

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH HJ AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE SECOND EAST ASIA FORUM, KUALA LUMPUR
6 DECEMBER 2004**

"TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED EAST ASIA COMMUNITY"

H.E. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, H.E. Kim Dae-Jung,
H.E. Tsutomu Hata, Excellencies, Distinguished Participants and Guests,
Ladies and Gentleman,

It is a special honour for me to be speaking before such a distinguished gathering this morning, including my illustrious predecessor and his colleagues from Korea and Japan who are all well-known for their visionary ideas and as proponents of East Asian cooperation.

2. May I, at the outset, welcome all participants from various parts of this East Asian region of ours including those from Malaysia. I do hope that those among you who are visitors from abroad will stay longer after the conclusion of this Forum and get to know better our country and its people. I can assure you that you will feel at home here among us.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. I have been informed that this Forum has been given the theme "Towards an Integrated East Asian Community". This is most timely in view of the increasing focus on East Asia in international affairs. In the past, when the times were good, we had tended to take for granted our commonality of interests. It took the 1997 financial crisis to make us realize how critical it was for East Asian countries to cooperate with each other and, in some instances, even to take joint action. It is as if we needed to be reminded of this fact that other regional crises had to descend upon us in succession. We had a region-wide SARS-scare. Then came the AVIAN FLU. Now, the problem of terrorism demands our attention.

4. There is no alternative but to take concerted common action in various forms in order to protect and promote the region's prosperity and ensure continuing peace in the East Asia region. Trade and trade related activities had been the driving force for regional cooperation in the past. The way forward must include other building blocks for regional integration. In particular, a deliberate effort must be made to enhance trust and confidence among regional governments especially by way of increasing people-to-people contacts and interactions at various levels and for various purposes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. Actually, East Asia as a community is no longer an idealism. It has been a “work-in-progress” for quite some time. Community building in East Asia has in fact recorded some remarkable achievements. For instance, the ASEAN+3 process, which began here in Kuala Lumpur in 1997, had spread to become a formula for cooperation in various areas. According to the ASEAN Secretariat, there are now 48 ASEAN+3 forums, ranging from the leadership Summits down to the expert-groups level covering many, many subjects of common interest or common concern.

6. Therefore, the task before this Forum is not to contemplate the East Asian Community as a theoretical construct. Your task is to identify what needs to be done in concrete terms to achieve an integrated East Asian region. What are the building blocks that need to be put in various places, in the route map which we should draw, in the direction of a fully grown and flourishing East Asian community? We must trust our judgment that this process is not merely inevitable. It is also our duty to make the process irreversible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. In Southeast Asia, the Leaders of ASEAN had signed, in 2003, the Declaration of Bali Concord II, to lay the foundation for an ASEAN Community resting on three pillars, namely the ASEAN Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. The year 2020 has been set as the target date for the completion of this Community. The ASEAN Summit just concluded in Vientiane had injected more urgency to this enterprise by adopting the Action Plans for the ASEAN Security Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. The future East Asian Community should be an integral extension of the ASEAN Community.

8. Our East Asian region has come a long way from one that was beset with many conflicts in the last century, to one where the regional countries live together in generally peaceful co-existence. This was made possible through the deliberate and determined efforts by the region's leaders, driven by their strong desire for regional peace, stability and security. This environment has enabled our region to grow and prosper in various ways, not only in the economic sphere but also in the social and cultural fields. Our next step should therefore be, to boldly stride forward from the existing peaceful co-existence to active and constructive engagement that is dedicated to establishing an integrated East Asian region.

9. We can begin to chart our way forward by seeking to emplace certain clearly discernable milestones in the route map to the East Asian community. These milestones would also serve as markers to indicate the progress that we make. I would like to suggest the following as some of the milestones or markers we can emplace in our quest for the East Asian community:

- First : East Asia Summit,
- Second : Charter of East Asia Community,
- Third : East Asia Free Trade Area,
- Fourth : Agreement of East Asia Monetary and Financial Cooperation,
- Fifth : East Asia Zone of Amity and Cooperation,
- Sixth : East Asia Transportation and Communications Network,
- Seventh : East Asia Declaration of Human Rights and Obligations.

East Asia Summit

10. The East Asia Summit would be more than a political symbol of an East Asian community. It should carry and drive the process of East Asia community building. Such an East Asia Summit of leaders would send a powerful signal of the existence of trust and confidence among regional countries, something that our region needs now and something that the world has been waiting to witness. This is because a stable and prosperous East Asia would be a major contribution to global peace, security and prosperity. At the recent 10th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane, the ASEAN leaders endorsed the convening of the first East Asia Summit in 2005. ASEAN ministers and officials have been given the political and diplomatic mandate to work out the modalities and other details. Malaysia is looking forward to play host to the inaugural East Asia Summit. ASEAN would remain as the driving force in this process. Therefore, God willing, we shall be able to emplace, in Putrajaya, in December 2005, the first milestone on the route to the East Asian community.

