

**THE OFFICIAL DINNER HOSTED BY H.E. FIDEL RAMOS PRESIDENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES**

THE MALACANANG PALACE, MANILA, PHILIPPINES, 3 FEBRUARY 1994

Your Excellency President Fidel Ramos and Madam Amelita Ramos;
Honourable Secretaries and Ministers; Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I first of all thank Your Excellency and your Government for the very warm welcome and generous hospitality accorded to my wife and I, and members of my delegation. We are indeed very happy to be here in the Philippines and see for ourselves the dynamic changes that are taking place in this beautiful country under Your Excellency's leadership. I am also particularly pleased to be able to meet you again and to renew our friendship. Your Excellency,

2. The government and people of Malaysia recall with fondness your visit to our country last year during which you demonstrated your firm desire to enhance bilateral relations with Malaysia and pledged your commitment to seek a national consensus to resolve the Sabah issue.

3. The new approach in our relations that you had advocated and which we shared had helped to contribute towards greater trust and understanding between our two countries. The optimism spawned by your visit rekindles the hope and vision of close and brotherly relations with active political, economic and social interaction between our two peoples. Indeed, this is the way it should be between two neighbouring countries that are linked, since time immemorial, by a common culture and tradition. It is with this hope and vision in mind that I have embarked on this journey to your country to return Your Excellency's visit to Malaysia in January 1993.

4. Our meeting this afternoon, during which we discussed issues of common concern and reviewed the progress of bilateral relations since your visit to Kuala Lumpur last year, revealed yet again how much our views and aspirations coincide. It reaffirmed our faith that in you and your government we Malaysians have a friend and partner whom we can work with to bring relations between our two countries to even greater height. I feel gratified that all the agreements reached in Kuala Lumpur are being seriously looked into by officials of our two countries and progress has been made in many areas of cooperation. The Joint Commission has been established and has successfully met here in Manila last December, resulting in a broad range of agreements to cooperate in the field of agriculture, trade and investment.

5. Worthy of special mention is the agreement to enter into a border crossing arrangement along the common border between Malaysia and the Philippines in order to combat illegal entry, smuggling and piracy. Your Excellency,

6. It is also a matter of great satisfaction to me that there has been a considerable increase of Malaysian investment in the Philippines. Your visit to Malaysia has contributed immensely towards this development. Several Memoranda of Understanding have been signed between Malaysian entrepreneurs and their counterparts in the Philippines. A few major Malaysian corporations have already established their presence in this country. Many others have shown similar interest, as manifested by the number of Malaysian businessmen, entrepreneurs and corporate figures that have joined me in this visit. I am confident that their meetings with members of the Philippine Administration as well as their interaction with their Filipino counterparts will result in greater awareness of the economic opportunities available in this country and hopefully will lead to concrete business deals in due course. As Malaysians are encouraged to seek business opportunities in the Philippines through trade and investment, Filipino entrepreneurs and businessmen are welcome to do likewise in Malaysia where opportunities abound due to its rapid industrial development.

7. In a world where the globalisation of industries is moving ahead at a rapid pace the Government has urged the Malaysian private sector to look outward and to invest overseas as well as forge strategic alliances with overseas partners in order to maintain their competitive edge. Today in your presence, Mr. President, I would like to repeat that call with a specific request to look at the Philippine private sector as a strategic alliance partner whose entrepreneurial skills are as renowned as any. Such a partnership means more than just a business necessity; it also adds meaning and substance to ASEAN cooperation that both our countries so firmly support.

8. Malaysia, since 1988, has been the second leading ASEAN trade partner for the Philippines. But the total bilateral trade, averaging RM1.3 billion annually, is still small. Both countries can take the necessary steps to expand and increase the volume of bilateral trade. There are many products which we can sell to and buy from each other. We can also cooperate in jointly producing items and components destined not only for each other's markets but also markets elsewhere. To encourage investments, we should conclude a bilateral Investment Guarantee Agreements as soon as possible.

9. Malaysia is ready to exchange developmental experience with the Philippines. We can do this through the Malaysian

Technical Cooperation Programme, which the Phillipines have availed in the past. There are many areas in which our experiences may prove useful. We see the potential for both countries to cooperate in various fields such as agriculture, tourism, transport and science and technology. We can certainly learn a lot from each other. Your Excellency,

10. On the international plane, the emergence of powerful economic groupings that promote specific regional interests is a matter of great concern to Malaysia. We strongly believe in the maintenance and enhancement of free trade globally. We are against discriminatory measures aimed only to protect specific interests at the expense of the small and economically weak nations. The successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round has given some hope for a better global trading environment. But we must remember that we are economically weak still. Level playing fields which the big nations talk so much about are quite meaningless when the contest is between giants and midgets. GATT must take this into consideration when enforcing its rules on weak nations.

11. The establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), and the creation of growth areas at the sub-regional level are certainly some of the positive steps towards enhancing and strengthening economic cooperation and expanding trade within our own region. In this regard, Malaysia welcomes the creation of the East ASEAN Growth Area (EAGA) which Your Excellency has initiated and tirelessly promoted. I am confident that with the full cooperation of both the governments and private sectors of the countries concerned, the EAGA will contribute positively towards the further development of the region at large.

12. The East Asian region is by far the most economically dynamic region in the world today. This trend will continue as we move into the twenty-first century. Growth rates in this region averaged 7.8 percent in the last decade. The East Asian experience is certainly the envy of others. The East Asian countries must have a forum to consult each other on issues of interest to them. It is for this reason that the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) should be formed. The EAEC should be the consultative forum for the countries of East Asia to exchange views on various issues of common concern. I wish to reiterate here that Malaysia does not envisage the EAEC as an economic bloc. It is never intended to be one in the first place. I hope that Malaysia and the Philippines can work closely together with the other countries in the region to ensure that the EAEC becomes operational as early as possible. It will help the less developed countries in East Asia to learn from the experience of the successful ones. More than that the EAEC can actually initiate cross investments which

can accelerate development and expedite technology transfer. An East Asian Crescent of Prosperity can then emerge and act as the locomotive of growth for the rest of the world. Your Excellency,

13. Before I conclude, I should like to take this opportunity to once again thank you and Madam Ramos for the very friendly reception and gracious hospitality accorded to my wife and I, as well as to the other members of my delegation. We feel very much at home here in the Philippines. We hope to meet more friends here in Manila and in the important and popular regions of your beautiful country which we will also visit. As the Malay saying goes, 'Tak kenal maka tak cinta'. It means that one will not love if one does not know each other. Your visit to Malaysia has helped to rekindle the interest for Malaysia and the Philippines to know more about one another. There is now a genuine interest to rediscover commonalities on both sides. It is my sincere hope that with my visit, the peoples of Malaysia and the Philippines will continue to get to know more of each other, to cooperate and to eventually resolve our problems for the sake of our common future and the future of the region.