

Introduction

During the meeting between ASEAN Foreign Ministers and their Japanese counterpart at the ASEAN Secretariat on 9 April 2011, ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan conceived the idea of a Caravan of Goodwill, to visit the devastated areas of Northeast Japan. The vision was to convey ASEAN's solidarity and support for the victims of the deadly 11 March earthquake and tsunami.

The Caravan took off this early this month—where members left their families for the 4-days Ascension Holiday weekend to support this matter-of-the-heart mission. The Caravan was anchored by the youth of ASEAN, and volunteers from all 10 ASEAN Member States, to help clear some of the debris around the evacuation centres—actually and emotionally. They cooked and served ASEAN dishes to the affected residents; performed by singing and dancing; sharing goodies with children gifted from other ASEAN staff unable to join in person.



The aviation Caravan was backed by Air Asia and Thai Airways. The Air Asia Caravan ferried volunteers from Jakarta, Aceh and Timor L'este, to Kuala Lumpur, where they were joined by participants from Malaysia and Brunei. The whole group then flew to Haneda, Tokyo, to meet the second group of 20 volunteers flown-in by Thai Airways. The combined group of volunteers then rendezvoused with 26 ASEAN students studying in Japan.

For the next 3 days, the entire ASEAN Caravan travelled in 2 buses to Miyagi Prefecture.

Instead of issuing a news release, we have decided to present the notes,

THE JOURNEY'S JUST BEGUN

For many of the volunteers, the Caravan of Goodwill was a journey that will shape their lives. The outreach to the victims, the bonding with their hosts and fellow Caravaners, and above it all, the friendship made over the trip, would be remembered for a long time.

Not surprising, many have already posted their experiences and pictures on Facebook, to share the memories with friends old and new. Here are some of the few links to our young friends of ASEAN:

BLOG

Annisa Hara (Icha)

<http://worldofchacha.wordpress.com/>

Calvin Ong

<http://calvin-myjourney.blogspot.com/2011/06/asean-youth-caravan-of-goodwill.html>

FACEBOOK

Annisa Hara (Icha)

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150190929809118.313044.532084117>

Calvin Ong

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150274593532386.375434.536342385>

Adelina Kamal

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150196139031269.304234.522741268>

Raja

<http://www.facebook.com/feeds/notes.php?id=100002517039763&viewer=100002517039763&key=AWgf7qKpZfzEuCs0&format=rss20>

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.103630736397494.5648.100002517039763&l=9e4a71e6c6>

Mutia Razali

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150200976227635.311085.632422634>

Our volunteers have shown not just the friendship and commitment of ASEAN towards an old friend, Japan. They have also shown the indomitable human spirit in the face of adversity. Over the span of a few days, they have proudly displayed the ASEAN spirit, walking the talk of working as One Community.

communications, remarks and responses in their original form, to remember this very special landmark event, where the people of ASEAN reach out to the Japanese people.

The *Caravan Diary* aims to capture the during and after-visit spirit—as well as the greater unity of those touched by this mission--Students, artists, ... through their blogs, Caravan Facebook, photo sharing, relationship bonding, and so much more.

To Japan, ASEAN remember your assistance and contributions over the years. At your time of need, we will not let you stand alone.

“Move Towards Hope”

An original composition by
ASEAN DSG Bagas Hapsoro,
for the Japanese victims and people.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXxzc8Yvnmw>

*"I can see...The flowing of tears as they drop to the ground
I can feel...The pains as you are suffering from losing everything"*

Let us join the journey with the Caravan Diary...ASEAN's trip of solidarity and hope with Japan.

THE CARAVAN DIARY
Fri, 3 Jun 2011, 03:35, Japan

Dear all.

I thought you might want to know how yesterday was. So here is a brief report.

We are all safely tucked away in Tokyo now! The storm has abated. Both the groups flying on Air Asia and Thai Airways arrived in Haneda within half an hour of each other. There was a slight drizzle.

