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ASEAN COMMITS TO CLOSER COOPERATION WITH CHINA, JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

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The foreign ministers of ASEAN, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea here Wednesday expressed continued commitment to the ASEAN Plus Three process.

The foreign ministers of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) met with their counterparts from China, Japan and South Korea at the Seventh ASEAN Plus Three Foreign Ministers' Meeting here on Wednesday.

In a chairman's statement issued after the meeting, the ministers noted with satisfaction the progress achieved in ASEAN Plus Three cooperation over the past nine years, which covers 16 sectors and has 48 mechanisms to facilitate and implement the cooperation.

The ministers welcomed the establishment of cooperation in four new sectors under the ASEAN Plus Three framework, which are cooperation in rural development and poverty eradication, women issues, disaster risk management and emergency response, and minerals.

Thailand and the Republic of Korea will organize the East Asia Cultural Week separately in 2007 to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the ASEAN Plus Three cooperation.

The ministers reaffirmed the urgent need to address energy security issues as the increase in oil prices has highlighted the need to search for alternative sources of energy.

The energy ministers of ASEAN Plus Three are due to meet on July 27, 2006, in Vientiane, Laos, to discuss energy security issues.

The ministers welcomed the convening of the East Asia Summit as a forum for dialogue on broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest with the aim of promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia.

The ministers reiterated their consistent position that the next United Nations Secretary-General shall be selected from an Asian member state of the UN.

They also discussed the preparations for the Tenth ASEAN Plus Three Summit and the Second East Asia Summit, which will be held on December 11-13, 2006, respectively in Cebu, the Philippines.

Since 2000, the ASEAN Plus Three Ministerial Meeting, namely between the ASEAN foreign ministers and foreign ministers of China, Japan and South Korea, has been held on the sidelines of the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conferences. This meeting focuses on broadening the ASEAN Plus Three cooperation, including discussion on East Asia community building.