

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD  
( PRIME MINISTER )

EVENT: THE OPENING OF THE FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE  
ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANISATION (AIPO)

VENUE: PARLIAMENT HOUSE, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 02 FEB 1982

TIME:

Honourable Tan Sri Dato' (Dr.) Syed Nasir Ismail,  
President of AIPO;  
Honourable Tan Sri Ismail Khan,  
President of the Dewan Negara;  
Distinguished Heads of Delegations;  
Honourable Ministers and Delegates;  
Your Excellencies;  
Distinguished Observers;  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

First of all, let me wish a warm "selamat datang" to the distinguished Delegates and observers of this Assembly. We are indeed very happy to have this privilege of hosting the Fourth General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organisation or AIPO. This is the second time that Malaysia is hosting a Conference of ASEAN Parliamentarians, the first being the Second ASEAN Parliamentary Conference held in Kuala Lumpur in August, 1975.

2. I am happy to know that the Fourth Working Committee Meeting of AIPO held in Kuantan in August last year was very successful and that the Meeting agreed to place before your General Assembly an Agenda comprising a wide range of subjects, covering a review of the regional and international political situations, and the vital matter of cooperation among the ASEAN countries in the economic, cultural and other fields. Organisational matters relating to AIPO are also before you for consideration and approval. I am particularly happy to know that one of the items that you are going to consider is the Common Legislative Programme on Narcotics, Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation. This indeed points to the way in which ASEAN Legislators can cooperate for the benefit of all their peoples.

3. I also note with great interest that one other subject that you are going to discuss is the ASEAN Trade Expansion Scheme. Now, trade is a very important matter for all of us in ASEAN and indeed Ministerial and Official Committees have been studying this subject for a number of years, and working out ways and means for liberalising and expanding the flow of trade among ourselves in ASEAN. What is even more important is that the ASEAN countries have been able to put up a common front in the face of the protectionism

practised by the developed countries.

4. Despite the various efforts made by us to secure fair terms of trade, we have, we must admit, largely been unsuccessful. In this connection, the depressed prices obtainable for our primary commodities are a case in point. Although the cost of production of natural rubber and tin have gone up tremendously in recent years, their prices in the international market do not reflect such cost increases. The prevailing low rubber price has adversely affected hundreds of thousands of the poor smallholders in Malaysia; as is the case with the other ASEAN countries. People who speak of free trade and opposition to monopolies have gone to the extent of disrupting the market by sales from stockpiles and so on. The aspirations of the peoples and Governments of our countries for a New International Economic Order have not only been ignored but their terms of trade continue to be made more inequitable.

5. It is here that the legislators' support of the ASEAN stand on these issues are of great importance. As members of your respective Parliaments you are in an ideal position to enunciate and explain these issues not only to your own voters and people, but also to the rest of the world. Popular non-Governmental responses would then enhance Governmental efforts of ASEAN countries to overcome the problem of depressed prices for our commodities.

6. It is the Malaysian Government's view that in the long run we should process a fair proportion of our primary commodities in our own countries and export the finished and semi-finished products in order to gain more in terms of value added and technology. Such a step would not merely help to alleviate the poverty and unemployment situation of our countries, but also make a meaningfully significant contribution to holding down the forces of inflation generated by expensive production of these items in the advanced countries. In these days of bulk carriers it makes economic sense, for example, to manufacture vast quantities of rubber tyres in Malaysia for export to consuming countries. The transport of low value raw materials in small quantities is no longer a means of lowering the cost of manufacture.

7. We in Southeast Asia have entered an era fraught with unprecedented perils. It is distressing to note that the problem of Kampuchea which has plagued us for the last few years appears to be no nearer to an equitable solution. The intransigent attitude of certain parties is very much regretted. It may no longer be worthwhile for us to support their position in the United Nations.

8. In Afghanistan the tragedy persists because of the continued defiance of the U.S.S.R. of world opinion. If Russia was opposed to the U.S. role in Vietnam for its support of weak unpopular regimes, similarly Russia should

not prop up the regime presently installed in Kabul. The people of Afghanistan should be allowed to settle their internal problems themselves. This, of course, means that other powers should not interfere either. A regime with popular support should, with the mandate of the people, be able to rule without outside help. For us in ASEAN, the tragedy of Afghanistan is a crucial test of the principle we believe in, i.e. no outside power should march into the territory of a weak neighbour or country in order to install a friendly Government. If this principle is breached without protest by the world community then ASEAN and other small nations will live in constant fear.

9. The ASEAN concept of ZOPFAN here in Southeast Asia is in pursuit of this cardinal principle. As Parliamentarians you have the duty and the stature in your respective countries and in the world and regional forums to pursue the quest for entrenching this principle as the only basis on which healthy and equitable international relations can be based.

10. I also understand that ASEAN Parliamentarians have been having a dialogue with their colleagues in other countries on various matters of cooperation for mutual advantage and that your representatives have visited some of these countries and they in turn have visited the Parliaments in the ASEAN countries. The presence of the distinguished observers here in your midst at this Conference is ample testimony to the success of your efforts in this direction. The Malaysian Government supports these contacts between members of various Parliaments for the promotion of greater understanding between our peoples and for fostering cooperative endeavours for our mutual benefits.

11. I am informed that among the topics included for the discussion at your Assembly is a Proposal to Study the Establishment of an ASEAN Parliament, perhaps based on the model of the European Parliament. I can only say that all important projects start as dreams in the minds of men of vision. We may or may not see our dream materialise, but if the objective is good and worthwhile, we should not be deterred by the magnitude or the problems. The ASEAN Parliament may yet be a forum for the successful coordination of our development and progress.

12. It now gives me great pleasure to declare this Assembly open and to wish you every success in your deliberations.