

**The Official Dinner In Honour Of Pol. Lt. Col. Dr. Thaksin
Shinawatra Prime Minister Of Thailand**

Langkawi, Kedah 27 July 2003

It gives me great pleasure to welcome Your Excellency and members of your delegation to Langkawi. I am delighted that Your Excellency has accepted my invitation to hold our Annual Consultation in this legendary island of Langkawi. I am hopeful the serenity and beauty of Langkawi as one of Malaysia's premier resort island would help us to continue our discussion in a more relaxing atmosphere. I do hope though that your visit, Excellency, will give me the opportunity to reciprocate the very warm hospitality you extended to my wife and I during our visit to Chiang Mai in July and Hadyai in December last year.

2. I recall with great satisfaction our last meeting in Hadyai when we had all our two Cabinets meeting together informally. It was indeed a unique occasion, the first ever such a meeting between our two countries. Such a meeting gave a fresh approach, which also allows direct interaction between our ministers. I have always believed that regular contacts and interaction between leaders, officials and people will help foster good relations between countries. The personal rapport established between them is immeasurable, and I must thank you for the initiative. I do hope we can again organise such a meeting in the future.

3. Today we have begun another chapter in our relationship by initiating a new fora to explore cooperation in technology to enhance economic growth in our two countries. The inauguration of the Plenary Session of the Malaysia-Thailand Technology Business Partnership Dialogue by us this morning has brought together Malaysians and Thais from both the public and private sectors to discuss and exchange ideas on technology cooperation for economic growth. This is yet another fine example of the spirit of collaboration that will continue to contribute to the expansion and consolidation of cooperation between Malaysia and Thailand.

4. Our joint efforts in the energy and commodity sectors, for example, have borne fruit. I am also pleased that we are continuously looking at new ways to expand such cooperation in other activities as well, such as in transport, health, education, and culture, all of which we had discussed in Hadyai. We are also particularly pleased with the various bilateral co-operation taking place between our agencies at our common border intended to enhance the socio-economic well being of the people in the border areas of both countries.

5. This afternoon, we had a frank and meaningful discussion on various issues affecting our two countries. We noted with satisfaction the excellent state of our relations as well as the satisfactory progress in our ongoing trade, investment and tourism. I am encouraged by your support to resolve the issues that we had identified.

6. We also discussed pending issues between our two countries. In this regard, I cannot but agree with you more when you said in Bangkok last year that Malaysia and Thailand offer the best model to the world of how two countries sharing a common border should live, coexist and cooperate with one another.

7. Close cooperation between our two countries is all the more relevant given the changing environment and the complexities of the world today. Terrorism, which poses the most serious threat to international peace and security, calls for strong bilateral cooperation, solidarity and commitment between us. By pooling our resources together we should, with our friends in the region, be better placed to nip any terrorist activity in the bud. No one country can fight this evil alone. We have to collaborate closely, as we have been doing, to eradicate this menace if we are to make the world a better and safer place to live in.

8. In our unwavering commitment to counter terrorism, Malaysia recently established the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism, in Kuala Lumpur, with its main scope of responsibility being to provide training to those involved in counter-terrorism so that they are fully prepared for the task. It will work closely with security agencies both within and outside the country to gather and exchange relevant information that would be pertinent for its training programmes. I am glad that many countries are supporting the establishment of the Centre. I hope we will continue to receive support not only from Thailand and our other neighbours, but also support of the international community as well as the United Nations.

9. Our cooperation has helped us to overcome the recent SARS outbreak in our region that caused havoc to our economies, especially in the tourism and transport sector. Again here, it was the joint and coordinated response that we took together with other countries in the region that had helped to contain the spread of the deadly virus in our countries. For our health care system, the knowledge and experience we gained together in combating SARS is immeasurable. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank you, Your Excellency, for the positive contribution made by Thailand in successfully hosting the ASEAN and ASEAN plus China Leaders Meeting, as well as the APEC Health Ministers' Meeting on SARS in Bangkok recently.

10. I have been following closely the remarkable economic progress that is being achieved by Thailand under your able stewardship. Your government's dual track policy of encouraging the export sector and increasing domestic consumption has certainly brought the desired result. I am encouraged that in the first quarter of this year, Thailand's economy recorded a remarkable 6.7 percent growth and that the expectation of continuing growth will remain strong for the rest of the year. I would like to congratulate you on your achievements. In October this year, Thailand will again take centre stage when you host the APEC Leaders Meeting in Bangkok. Your government, I know, has spared no effort in preparing for this, and I am confident this meeting will be a success. I look forward to being there.

11. In conclusion, let me once again welcome you to Langkawi. I hope that your short visit here will be a memorable one for you and members of your delegation.