My group on Thai Airways left Bangkok at 2.30pm after much media attention. The contingent from Thailand comprised mostly young men and women, who were survivors of the Phuket and Panga tsunamis. Thai Airways had arranged a big send-off, and the famous Thai movie star, "Pancake," dropped in for photos with us. The second surprise was when SG (ASEAN Secretary-General, Dr Surin Pitsuwan) turned up. He was on his way to Jakarta, and took the opportunity to send the group off. "Pancake" and SG will join the Caravan in Sendai tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the second group on Air Asia led by Adelina landed in Haneda not long after we did. The Indonesian Caravaners included our own ASEC (ASEAN Secretariat) volunteers, Aceh survivors and well known celebrities like Padi and Derby. They had flown from Jakarta and Aceh to KL (Kuala Lumpur), to pick-up Bruneian and Malaysian volunteers.

After we met in Haneda, both groups morphed into one ASEAN group, as we boarded the bus arranged by the Royal Thai Embassy, and headed to Hotel Villa Fontaine. We were finally settled in our rooms around 1am.

The coordination has been nightmarish, but as I looked back at yesterday's operations—which involved 2 regional carriers, the media, our embassies in Tokyo and Japan's embassies in ASEAN, regional celebrities and very young survivors of the 2004 Tsunamis—I cannot help but describe it as a classic manifestation of SG's idea of dynamic engagement. Here is a good example of people-to-people cooperation, with the help of the ASEAN governments as well as Japan.



Despite the late turn-in, we will have an early first morning in the land of the Rising Sun. At 7am, we will meet the third group of volunteers—ASEAN students studying in Japan—at the Nippon Foundation, before we start our journey through the disaster areas of Yamamoto, Watari, Iwanuma, Natori, Tagayo and Shichigahama in Sendai. It would be a historic journey and we have plans along the way to stop at one site to pay our respects to the victims of the multiple disasters.

Ciao. Raja

Response to Raja's Entries

Dear Pak Raja,

I was very touched by your story. Thank you for sharing your first-hand information, where you had stayed up late to complete. The enthusiasm and dedication by the Caravaners led by SG are enormous. Surely, our hearts go with you all and reach our Japanese brothers and sisters, Pak Raja.

*Best regards,
Bagas*

(Bagas Hapsoro, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for Community & Corporate Affairs)

THE CARAVAN DIARY
Sat, 4 Jun 2011, 00:51, Japan

Dear All,

We started very early yesterday, leaving the Hotel Villa Fontaine in Tokyo at 7am, loaded with all our necessities. We first stopped at the HQ of The Nippon Foundation for a briefing, and to rendezvous with 26 students from the various AMS (ASEAN Member States) studying in Japan. They had signed up for the Caravan, when they heard of the initiative. In fact, we were over-subscribed by 10 people. All of them speak Japanese, and they wanted to do something for the country that had taken care of them. Several of them told me that they had been waiting for such an opportunity.

It was interesting to see how the three groups interacted. Any potential language barriers had dissolved, as the Young ASEANS converged as one. Credit must go to the founding fathers of ASEAN, who decided right from the start that English shall be our common working language.

After the briefing, we collected our breakfast boxes, took a group picture and head to Sendai.

The weather was great, and the scenery beautiful. But the view changed dramatically as we reached the outskirts of Sendai. At Natori, where the scale of devastation was severe, we stopped for about half an hour. All around us, the destruction reminded us how the earthquake and tsunami had wrecked the people and their lives. Nothing was intact. The efforts of the relief workers were dwarfed by the sheer magnitude of the havoc.

Where could they move the debris to?
How do you revive farmland bleached by seawater?
How do people go back to the livelihoods they had depended on for generations?

We were told that it's almost three months after the quake and tsunami, and thousands are still housed in evacuation shelters, fortunately they had these centers because they had nowhere else to turn to.

The stark landscape brought great sadness and tears to the Caravan members. Some were reminded of their trauma from the Boxing Day earthquake and tsunami in December 2004. Six of our members came from Aceh, and a dozen were from Phuket and Phangga – all bore the brunt of the 2004 disaster.

All of us prayed in silence for the victims. On behalf of the mission, Adelina and I laid flowers at the Natori site and prayed that all the victims rest in peace.



Our next stop was Sendai city, which still carried some scars of the earthquake. But it was spared the devastation of Natori, and managed to stay operational. Caravan members were billeted at the Hotel Metropolitan Sendai.

