

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE  
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE FIRST MINISTERIAL  
CONFERENCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, AT DEWAN TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN, KUALA LUMPUR  
ON 22ND MAY, 1972

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Hon'ble Ministers, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to extend to you all distinguished delegates a warm welcome to Malaysia.

For us, Malaysians, it is indeed a matter of honour and pride that our capital city is chosen as the venue for this First Ministerial Conference for the Development of Transport and Communications in Southeast Asia. This is particularly so, as you also accorded us the honour of hosting the first meeting of Southeast Asian Senior Officials on Transport and Communications in September, 1967.

I trust that, despite your crowded programmes, you will have an enjoyable and pleasant stay in Kuala Lumpur.

I am informed that since the First Meeting of Southeast Asian Senior Officials on Transport and Communications, the Co-ordinating Committee which was established has met on eleven occasions in the past five years. The Committee had considered a number of projects in the field of transport and communications in our respective countries for early implementation. The object of this Ministerial Conference is, therefore, to consider all those decisions of the Committee which are urgent and necessary with a view to their implementation as soon as possible. The implementation of these projects will not only enhance further the progress of our respective countries in the fields of transport and communications but will strengthen and consolidate the foundations of regional Co-operation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The nineteen sixties was a period of intense activity on the part of Asian countries in organising themselves for regional economic co-operation. The efforts of ECAFE have, among other developments, led to the Kabul Declaration on Asian Economic Co-operation and Development. Equally important was the establishment of the Asian Development Bank and this surely marks a great step forward in our efforts at regional Co-operation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this region of Southeast Asia, regional co-operation has made great progress during the decade of the sixties. ASA or the Association of Southeast Asia was brought to light and later this was enlarged into what is now known as ASEAN or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Also the period witnessed the institution of arrangements for consultations among Ministers in the region and Japan on economic development of Southeast Asia in all its aspects.

Apart from our efforts in transport and communications, much work has been done in establishing machineries for co-operation in agricultural development and research, tourism, trade promotion, education and family planning.

Clearly, therefore, marked progress has been made to establish foundations for further efforts on our part both individually and collectively to achieve greater progress. The time has, therefore, come for us to incorporate a greater measure of substance into all our efforts and our endeavours. The political, social and economic demands of our time compel us in this decade of the seventies to develop and strengthen our strategies for more concerted efforts in collective and regional development. Let us, therefore, make this decade of the seventies an action-oriented period in our endeavours to establish a stable and viable South-east Asian economic community.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This, broadly, is our ultimate objective. However, we must define in more specific terms what that objective is and what is it that we seek.

As far as the Malaysian Government is concerned, we desire to see that the Southeast Asian economy develop in such a way that it will enable our people to have a greater and more equitable share in the rewards that flow from economic development.

As we assess the prospects of development in international economy in the coming decades, it is clear to us that the most important and dramatic developments will take place in the field of industrial trade. At present, the Southeast Asian Countries, taken as a whole, participates in this trade to only a very limited extent. This is largely because the economies of our respective countries are "agriculture oriented" and also because we are small countries and, therefore, the size of our individual markets is limited.

To achieve a faster pace of economic development, it is imperative that we work continuously together as real partners in development to achieve a common goal. We must work towards a restructuring of our economies so as to be able to engage in industrial development for both import substitution and export expansion.

Today, every developing country has embarked upon an intensified programme of industrialisation. This is to be expected because every Government has to chart a course of development according to its assessment of its own interests. But, none of us can achieve the desired visits in industrialisation or economic development on our own. For countries in Southeast Asia, it is not sufficient to depend only on their limited domestic markets. We must be given opportunities in an expanding world trade and have access to high-income markets of developed countries as well, to sell our manufactured goods and semi-processed and processed raw materials. It is only in this way can we hope to industrialise and generate employment opportunities sufficient to absorb our rapidly increasing labour force.

In addition to international trade, we should also look at the market in the region of Southeast Asia. Individually, our countries in Southeast Asia provides a limited market for our industrialisation programmes. However, collectively we do have a sizeable market. Therefore, we should agree on specialization in our productive activities. In this way, we should be able to complement each other in our industrial efforts in order to ensure adequate markets for our industrial products within the region.

