

Mr. Chairman;
Your Excellencies;
Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

**OPENING STATEMENT BY Y.A.B. DATUK
HUSSEIN ONN, PRIME MINISTER OF
MALAYSIA AT THE SECOND MEETING
OF ASEAN ECONOMIC MINISTERS,
KUALA LUMPUR, ON 8TH MARCH, 1976**

ASEAN Economic Ministers and their
delegates,

Mr. Chairman;

Your Excellencies;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is a privilege for me once again to be with an ASEAN gathering so soon after the ASEAN Heads of Government Meeting in Bali. Let me take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to you, distinguished ASEAN Economic Ministers and their delegates.

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1. After Bali, the nature and purpose of ASEAN have been clarified.

2. Much has been written and said about the Bali Summit. It is still too early to say how it will go down in the history of South-East Asia. I hope the Bali Summit will be remembered as a MUSYAWARAH ASEAN, as a great meeting of hearts and minds in the ASEAN region.

3. After Bali, the nature and purpose of ASEAN have been clarified. ASEAN remains a non-ideological, non-military and non-antagonistic organisation. Its membership is open to all states located in geographical South-East Asia. Bi-lateral co-operation in the security field is both necessary and desirable. However, it is an activity to be pursued by states on an individual basis outside the purview of ASEAN.

4. The central purpose of ASEAN, as re-stated by the heads of government, is what it has always been: to advance the material well-being of the South-East Asian people through effective socio-economic co-operation.

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5. I understand that you, distinguished ministers and delegates, will confer here in Kuala Lumpur on how ASEAN can give flesh and bones to such co-operation. I also understand that you will have a concrete agenda to guide you in your deliberations.

6. At this juncture in the evolution of ASEAN, it will be superfluous to dwell on the ABC of economic cooperation. South-East Asia is the world's largest exporters of such primary commodities as rubber, tin, palm oil, tropical hardwood and copra. In addition, it has abundant unutilised land, very substantial petroleum and gas deposits and enormous human resources. Any form of economic, multi-lateral cooperation is bound to benefit the region as a whole.

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7. The time has come for ASEAN to shift from broad generalities to hard details. This is why the deliberations of the Economic Ministers at this conference and at subsequent meetings are of utmost importance. In fact, ASEAN's future growth will depend very much on you and the work of your officials. I am sure you will ensure that the details are worked out thoroughly so that the fruits of economic co-operation are not monopolized by one or two states but are shared out evenly by all the participating countries.

8. At this point in time, we have to restrict our schemes of economic co-operation to Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia. We do so not out of our own volition but because these five states are the existing members of ASEAN.

9. As the Heads of Governments had re-affirmed at Bali, the doors of ASEAN are open to the other states located in geographical South-East Asia, to Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. As far as Malaysia is concerned, we shall strive unrelentlessly for a truly South-East Asian ASEAN. This goal may not be achieved in a matter of months but we shall work towards it with all the energy and resources at our command.

10. In recent weeks, the mass media in Hanoi have made some highly critical observations about ASEAN in general and the Bali Summit in particular. In my view, it is unfortunate that such remarks should be made. I hope that they do not reflect the views of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

11. ASEAN is an association of South-East Asians, by South-East Asians and for South-East Asians. We are not tools of any extra-regional, big power and we do not intend to be so. In fact, the prime motivating force behind the idea of a peaceful, free and neutral zone, which was given expression in Kuala Lumpur Declaration, is precisely this: to live and work together fraternally so that South East Asia can be denied as a battle-ground for competing ambitions to extra-regional, big powers.

12. Perhaps Hanoi is still too close in time to the Vietnam War to be able to appreciate the true character of ASEAN in an objective light. We are confident that time will show that ASEAN is ASEAN, not a new SEATO in disguise.

13. In conclusion, let me once again say "Selamat Datang" and "Selamat Bermusyawarah" to all our distinguished ASEAN guests. And now it gives me great pleasure to declare the Second Meeting of Asean Economic Ministers open.