Shortly after checking-in, we gathered to prepare activities for the following day. There will be 3 main events: the Takidashi and mud-digging at Ishinomaki, and the thank you party at the hotel. The volunteers were mainly divided into 2 groups—the younger and more robust volunteered for the hard manual labour of shoveling and removing mud and debris from the evacuation center, while a second

group to prepare ASEAN food and getting them ready to serve the 150-300 residents expected to turn up for the Takidashi. Caravan members will also perform some dances and songs for the residents.

T-shirts, caps and ASEAN flags were distributed. For those involved in the mud-digging they were issued rubber boots, gloves, masks and protective outfits, to make sure the highest standards of hygiene and safety were observed.

We were also expecting some Japanese volunteers to join us for the evening music fest, enhancing the people-to-people contacts.



All around me, the sense of purpose, dedication and enthusiasm was infectious. Members of the Caravan had met less than 18 hours, but they are clicking as one focused and dedicated unit. Our Japanese colleagues were also simply marvelous, assisting us in whatever way they can. The Japanese and ASEAN media were also out in force, filming the day's activities. After a most tiring day, everyone was given the evening off, so that they could have dinner on their own in Sendai.

But the excitement of the day was still rushing through me. Shortly after 1 am, I thought I felt an aftershock! Never mind, if it was my imagination, I would find out soon enough at breakfast. As I stayed up to write this note, it dawned on me I had never thought that a safe and sound sleep could be a luxury. It is certainly so for those living in constant fear of human or man-made calamities.

Raja in Sendai City, northeastern Japan.

Response to Raja's Entries

Raja:

Totally agree with DSG Bagas about his sentiments.

You daily report is heart-warming and the dedication the ASEAN troop is a reflection of the ASEAN Community spirit, and it argues well for a people-centred ASEAN.

There are no other activities like this to mobilise our ASEAN citizen, especially the young. It will leave a lasting impression on all and help carry on the future of our community building efforts.

We must do some op-eds on this as well as a video, which can be shown at the AMM and ASEAN-Japan FM meeting.

*Keep writing as your write-up really means something to us who are not there.
We feel connected in every way.*

*Thanks and all the best to SG and the troop.
ASEAN we are one and ready to help our friends.*

Nathan

(Pushpanathan Sundram, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Economic Community)

THE CARAVAN DIARY
Sat, 4 Jun 2011, 16:44, Ishinomaki, Japan

Dear all,

So I wasn't having a nightmare! There was an earthquake measuring 5.6 on the richter scale. But nothing to be concerned about.

We started early again this morning, leaving Sendai for Ishinomaki at 7am. Over the two-hour journey, we witnessed stories of human chemistry and spontaneity. Heartwarming to say the least. Who said that the Japanese people are reserved? Certainly not in Ishinomaki!

ASEAN volunteers were divided into 2 groups. The first of over 30 was the muscle group – taking care of physically demanding tasks of mud-digging, and clearing debris. They focused their attention on the vicinity of the evacuation center, as this would create a better environment for the residents. I did not notice any division of labor between the men and women. Even the 14 and 16 years old volunteers were giving their older counterparts a run for the money. Group 1 sweated it out all day from 9 am to 3pm.

While Group 1 labored away, Group 2 had zoomed in on the kitchen to help the cooks prepare satay, phadthai, fried rice and other delicacies. The cooks came from a local restaurant, and the Thai ambassador's cooks to lift the already fine-cooking to a new high!

Amidst the action in the field and the kitchen, our volunteers also set up a makeshift stage for the singers and dancers.

To make sure that no one is left out of the fun, another group of volunteers went house-to-house to invite the residents to the special ASEAN lunch. The personal invitation worked very well. The first residents came at 11.30am, and by 1pm, a long queue had formed. By 2pm, we estimated that more than 200 families had come. And they were not disappointed, as ASEAN performers put up an unforgettable show.



Rappipong from the Thai embassy started with the Thai harp. There were classical Balinese and Thai dancers. Su ZarZar, a Myanmar student studying musicology, put up a splendid string performance on the saunggauk, the Myanmar harp. And showing the resilient human spirit, our Aceh survivors performed the Saman dance known as the dance of “a thousand hands” for their Japanese counterparts.

