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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB OF AUSTRALIA LUNCHEON, AUSTRALIA ON 17TH OCTOBER, 1975

The Australian press, I have always noticed, has shown a marked interest in Southeast Asia. The region's trials and tribulations and the question of its future have been treated with a large measure of seriousness. Your interest in Southeast Asia is only natural since it is a contiguous region and it is a healthy interest which I most certainly welcome.

As the countries of the world interact ever more closely together by force of circumstances, we need to be better informed about each other if there is to be any degree of sympathetic understanding between us. The press plays a useful role in this regard. It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I take this opportunity of addressing the National Press Club of Australia and of sharing with you some of our perceptions and thoughts on the developments in Southeast Asia, the future of the region and the role that Malaysia can play in it.

Southeast Asia is currently undergoing a fundamental and rapid change. If we need to remind ourselves of this fact, the development in Indochina in the months of April and May serve as a timely reminder. In the short space of a few weeks, the political map of Southeast Asia has been completely transformed. We are going through a period of uncertainty but at the same time the end of the war in Indochina offers a rare opportunity for all Southeast Asian countries to make a new beginning in their relations with each other.

As I said at the opening of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Kuala Lumpur last May, "Never before in the history of this region have we the opportunity to create and establish for ourselves a new world in Southeast Asia—a world at peace and free from foreign domination and influence—a world in which the countries of the region can co-operate with one another for the common good". If we view the developments in Southeast Asia in terms of change and challenge, then there is no doubt in my mind that the greatest challenge facing the countries in the

region is to give the right response to this opportunity, that is, how judiciously and effectively would they seize this opportunity to co-operate with one another to secure for themselves and future generations real and durable peace in Southeast Asia. In a sense, this represents the sum total of the challenge of change in Southeast Asia and Malaysia for one is determined to play its proper role in response to this challenge.

As we all know, the strategic nature of Southeast Asia has for centuries made it the object of foreign domination and big power rivalry. It has a manpower strength of more than 200 million and immense natural resources second to none. Throughout recent history, it has presented a natural target for big power intrigue and intrusions.

Among the regions of the world, Southeast Asia has experienced the longest period of violence and war. Indeed, in the case of the Indochina states, the end of World War Two never really brought peace and war had continued, with all its tragic loss of lives and human sufferings, until the guns were finally silenced in May of this year.

It may be said therefore that for Southeast Asia as a whole, this is the first time that the area has known peace since the outbreak of World War Two. Viewed in this perspective, the end of the war in Indochina assumes a special meaning because it represents a breakthrough for countries in the region to secure for themselves, at long last, real and durable peace.

We in Malaysia therefore welcome the end of the conflict in Indochina not only because it brings to an end the tragic loss of lives and human sufferings in that area, but also because it offer us prospects of real peace and co-operation in our region.

One of the fundamental objectives of Malaysian foreign policy is to secure regional peace through regional harmony and co-operation. We have persistently maintained that the states of Southeast Asia have more things in common than the differences that divide them. We believe that if freed from all external interferences, these differences could be bridged and the common good prevail.

It is this perception that prompted our full commitment to ASEAN co-operation in recent years has fully vindicated these commitments. The Fifth ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Kuala Lumpur in May indicated clearly that ASEAN has come of age. The agreements reached at that meeting—to set up an ASEAN Central Secretariat, to recommend adoption of the draft Treaty of Amity and Co-operation—represent an historic watershed in the evolution of ASEAN from the period of development to that of consolidation.

ASEAN has flourished precisely because it serves the need of Southeast Asian states to realise their common aspirations. It is non-ideological and non-antagonistic in character and as such is the kind of organisation that could be expected to meet the common requirements of disparate parties.

The end of the Indochina conflict and the return of peace in that area offers new prospects of wider regional co-operation in Southeast Asia. While it is perhaps too early to talk of the Indochinese countries participating in ASEAN, I believe that it is essential that the door be left open and bridges built for wider regional co-operation in Southeast Asia which would include the states of Indochina. The Indochina states themselves when they are ready to participate in ASEAN will find that whereas there is much that it offers, there is indeed very little that it demands beyond the commitments of co-operation and the rejection of conflicts.

Consistent with this policy of regional peace through regional harmony and co-operation, and consistent with our policy of neutrality and non-alignment, Malaysia had responded positively to the developments in Indochina by quickly extending recognition to the new Governments that emerged in South Vietnam and Cambodia. At the moment, we have diplomatic relations with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Republic of South Vietnam and we hope very soon to establish our diplomatic mission in Hanoi. We have already an embassy existing in Vientiane, Laos, and so far as Cambodia is concerned, we are ready to establish diplomatic relations with her because it is our desire to have friendly relations with all the countries in Indochina.

As countries sharing the same region, it is essential that the countries of Southeast Asia, despite differences in ideology and social systems, should establish dialogue and relations with each other which, properly nurtured, would serve as the foundation for permanent peace, stability and prosperity in our region.

