

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD  
( PRIME MINISTER )

EVENT: THE 18TH. ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING

VENUE: KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 08 JUL 1985

TIME:

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Please allow me to extend a very warm welcome to all the Ministers and delegates to this 18th. ASEAN Ministerial Meeting. I hope your stay here in the next few days will be both fruitful and pleasant.

2. We meet at a time of challenge and a time of opportunity. The challenges must be confronted by creative dexterity and iron resolve, with pragmatism guided by a clear strategic vision with regard to the dictates of our national interest and the demands of ASEAN's future development. The opportunities must be grasped with equal creativity, with equal resolve, with a pragmatism that is similar and guided by the same depth of strategic vision.

3. For a long time, to echo a phrase, 'we never had it so good.' To be sure, the seventies was a period of international economic turmoil; but it was also a period of economic opportunity. Many countries in other parts of the world did badly. Many others did even worse. We in ASEAN performed exceedingly well, generally emerging as the fastest growing region in the world. Economic historians will say that we were not part of the passenger carriages being pulled. We were part of the engine of growth of the entire Pacific Basin and of the global economic system.

4. We still are part of the engine of growth and the days ahead are by no means dark. But the skies in the rest of the eighties threaten much rain and many storms. The prospects for commodity prices in the short and medium term demand that we continue to strengthen our efficiency as world beaters. The productivity push must be taken to new heights. The tide of growing protectionism and more blatant commodity market manipulation demand that we act with resolve and where necessary in concert to keep the open doors from being closed and to break the stranglehold of institutions created by marketeers for themselves. We appreciate all that is being done in Japan and the United States and elsewhere by those who believe in open doors. We

strongly deprecate the actions of those who champion protectionism.

5. In a fast-changing international environment, we must continue to be quick of foot, able to respond at the governmental level and in the private sector to market changes and product demands. We must make sure that the economic tensions between our friends -- the United States and Japan -- are not escalated, indeed that they are dissipated. Above all we must ensure that the solution of their problem should not be at our expense. Then of course we must continue to find the means by which economic cooperation within ASEAN can be taken in new directions and to new levels. Malaysia, together with the other states of ASEAN, must continue to ensure that ASEAN remains the focus of our attention and the cornerstone of our foreign policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. The biggest political challenge confronting ASEAN today, as in the recent past, is the Kampuchean question. Unfortunately, of late there has been a lack of response to the initiatives of ASEAN. We must continue to exercise patience. At the same time, we must continue to be proactive, to consider every possibility, and to work with determination and creativity in our tireless search for a just, productive, and viable political solution, a solution that will be just, productive and viable in the long term as well as in the short run.

7. It is Malaysia's view that for such a just, productive and viable solution the following imperatives will have to be met. Firstly the suffering of the Kampuchean people must be ended while Thailand's security must be ensured. This is basic. Then there must be a government of national reconciliation, and the Kampuchean people must be provided with the opportunity to exercise their right of self-determination and to ensure a state of Kampuchea that is sovereign and independent. This obviously means that finally foreign troops cannot be on Kampuchean soil.

8. The only guarantee of a viable solution to the Kampuchean problem lies in the reasonable accommodation of the vital interests of all the parties to the dispute, in creating a situation that all can live with and none will set about to undo. Those who neglect the lessons of history may be condemned to repeating it. Let us not forget Geneva. Let us not forget that true peace, true stability, true security are dynamic processes, which have to be sustained over time. As much as the other states in the Indo Chinese Peninsular and indeed everywhere else desire to live free and independent in their own homeland, so do the Kampuchean people.

9. For a settlement to be productive in terms of the long-term peace, security and stability of Southeast Asia,

it is essential that we understand that our concern must not only be with the short run but also the longer-term future of the region. We should aspire to a solution that is provocative of no Power. We should aspire to a political solution which establishes the ground rules for the game of peace in Southeast Asia, which establishes the principle that there must be respect for each other's independence and territorial integrity, which establishes the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and which establishes the principle of pacific settlement -- the living rule that all disputes shall be resolved by peaceful means. We should also aspire to a solution that will enhance the prospects for the realisation of our common goal for a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality in this region, where confidence and understanding can flourish and cooperation can prosper.