After the traditional and classical performances, it's time for pop!

Twenty-year-old Indonesian pop and movie star Derby and Padi's singer and bassist, got everyone tapping and swaying with his songs. Ronnel, our visually-impaired BABA colleague from the Philippines managed with some oldies. DSG Bagas special music VCD was a hit, and copies of the video were snapped up.

To show their appreciation for the ASEAN effort, some residents decided to rally around their senior neighbor on their harmonicas, and put up an impromptu performance for the visitors. The local young ladies also displayed their traditional costumes for their new-found friends.



When Dr Surin, Mr Yohei Sasakawa, chairman of the Nippon Foundation, and Thai movie star “Pancake” arrived, they immediately rolled up their sleeves and joined Group 1 in mud shoveling. Only when they are satisfied that they had done their share, did they proceed to the Takidashi by to join the festivities. The singing, dancing and eating continued until 3pm. Our Caravan gave out caps, t-shirts and other goodies from ASEAN well-wishers unable to take part to all those who joined the takidashi. Many friendships were made today amidst great warmth.

Many say the Caravan idea is a great idea in enhancing bilateral ties between ASEAN and Japan. More importantly, it had built a bridge among the youth of ASEAN, and their Japanese friends. It was also a real-life experience about engagement, about the role of civil society, about the common travails of survivors, and about volunteerism.

We have now arrived at the hotel and I must stop. We are set this evening to show some videos and play some music and to meet some Japanese volunteers. More on that later.

Thank you. Raja

Response to Raja’s Entries

Dear Raja,

A beautiful and important story. Many thanks for sharing.

*What you all did is of an historic nature, people to people encounters.
And the value of the event is also that it was publicized.*

*Catastrophes do provoke people to react in a way which underline their humanity,
and thus they do contribute to change the world.*

The relations between Greece and Turkey did somewhat change after the earthquake.

Best regards

Jean

*(Jean F. Freymond, President,
Network for Governance, Entrepreneurship & Development)*

THE CARAVAN DIARY
Sat, 4 Jun 2011, 16:44, Ishinomaki, Japan

Dear Friends,

...I had stopped at the Takidashi and mud-digging activity in Ishinomaki. That same evening, time had been set aside for the ASEAN 70 odd strong Caravaners, immediately after a hard day's work, to meet 30 Japanese volunteers invited to the dinner reception hosted by the Nippon Foundation.

Among the guests were 7 survivors of the Kobe earthquake who wanted to share their experiences with members of our group. There was a big buffet spread for the over 130 people there. In his welcome remarks, Caravan leader Dr Surin encouraged the singing of the ASEAN anthem and urged the ASEAN youth that they all should learn the song by the time we met again next year! Mr Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of TNF, said he is inspired whenever he meets young people and could go on talking endlessly. Without any script, he provided inspirational words to the young audience. Then it was a night of enchantment.

Maybe some would have described the "dirty dancing" as downright scandalous. But that would perhaps have been an error of judgment. After all Dr S and Mr S were there to lend substance to the talent that existed in the group. Both were inspired to join in the dancing as well. "Pancake" gave a sing and dance routine with our very seemingly quiet Phuket/Panga survivors, who with a sudden burst of hidden wild energy provided support in the background. What a talented bunch of dancers! It was all spontaneous, not practiced. Many others took their turns to sing and dance, with songs and dances all "made in ASEAN!" Two fun filled hours of revelry ended after Derby and the famous Padi singer Fadly and bassist Rindre got everyone to join in the singing. The night had to end early because the hall was booked only for two hours.

The Caravaners continued the night on their own. I know one group led by the harp-playing Myanmar students studying in Japan went to a karaoke place, while Padi ended in a jazz bar jamming with the local musicians. Music makes the world.



Response to Raja's Entries

Dear Raja san,

I am ever so grateful for the detailed account of the weekend ASEAN Caravan! I am writing to thank you, as well as to ask for your permission, to share your messages with our students at the Diplomat School for Interpreters (President Ms Fujiko Hara) for the following reasons: They will be made aware of the reality in the disaster-stricken area and also be known of the valuable goodwill activities of the ASEAN 10 youth led by Dr. Surin, Mr Sasakawa and yourself, not to mention all the other hearts of goodwill, that is not broadcasted on our daily news media and I am under strong conviction that these are the messages that must reach the Japanese people if we are to become a true member of the international community.

