

DINNER OF PRESIDENT CARLOS SAUL MENEM

ARGENTINA, 1 JULY 1991

Your Excellency President Carlos Saul Menem; Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen.

First of all let me say how delighted I am to be here in Argentina. I have heard much about Argentina's rich history, its riches, its beauty and its many accomplishments. Therefore I look forward to this visit, my first to Argentina. Although my visit to Argentina is a short one, it promises to be very eventful and productive.

2. I must also express my sincere appreciation to you Mr. President and to your government for the very warm welcome and gracious hospitality that has been extended to my wife and I and members of my delegation. I am also particularly pleased for the opportunity to meet with you again and to renew the contacts we first established when you visited Kuala Lumpur last year for the G-15 summit.

Mr. President,

3. Malaysia and Argentina established diplomatic relations in 1964. Though we have cooperated well in international fora, our bilateral relations have until recently lacked substance. But this is now changing. There is now a greater realisation that while our trade and consequently our economic health may depend on the markets of the industrialised countries, there is much to be gained from closer collaboration with other developing countries.

4. Mr. President, I am sure you will agree with me the G-15 process has already begun to germinate greater cooperation and exchanges amongst its members. There is now also a greater consciousness of the potential of South-South cooperation and trade.

5. Like you, I am keen to exploit the full potential of economic cooperation between our two countries in the spirit of South-South cooperation. The Malaysian market is open to Argentinian products ranging from machinery to wheat and beef. Some Argentinian companies are already doing well in Malaysia. A few turnkey projects are also being discussed. The Malaysian economy is set to grow at around 8% this year. There will thus be a great demand for goods and services which Argentina can help supply. On our part we have a whole range of goods and services to offer as well. The more than sixty Malaysian businessmen who have come with me to Argentina is an indication both of our commitment to economic cooperation and to the potential for trade.

Mr. President,

6. Our efforts to strengthen bilateral relations and economic cooperation comes at an opportune time. There is a growing trend towards economic regionalism in the world today. In Europe and in North America trading blocs have taken shape. Though based on laudable principles of free trade their actions are often at variance with what they preach. I appreciate that economic imperatives may

make it necessary for Argentina and other South American countries to be associated with these groupings in order to have access to trade, investments and economic cooperation. We wish you every success. Your success will be good for us just as our success will be good for you. I hope, however, that this will not lead to a diminution of the mutually beneficial ties that this region has with East Asia. With its high growth rates which average between 7 to 10 per cent, East Asia represents an important economic focus for South America. I hope, therefore, that closer ties with East Asia will be an intrinsic part of any South American strategy for economic growth and development.

7. For East Asia free trade is absolutely essential to development and growth. The East Asian nations will thus continue to be open to free trade and receptive to closer interaction with South America. The East Asia Economic Group or EAEG that is now being discussed within ASEAN will help uphold free trade and promote economic inter-dependence between regions. On the basis of our discussions today, I must say that I am greatly encouraged by the prospects for cooperation not only between our two countries but also amongst developing countries as a whole.

8. On that note of optimism, may I once again thank you for receiving me and my delegation with such warmth and hospitality. May I now propose a toast to you Mr. President and to the friendship between Malaysia and Argentina.