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EVENT: At The 29th International General Meeting Of The Pacific Basin
Economic Council

VENUE: At Washington D.C.

DATE: 21 May 1996

TIME:

'THE ASIAN VALUES DEBATE'

Let me begin by saying what a great honour it is for me to speak at this PBEC conference.

2. I believe in community-building. And I believe one of the most important tasks in the remaining years of this millennium is to lay strong foundations for a Pacific community of friendship, goodwill and prosperity -- bringing closer together the peoples of the northern Pacific, the southern Pacific, the eastern Pacific and the western Pacific. We must eschew exclusiveness and we must believe that the best way to convert non-believers is to keep in contact with them and to demonstrate the good resulting from your beliefs. The worst thing you can do is to isolate and to cause misery in order to gain submission to your beliefs and your ways.
3. Ideologies which are forced on people invariably ended in rebellion and rejection. It is as true of economic systems as it is true of political systems. The present world-wide love affair with the free market economy is not the result of arm-twisting. It is the result of observing the obvious results of the free market system. It is noteworthy that perestroika and glasnost were initiated not by the masses in the Soviet Union but by the top leaders, the only people who could go abroad to the so-called capitalist countries and see for themselves how much better off were the workers there, compared to the poverty of the workers in the Communist countries. What Gorbachev and Edourd Shevenardze saw must have convinced them that Communism held no promise for their country. And so Gorbachev started the process of embracing the free market and also democracy.
4. The Cold War was not won by Western diplomats or generals. It was won by the workers of the West with their Chevy and Plymouth parked outside western factories. It was won by wellstocked supermarkets and shopping malls.
5. I have not been asked to give my views on the Cold war. I was asked to speak on Asian Values. But what I have said so far have some bearing on the subject. Engage, don't contain.
6. There is a sincere belief amongst many in the West that their values and beliefs are universal -- universally valued and believed in by all civilised and civil men and women everywhere. There is the sincere belief amongst many in the West that there are only universal values -- and that these values are, as you already guessed -- the values which they hold. There is also the sincere belief amongst many in the west that the advocates and champions of Asian values or other values are merely

justifying oppression, dictatorship and uncivilised behaviour. Those who speak of Asian values are just looking for or merely making excuses.

7. I happen to believe that there is a large common ground of values which we all share, arising out of the fact that we are human, that we are parents, and that we being gregarious must live in society, and so on.

8. But I also happen to believe that there are natural differences in values. Those who say there are none are like the colour blind who can only see shades of grey, who cannot see all the colours of the rainbow and therefore say they do not exist.

9. Is anyone suggesting that there are no differences at all between the American way of life and values and some of the ways and values of the "old world", Europe? Indeed, did multitudes not flee to the new "world" in order to escape from the values and ways of the old? I am sure there are many American values and ways of today which the French would find somewhat different, if not quaint or even repulsive. Even America's close cousin, the British, find some American values a little off putting. Indeed, I am sure there are many in Europe who would see themselves as the custodians of "universal" Western values, who would see many American values as being at variance with or on the fringes of Western values. America is in so many ways a result of experiences and circumstances almost unique in the community of nations, even in the Western world.

10. Those who believe there are no differences at all in value systems and value beliefs might ask whether even within a single country there are no great value differences. Surely there is big city culture and Peyton Place culture. And big cities across continents share much in terms of values and ways. The starving in all societies share much, just as the very wealthy and the nouveau riche share much. America itself has been said to be a nation of many nations -- of many ethnic, cultural and geographical nations.

11. If all these things are true, how can it be argued that there are only universal values? If anything, it might well be argued -- as I have had the temerity to argue -- that just as European values are more universal than American values, Asian values are in fact more universal than both. Indeed on the basis of numbers and great similarities with others in most of Africa and much of Latin America, if anyone can claim to be the holders of universal values, Asia with its billions can. At the same time I pray the time will never come when anyone in Asia will stand up to claim that there are only universal values, i.e. the values of Asia. And that anyone who speaks of American values or European values or Western values are merely justifying the unholy things that are being perpetrated in America, Europe and the West.

12. If this were to happen, it could only be out of the arrogance of power. I believe that Asia will never have such power I hope we will never have such arrogance.

13. However offensive or outrageous is the idea that others elsewhere can deeply believe in different things and that these beliefs, values and ways of doing things may possibly be better, more productive and even more civilised than one's own, one should at least be prepared to accept this possibility.

14. Here, ladies and gentlemen, is part of the problem. For centuries, so many of us in Asia believed that our Asian values and ways were second-rate. If today, Asians have discovered that Asian ways and values are not inferior simply because they are Asian, and often are superior despite the fact that they are Asians, perhaps we may be forgiven. Especially when they read, daily and frequently about the terrible things that Westerners say are happening in the West and the wondrously things that so many Westerners say are happening in the East. If many in the West are either wondrously taken or sedately impressed by many of the values and ways of Asia, is it so strange that many Asians are similarly, wondrously or sedately struck by many of the values and ways of Asia?