Your messages will give our young people a sense of "bonding" as humans, as neighbors—that Dr Surin time and again has mentioned—and exposure to the goals for which both Dr Surin and Mr Sasakawa are dedicating their lives for. Hoping to hear from you with a positive answer, Raja!

*With warm regards,
Kana Hirano (Interpreter for Mr Sasakawa)*

THE CARAVAN DIARY

Sat, 4 Jun 2011, 16:44, Ishinomaki, Japan

Dear all,

Standing on top of the Hiyoriyama Hill in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, overlooking the scene of devastation that lies beneath, the entire port area was completely leveled, miles and miles of debris and twisted steels and wreckages of cars, boats and warehouses/factories, beyond our sight. We can feel the ferocious force of the earthquake and tsunami immediately and personally!



Our own Caravan Members, many of them survivors of Boxing Day Great Indian Ocean tsunami were speechless, in awe and in disbelief. Those from Phang-Nga and Phuket, Southern Thailand, were sobbing out-loud, reminded of the loss of family members of their own. Acehnese survivors cried out: "Allahu Akbar (God is Great)" also in pain of similar memories almost 7 years back.

For me, ASEAN has to be also a centrality of compassion and a fountain of goodwill. No level of prosperity or political stability or security can shield our people against such an unpredictable and untamable Power of Nature. Only the genuine human bond can sooth us and strengthen our will to start anew. The ultimate loss cannot be redeemed, but the bond of humanity can help absorb the pain and grief.

ASEAN dares to dream, we are fond of saying. ASEAN cares to share, we croon out in our Anthem. ASEAN has to reach out, not only to reap benefits from the extended network of friendship, but we must also exert ourselves to embrace others in need of warm embrace and genuine sentiment of care and compassion.

Only 72 of us representing 600 million! Meaningless in number, but a powerful gesture that ASEAN care. And we struggled to come on our own, by ourselves, just to be able to hold hands and look into the eyes of the survivors here in Miyagi and community along the Northeastern Coastline of 300 kilometers, and softly tell them: We are sorry for what has happened. We have been through it before. Japan has been so generous to our people. We just wanted to return the Goodwill.



That message has been delivered clearly and strongly more than any amount of donations we have made so far.

Thanks the ASEAN-Japan Foreign Ministers for endorsing this initiative. ASEAN aspires not only to contribute to the global economic and political community, but also to be an active member of a global humanitarian alliance.

Sawadee to all.

SG (ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Surin Pitsuwan)
Sendai, Miyagi, Tohoku, Japan.

Response to SG's Entries

Dear SG,

Most welcome, Sir.

I admire your leadership and hard work.

I heard from some volunteers that all social events and humanitarian mission were successful.

Glad that a large number of local citizens were present last night.

Full of festivity. Satays, Pad Thai and all of our goodies were all distributed until there were none left.

I am truly proud of SG's collaboration with the artist present, in performing "Bengawan Solo" song.

Equally happy to hear that my song was performed by our friends and was played on VCDs.

I am sure you all are exhausted by the long bus rides and early morning's activities,

but I am also very pleased to hear that no one was sick.

I will see you in Jkt.

Thanks and regards,

Bagas

(Bagas Hapsoro, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN
for Community & Corporate Affairs)

Dear Dr Surin,

You may not receive this for a few hours yet, but I must emphasize that your direct involvement, passion, concern for the welfare and interest for both Japanese survivors and Caravaners, comradeship and selfless dedication—amongst many other things I can add—have been the ingredients for the great success in promoting this Caravan of Goodwill.

When the Caravan disbands tomorrow as participants return home safely, I hope everyone understands you have only just started—not ended—a voyage of great importance, with young passengers who hold only a shovel in one hand, sincerity in the other and music in their hearts to make Sendai, Asia and indeed the world a better place.



