

SPEECH BY: Dato' Seri Dr. **Mahathir** Bin Mohamad  
( Prime Minister )

EVENT: At The Official Dinner in Honour of H.E. General Tan Sri Chavalit Yongchaiyudh Prime Minister of Thailand

VENUE: Sri Perdana, Kuala Lumpur

DATE: 27 Feb 1997

TIME:

1. It gives me great pleasure to welcome Your Excellency, Madam and members of your delegation to Malaysia. Please accept my sincere felicitations on your recent assumption of the post of Prime Minister of Thailand. Your appointment is a recognition of your distinguished accomplishments in the service of your country and people.
2. I am particularly delighted that one who is a familiar personality and a friend of Malaysia is at the helm of affairs in neighbouring Thailand, a country with which Malaysia has had long and close ties. Your presence and the presence of many Thai senior government officials here today reflects a desire to further strengthen the already close relations that exist between Malaysia and Thailand. We have had fruitful discussions and exchange of views this afternoon on various bilateral and regional issues and I look forward to enhancing our relationship in the years ahead.
3. It is no secret that Malaysia and Thailand are close friends and neighbours in the true spirit of ASEAN. Our relations have progressed amicably over the years. The bonds of friendship between Malaysia and Thailand, based on mutual respect, have resulted in strong cross-border cooperation.
4. I am pleased to note that bilateral trade between the two countries has been growing steadily from US\$3.8 billion in 1994 to US\$4.9 billion last year, recording an increase of 28.4 percent. Despite this encouraging expansion in bilateral trade, the level of investments between our two countries is not equally impressive especially given the numerous opportunities and incentives in both countries. It is my hope that there will be a marked improvement in this area of cooperation in the near future. I am delighted to know that Your Excellency would give a talk on investment opportunities in Thailand to prominent Malaysian and Thai businessmen tomorrow. I hope that more such events will be organised in our respective countries for mutual benefit. There is a need also to

foster strategic linkages between our entrepreneurs and captains of industry in order to create partnerships in economic development, not only at national but also at regional and global levels.

5. Being neighbours and sharing common land and sea borders, it is inevitable that there will be frictions every now and again in our relationship. However, I am happy to note that through the years, certain useful bilateral mechanisms like the annual Joint Commission Meetings and the General Border Committee have managed to overcome problems, or kept them at a low level, the subjects of negotiations rather than confrontation.

6. In planting the seeds of real cooperation between our private sectors, I am encouraged to note that in the overlapping continental shelf area, we have turned a potential area of conflict into an area of shared benefit by creating the Joint Development Authority to exploit and equitably share the non-living resources.

7. I would also like to take this opportunity to express Malaysia's position on the subject of illegal immigrants. Malaysia needs foreign workers but their entry and presence must be in accordance with established procedures as well as Malaysia's laws and regulations. We, therefore, highly appreciate the cooperation extended to us by close friends and neighbours such as Thailand in order to curb the entry of illegal immigrants into Malaysia.

8. On regional matters, I am deeply convinced that the depth of mutual understanding and trust between our two countries has significantly contributed to the overall peace and cooperation in the region. ASEAN will this year celebrate its 30th Anniversary which is evidence of its remarkable and enviable success as a regional organisation. ASEAN has now become a forum capable of sustained cohesiveness upon which various issues of common concern can be effectively addressed and managed. Malaysia looks forward to the early realisation of an ASEAN TEN in which all the countries of South East Asia are fully members of the ASEAN family. I am sure that the new members will soon grow economically and together we will have a market of some 500 million people. Even if the per capita is small, the purchasing power of 500 million people will be considerable.

9. Regional and international cooperation have today become an indispensable means of achieving the common good and prosperity of countries. Malaysia and Thailand are not big nations but we have shown the commitment and courage to participate and contribute positively in the various multilateral organisations. We will be that much

more effective when we work in concert, as for example,  
through ASEAN.

FILE NAME: SP2702