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**Title : ASEAN PATRIOTISM CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY THE INSTITUT
KAJIAN SEJARAH DAN PATRIOTISME MALAYSIA OR THE
MALAYSIAN INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL AND PATRIOTISM
STUDIES**

YAB Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam,
Chief Minister of Melaka,

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to express my profound appreciation and thanks to YAB Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam, Chief Minister of Melaka and the Institut Kajian Sejarah Dan Patriotisme Malaysia or the Malaysian Institute of Historical and Patriotism Studies for kindly inviting me to officially open and be associated with the ASEAN Patriotism Conference.

I would like to commend the Malaysian Institute of Historical and Patriotism Studies for the invaluable work that it is doing to inculcate the spirit of patriotism among the people of Malaysia, especially the youths. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Melaka State Government and the Malaysian Institute of Historical and Patriotism Studies for getting together such a distinguished group of participants from ASEAN member countries to interact and deliberate on matters pertaining to patriotism with topics ranging from history, colonization, nationalism and nation-building.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to warmly welcome the participants from the ASEAN member countries to the Conference held at the historical city of Melaka. While participating in the Conference, I hope our ASEAN friends would find time to venture and explore the numerous tourist attractions in and around Melaka as well as other parts of Malaysia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The term patriotism is an elusive one. It had also evolved over time and holds different meaning and value to different people and society. During the colonial era, it was correctly associated with the struggle for independence to throw off the shackles of colonialism. Nearly all our countries have undergone the process of decolonization. Our freedom could be attributed to the heightened spirit of patriotism

that prevailed then among our people and the sacrifices that they made for the sake of our nation.

Following independence, efforts were taken to instill and nurture love in one's own country, while preserving our freedom and protecting it from foreign interference, be it political, military, economic, culture or religion. Parallel steps were also taken to bring about development and prosperity. Regional cooperation and collaboration were forged to harness our national and regional strength in order to enable us to jointly prosper.

While these positive aspects of patriotism directed at nation-building are welcomed, it is regrettable that the demonstration of national patriotism in many cases had degenerated into excessive national pride and parochialism and religious intolerance leading to conflicts and disputes within countries and amongst countries, thus causing untold sufferings of innocent lives. Events in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Palestine, Somalia, Rwanda and Chechnya are reminders of the calamities that could befall on a country and its people if some choose to follow forms of extreme and narrow based patriotism. Such conflicts and disputes have led to many countries in other parts of the world to regress in poverty and backwardness, sometimes even worse than their pre or post independence eras.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We in ASEAN are fortunate that we have avoided such pitfalls despite the festering wars and conflicts that accompanied the formation of ASEAN and its subsequent development. ASEAN was able to successfully overcome these challenges and move forward. Through a strong spirit of cooperation and cohesiveness, and responsible leadership, ASEAN has now become the most successful regional organization in the developing world.

In essence, the nations of ASEAN, both collectively and individually, have made significant contributions to the peace and stability of the region by their political pragmatism and economic dynamism. While pursuing their national priorities, ASEAN Governments never fail to take into account the larger interest of the region. For Malaysia the conduct of its policies and relations with its ASEAN neighbours fitted well with a policy premised on the belief that prosperous neighbours will not only have less domestic problems which impact on neighbours but, can actually help prosper it by being a rich trading partner. It therefore pays for neighbours to help prosper each other. Another positive aspect of cooperation within ASEAN is the ASEAN approach in helping the newer members to catch up with the older members. It is motivated by selfishness and the spirit of regional patriotism. We should therefore promote further and nurture similar forms of ASEAN patriotism in order to build our national and regional strength and resilience.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although there still exist certain differences, challenges and conflicting claims, the South-East Asian region nevertheless enjoys unprecedented peace and stability. ASEAN as a group can obviously contribute much towards the growth and advancement of our region. Although all of us are still recovering from the economic turmoil which has undermined our growth and economic prosperity, our potential is still there, the skills and the willingness are still there. The system and the game rule of a globalised world may not favour us now but ASEAN will learn to handle them in time and bounce back, possibly stronger than ever before. What we need to do now is to build up our internal strength and resilience, our organization, our unity and cohesiveness and also our national and ASEAN patriotism, and then we will overcome the difficulties and achieve progress and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Conference is a good platform to learn from each other about our diverse history, political and economic system, and culture as well as experiences in nation building. Once we understand about each other's country, we shall also respect each other's differences. I sincerely hope that such an understanding will lead to enhanced overall cooperation and solidarity amongst us.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again congratulate the Melaka State Government and the Malaysian Institute of Historical and Patriotism Studies under the leadership of YAB Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam for organizing this conference. Once again I welcome our foreign friends and appreciate their keen interest for coming together to listen and share their experience and knowledge concerning our history and nation-building efforts, and to explore how we could continue to instill the spirit of patriotism in the hearts of our peoples.

The friendship and networking that you will establish here will contribute towards ASEAN efforts to strengthen the people to people relations.

On that note, I have great pleasure in declaring open the ASEAN Patriotism Conference.

Thank you.