I also believe that the development in Indochina has made the proposal of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality in Southeast Asia more relevant than before. The attainment of a Zone of Peace remains for us an important foreign policy objective. We are convinced that the lessons of the Vietnam War will give additional impetus to the speedy realisation of the neutralisation of Southeast Asia. The Vietnam war has shown us the dangers and futility of big power involvement in our region.

For Southeast Asia, with all its strategic importance and its immense natural resources, there could be no other way to permanent peace and stability than to isolate ourselves from external interferences. We are convinced more than ever that only through the neutralisation of Southeast Asia could this region be free from the interference and competition of external powers and thereby spared the kind of human tragedy that for so many years had befallen the states of Indochina.

In co-operative regionalism, Malaysia believes that Southeast Asian states can enhance their respective national resilience and in both they will find the strength to maintain a policy of neutrality vis-a-vis the external powers. Though the Indochina states have yet to participate in ASEAN and espouse zonal neutrality in a tangible manner, Malaysia is fully convinced that their interests and that of the present member states are ultimately convergent.

It is for this reason that Malaysia had no hesitation in recognising the new governments that emerged in those countries. As far as we are concerned, our friendship is fully and openly extended for we are fully persuaded that for better or for worse, the future of all Southeast Asian countries, whatever may be their social systems, is inextricably intertwined.

I might recall here that the ASEAN countries themselves, at the last Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Kuala Lumpur in May, have agreed to extend their hand of friendship to the new government in Indochina, to establish friendly and co-operative relations with them, and to offer assistance in the national reconstruction of their countries should such assistance be acceptable to them. If Southeast Asia is to enter an era of peace and co-operation, it must be based on strictly indigenous impulses. It is the aim of Malaysian foreign policy to contribute fully to this process at this juncture as we have consistently done in the recent past.

In this crucial period of readjustment, the countries of Southeast Asia have to be particularly imaginative in their relations with the outside world. There has to be conscious determination on their part to avoid security alliances with great powers which not only drag them into external power conflict but more importantly sour their relations with each other to the detriment of the region as a whole. Awareness of this counter productive aspect of security alliances with great powers conditions Malaysia's relations with them.

In our relations with the rest of the world, we therefore bring to bear a co-operative approach that we feel is most appropriate to the era of international interdependence. We do not see any profit in taking an adversary position with any country. We deal with every country for mutual benefit and on the basis of strict equality. This approach has been translated into action in terms of our relations with all the major powers. Today Malaysia maintains mutually beneficial relations with the United States, the Soviet Union as well as China.

Our establishment of formal diplomatic relations with China seems in retrospect to have been a psychological breakthrough for Southeast Asia, particularly in breaking down the barrier of mutual suspicion between China and Southeast Asia. For us each great power has much to contribute to the stability and progress of

Southeast Asia, which we believe to be in their common interest. Equal access for each in peaceful circumstances is surely preferable to exclusion for any in a climate of conflict.

Important as are our relations with the great powers, Malaysia's foreign policy does not neglect the many other countries impressive concentrations of power, wealth and technology, in their own right with whom we can beneficially co-operate. I personally have observed that it is often easier for middle powers to accept the fact of interdependence than it is for powers of the first rank to do so. We have, I feel, a commonality of interest with, for example, Australia and New Zealand in making interdependence more than just ideals.

We are already, to a considerable degree, partners in progress with many of the middle-power countries and it would be highly logical to expand our co-operation with them. There are many international issues, especially international economic issues, on which our respective positions are not mutually exclusive, and it would be desirable for Malaysia to explore the outward limits of co-operation concerning them, both in bilateral as well as multi-lateral forums. Like all small countries desiring to maximise their independence, a diversification of Malaysia's relations with the outside world is both prudent and necessary.

At this juncture, I wish to express my admiration for the vision that Australia has displayed in its own responses to the challenge of change in Southeast Asia. I note with particular appreciation Australia's sympathy for indigenous Southeast Asian efforts to build their own future free from external interference. Australia's participation in ASEAN projects that would be of benefit to all members is illustrative of the kind of supportive assistance that Southeast Asia expects in the crucial years ahead, assistance that would help us to better help ourselves.

I have attempted in the last several minutes to discuss some important aspects of Malaysian foreign policy objectives in Southeast Asia. These objectives are based on a realistic appraisal, of the needs of the region and of the prospects for the realization of these needs.

I am convinced we shall achieve these objectives, because although our approaches may be different, I believe that all of us, in Southeast Asia as well as outside, such as here in the South Pacific, share in common the objective of regional peace, stability and prosperity.

As I have said earlier, we in Southeast Asia now have the historic opportunity to secure for the region and for future generations real and durable peace. We have no choice but to respond to this opportunity in a positive manner. I believe that in pursuing our foreign policy objective, as I have just outlined, Malaysia, for its part, is responding positively to this challenge.