10. Such a just, productive and viable solution is, unfortunately not at hand. We in ASEAN must therefore continue to strive to bring it about. Clearly Vietnam must be brought to realise the need to engage in meaningful dialogues with us and with the parties concerned so as to remove the impediments to peace in Kampuchea. It is time for Vietnam to respond constructively to the ASEAN approaches.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. If the Kampuchean problem poses the biggest political challenge to our ingenuity, our creativity and our efforts, the problem of dadah or drug abuse and illicit trafficking poses the biggest social challenge. In your countries as in mine, we have undertaken great efforts to deal with this dreaded disease. We have sought to move our nations, to galvanise our society in the war against narcotics. It is time to take the fight to the international arena and to create a world concert against the abuse of drugs and the criminals who perpetrate this crime against humanity. In this context, Malaysia welcomes the timely call of the Secretary General of the United Nations for the convening of a World Conference of Ministers to initiate a programme of concrete action. I would go further. Given the gravity of the situation and the universality of this grave menace to mankind, is there not a need to push most vigorously for a United Nations organisation similar to the organisation for refugees? I call upon you to impress upon all the ASEAN dialogue partners the necessity and the urgency of a concerted global war against a menace that recognises no boundaries and that threatens all societies in every part of the world.

12. I have mentioned what to me are the most serious economic, political and social challenges to ASEAN and to ASEAN's ingenuity and energies. Let me now dwell a little on the opportunities that ASEAN offers.

13. It might be argued that in the more uncertain economic situation that will confront us in the days ahead, the opportunity to take ASEAN economic cooperation to new frontiers will be more complicated. If anything, now is not the most opportune time. There may be some veracity in this. But let us ask ourselves: how often in the life of an organisation, as in the life of a man, does the 'most opportune time' come? When, in the life of ASEAN, will the most opportune time for economic cooperation arrive? Do we merely sit and wait? Or do we move to create the conditions and to mould the events that will allow us to achieve the breakthroughs we must have with regard to economic cooperation?

14. We have heard the saying that nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come. I am one who believes that it must be one of the fundamental tasks of true leadership to take a powerful idea and to make its time come. The opportune time, like good luck, may happen by chance. But it more often comes about by the sweat of our brows and by the courage of our convictions, by human effort allied to human determination. It is time for those of us who believe dearly in ASEAN, who see vast potential for economic cooperation, to stop being merely dreamers and to bedoers. It is time for us who recognise the great opportunities to stop waiting and to start moving.

15. We now see our entrepreneurs and traders eyeing the 'vast' China Market, but missing or dismissing the reality that is before their very eyes: the ASEAN Market. Statistics tell us what our deflected imaginations fail to grasp: that the ASEAN Market is four times the size of the China Market. That the ASEAN Market is at our very door-step, not in a far-away land whose business practices and systems are uncertain, and in some areas, still an unknown quantity. We now see some of our investors eyeing China as an attractive place for their investment, when vast opportunities exist in ASEAN in every area of business activity.

16. There are, no doubt, various obstacles to greater economic cooperation within ASEAN. But to the negative thinkers, let me pose this question: in what worth-while human endeavour do we not encounter serious obstacles? To be sure, the economies of the ASEAN countries are generally competitive rather than complementary. But can we not seek the many areas of complementarity, which are there in even the most complementary system, and exploit them to our mutual advantage? Is it not time for our private sector to know as much about the markets of each of the ASEAN states as we know about the markets of Japan, of Europe and of the United States?

17. Let not my remarks be misunderstood. ASEAN has been a resounding success. Even if we make little headway in the area of economic cooperation, ASEAN will continue to remain

a vital institution. It will remain a vigorous and productive endeavour. If ASEAN did not exist, we would have had to invent it. But this year as in years past we have an opportunity, indeed, an obligation to all our peoples not only to consolidate ASEAN, but also to strive to break new ground, to take each new challenge and to turn it into a new opportunity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. I now have great pleasure to officially declare open this 18th. ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.  
Thank you.