Asia. In the eyes of all major powers, Southeast Asia still retained its strategic role as possible choke points for oil tankers and naval ships travelling between the Persian Gulf and Northeast Asia. Moreover, ASEAN was viewed as a stabilising force in the region due to its economic dynamism and its collective political strength. All major powers wanted to be good with ASEAN. The negotiations started at the beginning of 1980 to solve the Cambodian problem and the eventual changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union brought changes in the perceptions of ASEAN and Indo-China countries towards each other.

In its annual ministerial conference held in July 1991 ASEAN for the first time invited representatives of the Soviet Union and China to attend the Conference.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use space provided below each question to give your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the Unit.

- 1) Which were the two sub-regional groups of Southeast Asia during the emergence of ASEAN?
- 2) Who are the member countries of ASEAN?
- 3) What were the original objectives of ASEAN?
- 4) Which were the countries outside the region who supported ASEAN?
- 5) What are ZOPFAN & SEANFZ?
- 6) (Read the following carefully and mark the correct answers)

Which of the following would you regard as true?

A) ASEAN came into existence in

- a) 1967

- b) 1977
 - c) 1987
- B) ASEAN invited representatives of USSR and China to take part in its ministerial conference for the first time in
- a) 1971
 - b) 1981
 - c) 1991
- C) India became the sectoral partner of ASEAN in
- a) 1973
 - b) 1983
 - c) 1993

27.10 LET US SUM UP

The end of the cold war brought new challenges for Southeast Asia and ASEAN. The trend towards regional trading blocks in the world provided both ASEAN and Indo-China with common ground for increased regional cooperation. ASEAN was actively engaged in regular talks with its dialogue partners, the US, Japan, European Economic Community, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. ASEAN had become equally important as a friend to the countries in Asia. It made India its sectoral partner in January 1993.

Nurtured over 25 years, the organization's collective spirit has not only earned it world recognition but also lowered the potential for regional dispute significantly. This is by and large due to ASEAN'S policy of consensus.

However ASEAN is an young organization compared with the successful ones as the European Economic Community. Therefore, it is difficult to measure its progress in very concrete terms, and even more difficult to measure its performance with others.

There were some reasons for ASEAN's success; viz., consensus functioning, common international outlook, mutual respect among its members and growing personal contact between politicians, businessmen and academics of the member-states of ASEAN.

ASEAN has come a long way to exist as a viable regional grouping serving basically the member-countries' political and security purposes, though the founding fathers of the association claimed and proclaimed the objectives to be economic and cultural.

27.11 KEY WORDS

- Regionalism** : Feeling of belongingness to a region or an area.
- Protectionism** : An act favouring the protection of trade by duties.
- Neutrality** : One who takes or favours a neutral position or not involved in a dispute or siding either party.
- Multilaterism** : Interacting with several countries, parties or participants.

27.12 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Dehl, Amfinn T., 1982, *Regional Organization and order in Southeast Asia* (Macmillan, New york).

Leifer, Michael, 1980, *Conflict and Regional Order in Southeast Asia* (International Institute of Strategic Studies, London).

Peter Polomka, 1975, *ASEAN and the Law of the Sea : A Preliminary Look at the Prospects of Regional Cooperation (Occassional Paper No.36, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore).*

Sengupta, Bhabani, ed. *SAARC-ASEAN: Prospects and Problems of Inter-regional Co-operation* (South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1988).

United Nations, *Regional Industrial Cooperation : Experience and Perspective of ASEAN and Andean Pact* (Industrial Development Organization, Vienna, 1986).

27.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) ASA, MAPHILINDO
- 2) (ASA) Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines (Maphilindo) Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia.
 - A) a) 1960s
 - B) b) Latin America
 - C) c) Economic

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) First the Communist Indo-China bloc consisting of Laos, Cambodia and the two Vietnams. Second the non-Communist countries of Southeast Asia consisting of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore.
- 2) Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines and Brunei.
- 3) Economic, Social and Cultural
- 4) USA & Japan
- 5) ZOPFAN—Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality; SEANFZ — Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone.
- 6)
 - A) a
 - B) c
 - C) c