Of course, we all realise that this objective cannot be achieved overnight. It will require sustained efforts on our part to reach an understanding on this matter and to gear our industrial programmes towards this objective which is clearly in our own individual as well as collective interests.

I would like to feel that we will use this period of the seventies to take the necessary steps towards working together and co-operating closely in the economic progress of our region.

Obviously, we must start in areas where we can obtain agreement and then move forward step by step, supplementing and complementing each other in laying the basis for more sophisticated projects and programmes. If we do this, I am confident that in the not too distant future, we will be able to fashion for our people an independent and viable Southeast Asian Community.

The goal that we seek is the establishment of an independent Southeast Asian Community internally stable and secure, outward-looking but, as far as possible, dependent on its own strength and resilience for its well-being and progress.

As we all know too well, it is a matter of considerable regret to us that some countries of Southeast Asia have not enjoyed peace for more than two decades because we have not been able to stand on our own feet. As a result, we have allowed super powers to be involved in our internal affairs and we have become an area of super-power conflicts. This state of affairs must end. The Malaysian Government believes that the only way to bring about peace in the region of Southeast Asia is that the people in this region must be allowed to determine their future themselves without any outside interference.

We also believe that the only guarantee for a secure, stable and progressive Southeast Asia is the Neutralization of this region. This must be our broad and long-term objective. However, if this is to be achieved, we must not only have the will and capacity to defend ourselves but also we must be economically strong and viable.

I believe that, as in other fields, our efforts in transport and communications and our deliberations on the Regional Transport Survey should be reviewed in this perspective.

Undertaken at the request of our Governments and under the auspices of the Asian Development Bank, the Regional Transport Survey is indeed a massive study of our existing transport systems and of the improvements which can be effected to speed up the development of all our economies. I commend it for your consideration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I know I speak of all of us when I express our gratitude to the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the United States Government and the international team of consultants involved for their substantial contributions to the planning, financing and execution of the Survey.

However, I would not wish to influence in any way your evaluation of the Report on the Regional Transport Survey. I can only suggest that it provides a useful starting point for determining the specific actions we should commit ourselves to undertake with respect both to the planning and implementation of projects and policies in the field of transport in this region.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

The task ahead of us is formidable. If our endeavour in the field of transport and communications is to bear fruit, much of the required effort, of course, will have to come from within the countries of the region itself. However, at this stage in the development of our respective economies, we inspect the developed countries and developmental agencies would play respective role in supplementing our own efforts by way of technical and capital assistance for such economic projects.

The support we have received in the Regional Transport Survey itself is a good example of how useful such external assistance can be. Another is the technical assistance which the United States Government has provided in the form of feasibility studies for some seventeen high priority regional projects while the Regional Transport Survey was being undertaken. The potential order of investment in these projects exceeds US\$200 million. A significant portion of this finance has already been secured through external sources, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

For all this support, we are indeed grateful. As we embark now upon an intensification of our efforts, we do indeed look forward to a continuation as well as an expansion, of such co-operation from a wider circle of our friends.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I understand that after this Conference, a number of you will be proceeding to the United States to witness Transpo 72, the International Transport Exposition in Washington D.C. and that you will take the opportunity of your presence in Washington at that time to discuss the role which the United States Government as well as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the U.S. EXIM Bank might play in our development efforts in the transport and communications field in the Southeast Asian Region.

This is a constructive step and I wish you well in these consultations. Let me also suggest to you that when the opportunity arises, you might also wish to make similar visits to our friends in the other countries of the world in the quest for broad-gauged international support of a programme which is of vital importance to all of us in this region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The need for positive economic Co-operation in the region is great. At the same time, too, the opportunities for making tangible progress are significant. In the field of transport and communications on which we are now deliberating, as well as in other fields, let us lose no time in taking the necessary steps for concrete results in this decade of the seventies. And, as the progress of our regional co-operation unfolds, let us redouble our efforts to forge an increasing sense of understanding, co-operation and solidarity among all our peoples in Southeast Asia.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now have great pleasure in declaring open this First Ministerial Conference on the Development of Transport and Communications in Southeast Asia and I wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you.