How crucial are agendas for the East Asia Summit?

By Beginda Pakpahan

Indonesia hosted the 6th East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bali on Nov. 19, 2011, with four crucial agendas for the participating world leaders.

The priority agendas are the strengthening of collective security in the East Asia region; development of economic partnership among EAS countries; cooperation in cross-cutting issues such as climate change and energy allocation; and the EAS evolutionary architecture.

Strengthening collective security in the East Asia region is a must. East Asia is a dynamic region that has its own security challenges, such as the Korean nuclear issue, democratic reform in Myanmar and tensions in the South China Sea.

These issues have been broadly discussed both at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Summit, and the East Asia Summit will be an effective forum to reach better understanding and to build confidence among actors within the region.

The EAS can serve as a diplomatic outlet to discuss and to build a concrete peace solution for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula since China, the US, Japan, South Korea and Russia are also part of the EAS. Their diplomatic influence can be used to build confidence with North Korea over the question of its nuclear program. The EAS also can be a forum to discuss the latest progress in the implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea between ASEAN and China.

The EAS can also closely monitor the recent developments in Myanmar, which has taken positive steps toward democracy. The EAS can collectively support ASEAN to ensure positive engagement with Myanmar for implementing its road map to reform its government system toward democracy.

The development of an economic partnership among EAS countries is a main agenda, given the fact that the East Asia region has gradually become a center of commercial and investment activities in the world.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership in East Asia and the East Asia Free Trade Area are the two main economic initiatives in the region. However, these plans would not be effective without the connectivity between ASEAN countries and East Asia countries.

This connectivity can be implemented through transportation, supporting infrastructures and investments. ASEAN has focused on linking countries within Southeast Asia. This agenda may be expanded by including East Asia countries.
The next target is to realize all the above plans through concrete and detailed actions. The leaders of EAS can make plans of action to implement these agendas into real programs.

The third agenda is the long-term cooperation on the cross-cutting issues, such as climate change, energy resources and disaster management. The EAS can make clusters of cooperation among governments and non-state actors based on issues, such as a climate change cluster, an energy cluster and a disaster management cluster. The aim is to develop various cooperative networks in each cluster to link up together within the framework of the EAS.

These clusters can share their views, experiences and concrete plans of action within their own cluster. Then, if they need to discuss cross-cutting issues, they may meet among all clusters. These clusters can be an effective means of interaction for governments and non-state actors to collaborate in tackling common challenges in the region.

The EAS evolutionary architecture is another pressing agenda. The EAS will need to figure out what kind of form it will take. The EAS is still an evolving regional architecture.

The leaders of the EAS may project the future of the EAS when they meet in Bali. They can make the EAS a focal point that can assemble and connect other existing regional forums, such as ARF and ASEAN+3. Bear in mind, ASEAN should be a driving force in the process of EAS development. ASEAN has a central role in shaping and driving the EAS toward a more solid structure.

The reason as to why the role of ASEAN is crucial in this process is because ASEAN can be an axis of regional architecture in the region. The EAS should have an inter-connection with ARF and ASEAN+3. The security talks in the EAS will be connected with ARF in order to build confidence among members in the EAS and ARF. The economic agendas in the EAS can be supported by real programs in ASEAN+3. In short, these diplomatic forums should not be overlapping but complement each other.

In conclusion, we hope that the EAS will achieve positive plans of action that may be implemented by all members in the near future. These plans of action should also contribute to the human development in East Asia. Moreover, the acceptance of new members, the US and Russia, would bring more balance to the interaction among actors within the EAS, which may foster the creation of a solid East Asia cooperation.

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(Published at the Jakarta Post, 19/11/2011)