

**The Official Dinner In Honour Of His Excellency Dr Mari Bim Amude Alkatiri Prime Minister Of The Democratic Republic Of Timor Leste**

Seri Perdana, Putrajaya 12 August 2002

It is a pleasure to extend a warm welcome to Your Excellency Dr Mari Bim Amude Alkatiri, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste, and the distinguished members of your delegation to Malaysia. I am indeed honoured that Your Excellency has chosen Malaysia as the first country to visit since assuming the office of Prime Minister of your newly independent country. I hope that you and members of your delegation will have a pleasant and fruitful stay in Malaysia.

2. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the people of Timor Leste on their independence, the first independent nation of the new millennium. The road to nationhood has been long. It has required difficult decisions and severe sacrifices. The Timorese Leste should be very proud of their achievement.

3. As the Timorese Leste now set out to shape their own destiny, they will face trials and challenges. While they succeeded in one challenge - winning the independence - this only paves the way for many more. I am confident that with the support of the people and countries of this region, Your Excellency and the Government of Timor Leste can rebuild and develop your country towards realising the aspirations of your people for a peaceful and prosperous country.

4. I am happy to note that cooperation and relations between Timor Leste and Malaysia have been, and continue to be further strengthened. Malaysia was among the first to set up a Liaison Office in Dili in April 2000 in our efforts to foster and facilitate closer cooperation and relations with Timor Leste. As you are aware, Your Excellency, we have since upgraded the Liaison Office to a full-fledged Embassy on 20 May this year, in conjunction with Timor Leste independence. Also, we welcome the establishment of your embassy here and the recent appointment of a resident Ambassador, His Excellency Djafar Alcatiri.

5. As a newly independent country, Timor Leste will have to face many challenges in the years ahead, yet be assured that Malaysia's commitment to develop close and mutually beneficial relations with your country will continue. We will maintain our cooperation with you in your development efforts within our capacities and abilities, under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP). We will continue to provide training for Timor Leste Defence Force personnel to help them

increase their capabilities in maintaining peace and stability in your country. We are supportive of the continued and important presence of UNMISSET (United Nations Mission of Support for Timor Leste) to ensure the smooth implementation of the process of nation- building in your country. Also, as you are aware, Malaysia participated in various capacities under UNTAET (the United Nations Transitional Administration in Timor Leste).

6. We recognise that current economic relations between our countries are unimpressive, yet there exists potential for trade and investment between our countries. We must endeavour to develop these potentials. I have been made to understand that there are already 90 Malaysian businessmen in Timor Leste involved in various economic activities such as consulting and accounting; hotel and restaurants; and commerce and general trading. I am confident that this level of relations can be further expanded. On our part, Malaysia will continue to encourage its private sector to go to Timor Leste and see for themselves the opportunities available for the mutual benefit of our two countries, among others in areas such as petroleum and gas exploration, infrastructure development, banking and insurance and agriculture. It is also my hope that Timor Leste would facilitate and assist Malaysian entrepreneurs in their endeavours.

7. From our own experience with independence in 1957, we recognise the importance of fully developing our economy and ensuring that the country's wealth is equitably distributed. We have since then embarked on various development programmes through our New Economic Policy, and presently our National Development Policy. We have aimed at transforming our economy from a commodity-based agricultural economy to a resilient, modern and diversified economy. With the right policies and right support, I believe that your country can develop and prosper. I believe you can tap the energy of your new struggle for development.

8. As a part of Southeast Asia, your country will play an important role in ensuring the continued development, peace and stability of this region. As developing countries, we in this region must foster close cooperation to collectively ensure that our interest are taken into account. We hope to see your country play an active role in this region - a role of maintaining peace; of creating economic partnerships between countries; and of increasing our cross-national and cross-cultural understanding. This engagement in the region is possible and necessary.

9. Malaysia welcomes the intention of President Gusmao to make a visit to Malaysia and we look forward to receiving him in

the near future. I too plan to visit your country at the end of this year. It is my belief that through such exchanges, we will be able to create better understanding and awareness between our two countries as well as to realise the full potential of our relationship