

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL VISIT TO MALAYSIA BY HIS
EXCELLENCY SAMAK SUNDARAVEJ, PRIME MINISTER OF THE KINGDOM OF
THAILAND, AT KUALA LUMPUR
24 APRIL 2008**

His Excellency
Samak Sundaravej
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your Excellency, Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej, I am very delighted that you are the first foreign Head of Government to come on an official visit to Malaysia after the recent general elections in our country and the formation of my new Government. We would like to welcome you as a friend and as Prime Minister of Thailand, an immediate neighbour with whom Malaysia has had a long era of good relations which had withstood the test of time and the vicissitudes of history. I wish you and members of your delegation a very pleasant stay in Kuala Lumpur.

2. Your Excellency, I look forward to the discussions we are going to have this afternoon. I am sure we would want to exchange views on how we can enhance our bilateral relations at various levels and in various ways. We can identify specific measures to accelerate cooperation in matters already agreed before while exploring new areas for collaboration. As we share common land and sea boundaries, there will always be issues which require our continuing attention. There are also many opportunities to be exploited for our mutual benefit. The overriding objective should always be the maintenance of friendly relations between our two Governments and peoples because the peace and prosperity of our two countries are interdependent in many ways. This is particularly the case in the border region.

3. As we share a common border, we know that peace, stability and prosperity in southern Thailand are very important not only to Thailand but also to Malaysia. We also know that the solution to the problems generated by poverty and underdevelopment lies not only in the construction of infrastructure and the provision of social amenities but also investment in human capital. When people are equipped with knowledge and skills, they become useful citizens who can uplift themselves economically and socially and contribute to the well being of the society at the same time. We are therefore sincere when we say that Malaysia is prepared, in any manner considered appropriate and desirable by Thailand, to contribute towards the economic and social development of the people in southern Thailand. Some progress has been made in the area of education and skills training for young people but we need to do much more.

4. Nevertheless, I am happy to note that we have done quite well in terms of bilateral trade and investment as a whole. The total trade between our two countries have grown from USD15.66 billion in 2006 to USD 17.23 billion in 2007. Malaysian investment in Thailand has surpassed the RM 1 billion mark. Malaysia's national car-maker, PROTON, has successfully launched new models in the Thai market. However, it remains a fact that our two countries seem to trade and invest more in other countries than we do bilaterally.

5. We would particularly like to invite Thai investors to explore the opportunities available in our new development area, the Northern Corridor Development Region. Such investments would contribute towards the well being of people living in the border areas, including those in southern Thailand. For example, our joint project of building a second bridge across the Golok River linking Bukit Bunga in Kelantan and Ban Buketa in Naratiwat, which was opened in December 2007, has proven to be a very good model of productive collaboration. I have been informed, just as we had anticipated, that this bridge has spawned new economic activities on both sides.

Your Excellency,

6. While we accelerate the bilateral cooperation between our two countries, Malaysia and Thailand, as founder members of ASEAN, should also exert leadership for the strengthening of regional cooperation. It was in Thailand, in 1967, that ASEAN was born. It is most fitting that as we embark upon putting into effect the ASEAN Charter of 2007, Thailand is once again taking over the Chairmanship of our regional grouping this year. Malaysia will give full support to Thailand in spearheading the task of forging greater regional integration and establishing the ASEAN Community on schedule in 2015. We are confident that under your able leadership, the 14th ASEAN Summit to be hosted by Thailand in December 2008 will be a resounding success. Malaysia firmly believes that ASEAN is the cornerstone for peace, stability and prosperity in Southeast Asia.

Your Excellency,

7. Last year, we celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Thailand. We should think ahead and lay the foundations for good relations to endure for the next 50 years and beyond. To succeed, we need vision, sincerity and a strong commitment to finding creative solutions to any problems that arise. We have done all these in the past. There is no reason why we cannot continue to do the same in the future.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Let me conclude by wishing His Excellency the Prime Minister and the Government of Thailand every success in attaining peace and prosperity for Thailand and its people. Your Excellency, Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej I also look forward to meeting you again in the near future. I thank you.