Charter of East Asia community

11. The Charter of the East Asia Community should, like the Bangkok Declaration, be short in terms of words but profound in terms of concept and substance. It should set out the promises, principles and objectives to guide our process of community building and our vision of East Asia as a community of peace, friendship, prosperity, development and progress that we must strive to build over the coming generations.

East Asia Free Trade Area

12. An East Asia Free Trade Area, like the East Asia Summit, is also one of the 26 measures recommended by the East Asia Study Group. In this connection, ASEAN has already formalized the ASEAN Free Trade Area and has entered into a free trade agreement with China. Soon, ASEAN will begin negotiations for a Free Trade Area with the Republic of Korea. With Japan, a longer route is being taken with the Framework for Comprehensive Economic Partnership although the ultimate aim is also to achieve a free trade agreement between the two sides.

13. We must strategize to make the leap forward towards an East Asia Free Trade Area. I understand that the ASEAN+3 Economic Ministers have endorsed the establishment of an Expert Group to study the feasibility of such a free trade area. Naturally, this enterprise would be a challenging task for our East Asian countries which have a combined GDP of about USD 6.8 trillion and a population base exceeding 2 billion. The trade and investment opportunities are vast indeed. The sooner we arrive at this milestone the better.

East Asia Zone of Amity and Cooperation

14. At the same 10th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane, the Republic of Korea acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. With Korea's accession, all the Plus-Three countries have thus formally acceded to the TAC. As a code of conduct for inter-state relations, the TAC is therefore now the de facto East Asian charter for peace and good neighbourliness. With the TAC as the foundation, an important milestone would be the realisation of a Zone of Amity and Cooperation specially tailored for East Asia as a whole.

15. Such a zone would guarantee respect for the rule of law, sovereignty, territorial integrity, good neighbourliness and equality among nations. It should furthermore renounce the use or threat of force, enhance transparency in security matters, promote confidence building among nations including the avoidance of arms race and ideally, exclude weapons of mass destruction from the zone.

16. It would indeed be a milestone of sorts if the first East Asia Summit could, on the basis of adherence to the purposes and principles of the TAC, make a decision to lay the foundation for the eventual establishment of an East Asian Zone of Amity and Cooperation.

East Asia Transportation and Communications Network

17. In this era of Information and Communications Technology, it should be obvious but I wish to remind you nevertheless that connectivity would be, or should be, a defining trait of an integrated East Asian Community. Therefore an important milestone in our quest would be the formation of an East Asian Transportation and Communications Network. This network should include facilities not only for the physical movement of people and merchandise but also electronic connections between peoples and countries. The outlines of this milestone is already visible with various projects such as the proposed Singapore-Kunming railway line. This Forum might wish to germinate other ideas in this regard.

Agreement of East Asia Monetary and Financial Cooperation

18. East Asia has already gone a long way in this area. The reasons are obvious, sound and the logic compelling. It will definitely gain strength and momentum in the days ahead.

East Asia Declaration of Human Rights and Obligations

19. I must remind you as well that close to a third of humanity live in the countries of East Asia. Asian societies are renowned for their respect of the dignity of the human person. The East Asian community should therefore be comfortable with internationally recognized standards of human rights. Of course, it is also characteristic of Asian societies to expect its people to observe cultural norms as well as certain responsibilities and obligations as members of the community. In Asia, the interest of the community takes precedence over the interest of the individual. The East Asian Community will undoubtedly be required to deliberate and establish its own standards and issue an East Asian declaration on human rights and obligations.

20. In this connection, the highest priority should be given to the eradication of poverty throughout East Asia. The availability of adequate food, clothing and shelter are the prerequisites for a decent life and fundamental to the maintenance of the dignity of the human person. The total eradication of absolute poverty and the institution of good governance should therefore be the sacred mission of every government in East Asia. This is not only a social responsibility. Both are also key to ensuring stability in the country and avoiding one of the root causes of radical dissent.

Ladies and gentlemen,

21. I have tried to conceptualise a route map with certain important milestones for charting the course and measuring the progress. However, as we proceed along this route, we are bound to encounter obstacles and other 'roadblocks'. Issues such as the Korean Peninsula, the Cross-Straits, the overlapping territorial claims especially in the South China Sea, regional terrorism and pockets of internal strife are some of them. These problems must be addressed urgently before they become unmanageable.

Ladies and gentlemen,

22. An integrated East Asian Community must not be viewed entirely as an end in itself. It must also be viewed as a means, or as contributing to, the establishment of a larger peace and a more stable global environment.

23. With these broad remarks, I hope that I have made some contributions to your deliberations on this critically important subject. I wish all of you great success in your discussions at this second East Asia Forum.

I thank you.