15. Not only are we now convinced of the rightness of many of our Asian ways, but we are also convinced that these Asian ways are currently under attack. And much of the debate on Asian values is clearly defensive in nature. It is therefore not surprising that the intensity of the Asian values debate is largely determined by fear that Asian success might lead to Asian self-assertion.

16. Many of us in Asia cannot but be aware of results. It is hard to quarrel with results. We cannot avoid noticing the connection between our approach, our values with our success in many fields. Why then must we change ourselves to suit the West and their values. Why are so many in the West insisting that we become just like them. This the strong among us will not do. The weak unfortunately have little choice.

17. The ancient Greek historian, Thucydides, at the end of his history of the Peloponnesian wars, came to the conclusion that in the affairs of nations the strong will demand what they will and the weak must yield what they must. Much of Asia will no longer yield. For much of Asia is now no longer weak -- in material or mental terms. Much of Asia will resist -- in silence. Some in Asia will talk back.

18. We will do so not only because we have thrown off the shackles of mental servitude. In truth, we must fight for we are fighting for our winning ways, which are under internal as well as external attack and erosion. We know we can only win the future by mustering and fortifying the many strengths of the past.

19. I have attempted an explanation of why it is that Asian values are often the subject of such vigorous debate. Let me now say a few things about Asian values per se. First, what are some of these values?

20. Asia is, of course, a huge continent, like America is a huge country. For every generalisation about Asia or America that is made, exceptions can be found. And yet, there is a body of common values and beliefs that most of us in Asia hold on to in order to guide our way in the world that can be called "Asian" just as there is a body of common values and ways that can be called "American". I would like to emphasise here that the difference between people, is not their physiognomy, ethnicity or skin colour. What distinguishes them is their culture, that is the system of values which they believe in relationship. In education, over 100,000 Malaysian students have bonefired from a U.S. education. Today, the USA has replaced Britain and Australia as the favoured destination of Malaysian students. Four out of every 10 Malaysian students have come to the USA. There are presently

17,000 Malayalan students here in the USA, making Malaysians the seventh largest group of foreign students in the USA. In the early years, Malaysia has benefited from the U.S. peace corps in our educational and rural development.

14. In business and economic terms our relationship is also growing from strength to strength. New partnerships, jointventures and strategic alliances are being established between U.S. and Malaysian companies and businessmen. Trade and investment flows between our two countries have also been growing steadily. Likewise, U.S. exports and investments in Malaysia have shown substantial increases. It is clear that the booming Asia-Pacific economies have induced many U.S. companies to reassess their business strategies to take advantage of the robust regional growth. Increasingly, more and more U.S. companies are diversifying their investment portfolios in the region. Malaysia is a beneficiary of this strategic shift with the increase in U.S. - Malaysia trade and investment.

15. Malaysian executives have served in senior positions in U.S. companies not only within Malaysia but also overseas. A Malaysian is President of the Motorola in China. Until recently, a Malaysian was Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Republican National Committee in Washington DC. There are significant numbers of Malaysian engineers working in San Jose and Cupertino.

16. In geopolitical terms, Malaysia and the U.S. have several common interests. We both believe in the preservation of global peace, security and stability. We believe in the free market system to achieve economic prosperity. We believe in staying engaged with the emerging regional power, China. We subscribe to basic democratic principles. We belong to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. Despite our initial misgivings, Malaysia is now fairly comfortable with the APEC process. In fact in 1998, Malaysia will host the APEC Summit. Malaysia holds roughly similar view with the U.S. on the legitimacy and correctness of allowing the Bosnians to have sufficient capacity to defend themselves if the U.N. and Nato are not prepared to defend them.

17. In the process of industrialisation Malaysia has progressed from the humble beginning of labour-intensive semi conductor assembly of the 1970's to today's sophisticated, valued-added manufacturing that includes marketing and customer support which have all been initiated by U.S. companies. Malaysia has benefited from this shift to higher-end manufacturing by American firms. The top-five industries with highest U.S. investments in Malaysia are Electronics, Chemical and Chemical Products, Petroleum Refining, Transport Equipment and non-Metallic products. In fact, today we see American companies engaged in the entire value-chain process in their Malaysian operations. Intel is one such outstanding example of the whole value-chain carried out in Malaysia.

18. It is in the mutual interests of Asia and the USA for the U.S. to continue to stay actively engaged in Asia. Asians by and large welcome your investments, technology and tourists. But, we hope the U.S. will not ride rough-shod over our legitimate concerns. We are free nations and as much as the U.S. and its citizens value your freedom, we value ours. Between free nations, partnerships should not be as between client states and a big power. They should be based on mutual respect. What applies to us must apply equally to all.

19. Malaysia continues to welcome an active U.S. economic role in Asia. Specifically, we welcome your trade and investments. Malaysia is keen to attract more investors that can enhance the development of high-technology industries in the country. We hope you will see the potential of Malaysia, standing at the crossroads of Asia, confident of its future, determined to achieve its Vision 2020, as a reliable and trustworthy partner. Join with us in our quest to upgrade our industries. March with us towards our Vision 2020 goals. Participate with our businessmen and join hands with them to be techno-entrepreneurs of the Asian Century.

Thank you.

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FILE NAME: SP2105
REF: SMA210596