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Brunei becomes ASEAN member today

JAKARTA, Jan. 6: Brunei, the tiny, oil-rich Sultanate that won full independence from Britain on New Year's Day, will become the sixth member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) tomorrow at a ceremony in the Indonesian capital, reports Reuter.

A tiny coastal enclave of 200,000 people in northern Borneo dwarfed by its neighbours, Brunei sees membership of ASEAN as the most logical development after regaining control of its foreign policy and defence for the first time since 1888.

Diplomats said Brunei was likely to have an impact on the grouping commensurate with its size and was expected to follow suit on major foreign policy issues.

The Foreign Ministers of ASEAN's five founder-nations — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand — will meet first tomorrow to formally approve Brunei's admission. It will be the last ASEAN meeting at which the Sultanate will be only an observer.

The Sultan's brother Muda Mohamad Bolkuah, Brunei's newly-appointed Foreign Minister, will then sign a document committing the fledgling state to the principles of the Bangkok Declaration which established ASEAN in 1967.

Finally, the Brunei flag will be raised alongside those of the founder-nations outside the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta.

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