As we parted last night under the shadows of the Tokyo Radio tower after dinner, I could not help expressing hope that your partnership with another great visionary and humanitarian, and someone we both have as a friend—Mr Yohei Sasakawa—will be the tower of inspiration for cementing ASEAN-Japan people-to-people solidarity, and for rebuilding lives and livelihoods in Japan and ASEAN.

This demonstrates people power across boundaries.

I know that even as you boarded the plane and fiddled with your blackberry until the plane takes off, your concern was only for our young Caravaners on Air Asia and Thai Airways because of our limited resources, and whether they had dinner or some yen to buy that bottle of water. Don't worry I am sure our innovative ATM approach will take care of that!

The greatest gift you and Mr YS have given, the young especially, is this opportunity of doing something for a higher cause. Their lives have been enriched for all and live changing for a few. This in my consideration is a precious gift. Thanks. I have one more day of work at TNF before I end my "Caravanning"!

*Raja in Villa Fontaine,
where the Caravan took off from Tokyo.*

Dear SG Dr. Surin,

By reading heartwarming reports from you, Raja and other people, I cannot but feel emotional full of thanks to you and all those who volunteered to join and help the Caravan.

"Arigatou ASEAN." You are our true friends. Japan will never forget compassion, kindness, sympathy, solidarity—all those invaluable parts of humanity that ASEAN has shown to us through the Caravan.

Once again, "Hontouni Arigatou": a thousand thanks to ASEAN from the bottom of our hearts.

With my highest regards,

*Takio Yamada
Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN*

THE CARAVAN DIARY
Sun, 5 Jun 2011, Tokyo, Japan

Dear All,

I want to thank everyone for a most unusual journey we have ever made by the ASEAN Secretariat. Would not have been possible without your help. Many of you above and beyond the call of duty.

Please extend my appreciation to all involved—including all the participants. They are superb and in best of spirit.

Thank you all.

*SG ASEAN
On Board Air France from Tokyo to Paris and Budapest.*



Response to Caravan Diary Entries

Dear Dr. Surin and Raja,

Thank you for including me in your list of recipients of your precious messages!

It was the happiest weekend for me in all the decades of my life that I have been fortunate to live in happiness, and to have received your daily reports makes it a memory I shall cherish forever.

I have been blessed and enriched to have been able to know both of you, and that grows every time I meet you both.

I was especially touched by "Papa Surin"—worried after your Caravan children after their arrival in Tokyo. Have they eaten? Are they seeing the Ginza? Will they be alright until their plane leaves?

They have to wait for so long until their plane leaves at midnight...while you yourself had to rush to catch your own plane, not for home, but to another important meeting in Bucharest.

I am one very fortunate Japanese that has been given an opportunity to work close to Mr Sasakawa and his staff at the Nippon Foundation....

*Thanking you once again,
yours sincerely,*

*Kana Hirano
(Interpreter for Mr Sasakawa)*

THE CARAVAN DIARY
Sun, 5 Jun 2011, Singapore

Dear Friends,

We started the day a little more leisurely than over the previous 2 days as this was our final day in Japan. After Dr Surin spent some time riding with the Caravaners in the buses to share experiences and get feedback, we broke up into 2 parties. The 2 buses headed for Matsushima to observe some of the recovery efforts in that area before heading for Tokyo and Haneda to catch their midnight flights to Bangkok/KL/Jakarta/Aceh.

Since most of the Caravaners had not been to Japan—least of all been on an aircraft—they did a bit of sight-seeing. In Tokyo they went through the Ginza district before heading for Haneda airport.



Dr Surin, Mr Sasakawa and I headed for the city of Onogawa in the northeast where some of the worst destruction had taken place. **It was more like an annihilation or a scene from a war zone after being bombarded by aircraft. Little was spared. Cars were seen atop 5-storey buildings and houses moved from their original positions. About 1,000 people are said to have perished or are missing in this small community.** We viewed the destruction from a hilltop some distance from the sea.

