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Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh, Salam Bahagia and Good Morning,

The Honourable Dato' Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi
Prime Minister of Malaysia,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

ladies and Gentlemen,

1. On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, I wish to warmly welcome The Honourable Dato' Seri Abdullah Hajj Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia, and all of you to the Second East Asia Forum. I deeply appreciate your presence here today to share with us your thoughts and views on how we could realise our common objective of realising an East Asian Community.

2. I am particularly grateful that The Honourable Prime Minister has found the time to deliver the keynote address entitled "Towards an Integrated East Asian Community" at our Second East Asia Forum.

3. As all of you are aware, The Honourable Prime Minister during his tenure as Foreign Minister, was very much involved in building, enhancing and consolidating Malaysia's relations with other countries at bilateral and regional level under the premiership of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. In this regard, the subject of East Asian cooperation then is not new and in fact close to his heart. It is in this context that we are therefore highly fortunate to have him with us this morning as the Prime Minister of Malaysia to set the tone, structure and content for our discussions.

4. I am also happy to see the presence of my colleagues from the ASEAN countries, Deputy Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of Laos, H.E. Somsavat Lengsavad, the Foreign Minister of Myanmar, H.E. U Nyan Win, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, H.E. Alberto G. Romulo, for their participation in the East Asia Forum. I also wish to acknowledge all other delegates from ASEAN + 3 countries - Japan, Korea and China.

5. Today's gathering is given an important historical context and perspective by the kind presence of former Japanese Prime Minister Mr. Tsutomu Hata, former Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad and former Korean President

H.E. Kim Dae-Jung. I am sure that their contributions will enrich our discussions.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. ASEAN+3 cooperation has come a long way since its inception in 1997. Today there are more than 48 different fora spanning the whole gamut of cooperation. This broad and extensive network of cooperation has essentially laid down the structural framework for the future East Asian Community.

7. The East Asia Forum is one of the 26 measures of the East Asia Study Group. The thrust of this Second East Asia Forum today is to further discuss, explore and propose practical suggestions and ways to construct an integrated East Asia Community by building on the outcome of the first East Asia Forum organised by the Republic of Korea last year.

8. In this connection, the agreement of the 10th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane on the convening of the East Asia Summit in 2005 in Putrajaya is another key achievement in the evolution of the East Asian Community. As the incoming ASEAN chair, Malaysia would certainly use the occasion to advance ASEAN's collective interest to move forward the East Asian Community while preserving the unity of ASEAN and strengthening it further.

9. I hope our deliberations could explore further views and ideas that the Prime Minister would put forward in his keynote address. At the end of the Forum, the participants will recommend ways and means on advancing our objective of realizing an integrated East Asian Community in the near future.

10. On that note, it gives me great pleasure to invite The Honourable Prime Minister to deliver his keynote address and declare open the Second East Asia Forum.

You have the floor, Sir.