We were given some other information and statistics. About 6,000 people lived in the city. It is famous for its oyster, scallop and salmon farming as it is surrounded by a beautiful bay. 98 evacuation centres are still in operation with some 7,240 evacuees still in Ishinomaki. **The bodies of the dead had to be buried because there are no crematorium left to cremate. About a quarter of the houses were washed away. The trees are dying because of the salt water.** 80% of the population of Ishinomaki has been affected by the 10-15 meters high tsunami waves. The land is said to have sunk about 7 cm and during high tide floods still occur. The water supply to the area was restored only recently. While the main artery road is now passable the trains have stopped running to Onogawa.

In Onogawa, about 70% of houses have been swept by the tsunami such was its wrath. Onogawa has a nuclear power plant but fortunately and ironically it is said that the area surrounding the plant has been declared the safest place in Onogawa. Everywhere you could see and smell the vomit of the sea—the smelly sludge and mud that covered the area.

One consequence of the 2011 tsunami, according to Mr Sasakawa, is that young people are increasingly turning to marriage as they do not want to be alone when such a disaster strikes again. They want to be with a companion.

Following this we headed for Sendai city to catch the Shinkansen for Tokyo and, after dinner, Dr Surin headed for Budapest to attend the ASEM Foreign Ministers meeting. No doubt he will share with his ministerial colleagues about the ASEAN Caravan and what he had seen and heard.

I was told by many Japanese friends that the people we encountered especially at the takidashi found the ASEAN Caravan members to be different from other groups who came.

Even as we served the food and gave away the caps and the T-shirts there was merriment and laughter, song and dance.

The Caravan has been celebrated in history in literature, film and song. It connected Europe and Asia by land and sea with silk and spices. This modern day Caravan by air and land, bringing not goods to trade but cheer and support, has connected the hearts of people in Sendai and ASEAN. We should add this human spirit to the connectivity that the politicians and bureaucrats want to promote. So I hope ERIA, one of the sponsors of this Caravan, will take heed as they conduct their research. What do you think Nishimura-san?

The multiple disasters—particularly the Fukushima nuclear plant issue—will lead to a serious inquiry by the Japanese themselves, especially the younger generation, about their future in a changing physical environment.

Reconstruction and rebuilding lives will be a tremendous challenge such is the extent of the destruction. Will Japan develop more creative approaches to international cooperation? What are the implications of paralysis of the governing class to Japan in the long term?

Can this Caravan and its embedded idealism mean something for the peoples of ASEAN and Japan and their collective future?

I should not end without thanking the many people and organizations—on behalf of Dr Surin—that made this Caravan possible and a success:

- *the spirited ASEAN volunteers themselves who came from all 10 countries (as young as 14);*
- *the Royal Thai Embassy (Ambassador Futrakul and staff in particular) and other ASEAN embassies;*
- *the Japanese embassies in ASEAN for facilitating the visas;*
- *Ambassador Yamada (of Japan to ASEAN);*
- *The Nippon Foundation -Chairman Sasakawa and the staff, NHK and especially Aiko Doden and her staff who will produce a documentary and other ASEAN and Japanese media,*
- *The private sector such as Sony Music Indonesia, Air Asia and Thai Airways and personalities including PADI, Derby, Pancake, Pak Bagas for his special music video and BABA 9 for their special video;*
- *Nan in Bangkok and Mary in Singapore. Our final thanks go to Ms Adelina Kamal, Mrs Augustina, and MsKonno of the ASEAN Secretariat.*



Raja in Singapore

Response to Raja's Entries

Dear Mr. Raja:

I am happy to learn that you have safely travelled back to Singapore. I hope you are well, not feeling spent after such solid 3-day visit to the affected area. Thank you for your detailed report.

This is a short note to inform you of the ASEAN Caravan report broadcast time on NHK WORLD TV.

*<NHK World News Line: feature "From ASEAN to MIYAGI" (approx 5 min news report)>
On NHK World TV, June 8th 12:00-, 14:00-, 15:00-, 23:00- (GMT)
At the time of the broadcast, the report can be watched on... <http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/>
Also, after the first broadcast, the reporting will be archived in the "feature" section.*

As briefly explained earlier, we are simultaneously working on two more, one as a 28 min documentary on NHK BS on June 17th, and another as a commentary on NHK General TV on June 10th.

Warmest, Aiko

*Aiko DODEN,
Senior News Commentator,
NHK Japan Broadcasting Corporation.*
