

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

VIETNAM'S MODERNISATION AND ASEAN COOPERATION

*Anwar Ibrahim**

Iwould like, first of all, to extend a very warm *Selamat Datang* to all foreign delegates and participants of this symposium to Malaysia. We are indeed honored by the distinguished presence of His Excellency Mr Nguyen Khanh, Deputy Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and his high-powered delegation representing his country here.

Barely a year has passed since I addressed in Hanoi the first in this series of symposia on Interaction for Progress. On that occasion, I made allusion to a certain creature of myth, namely the dragon.

As I recall, I was referring to the interplay of reality and imagination when I invoked this very familiar creature of Asian mythology. Vietnam as "the Land of the Ascending Dragon" is ready to rise and breathe fire again if its people have the courage of conviction, the commitment and the determination.

Today the dragon comes to my mind again in another context, especially when we consider the theme of this symposium – Vietnamese Modernization and Asean Cooperation.

The myths tell us that the dragon is immortal. It may sleep awhile, or hide away, but it is ever ready to rise again, as strong and as powerful as ever.

The same is true, I believe, for our peoples in Asia. We all take the path of modernization by harnessing our inner strength and the resources of our culture and traditions. Although we have all gone through decades of subjugation and humiliation by foreign powers, we have not merely survived; we have emerged even stronger than we were before.

For some of us, the strength is yet latent and potential rather than realized. This is the situation, I believe, that Vietnam is in. Malaysia has had the good fortune of some decades of peace and stability to realize this latent strength of our cultural values and to build upon it. It is true that we in Malaysia have wholeheartedly espoused modernization. We are determined to march ahead into the future, but at the same time we are not prepared to abandon

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our past in its entirety and consign it to the museums or history. We are equally determined to live and abide by the positive values of our tradition and retain our cultural identity.

Since the formation of ASEAN, we and our partners, have developed a truly unique Asian way of managing and dealing with intra-regional issues and problems. Drawing upon our values and traditions we have succeeded in forging the most viable regional grouping of its kind anywhere in the world. If today ASEAN is seen by the rest of the world as a success, it is because of our collective commitment to prosper and yet to remain Asian in our ways.

We believe this aspiration to prosper together and the sentiment to preserve our identity is also shared by our cousins in the rest of Southeast Asia. It is in this context that Prime Minister Dato Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad expressed the hope that the ASEAN six would evolve over the next few years into the ASEAN 10. We are already, in more ways than one, a family — linked by bonds that are ancient yet still vibrant and relevant. Our desire is for this family, which in the recent past underwent many conflicts and separations, to come together again as a community for peace and progress.

We are aware that the possibility of a bigger ASEAN as well as its logical extension into a wider caucus incorporating the entire East Asian region is viewed with envy and suspicion by some. We say to them: Do grow out of the Cold War mindset! Let us not think in terms of “spheres of influence,” polarity” or “containment.” They may no longer use these terms unabashedly, but we believe the vocabulary of the Cold War era is still very much alive in their minds. In fact, their very objection to the EAEC proposal is almost sufficient proof of the necessity of such an arrangement.

The entire ASEAN region is currently excited about Vietnam’s new course. In fact we cannot afford to ignore Vietnam. Those who choose to ignore Vietnam will be left behind. But let us spell it out, for our mutual benefit, lest we in ASEAN and the Vietnamese people misunderstand each other: Our going into Vietnam is as friends and partners. As far as the Malaysian Government is concerned, our encouragement of the private sector to venture into Vietnam is not a license to exploit the weaknesses of the Vietnamese economy for short-term profiteering. We value our friendship with the Vietnamese people. To our Malaysian private sector let me address this expression of hope: the governments of Malaysia and Vietnam have paved and facilitated the way for you to participate in Vietnam’s reconstruction and development. Let us strive to fulfill our

social obligations to the host country and be remembered as businessmen with social conscience.

In this regard, our attitude is an extension of our national policies. For example, we have encouraged and promoted a greater role for the private sector in national development on the understanding that their pursuit of profit is balanced by social responsibility. In our national development policy we pursue the path of growth with distributive justice. Our conviction in the necessity of affirmative action on the part of the Government is based on the fact that market forces alone cannot ensure equitable distribution of economic benefits. Unbridled capitalism will generate wealth, no doubt, but it will not prevent the growth of poverty. We have been witnessing the growth of the underclass in mature industrialized societies. Poverty and deprivation breeds jealousy and hate. Where whole communities feel isolated and despair of assistance from the Government, let alone the wealthy, then even a tiny spark can ignite the explosion.

We in Malaysia have learned some tough and bitter lessons along the way. Following the racial riots of May 13, 1969 the Government formulated the New Economic Policy to redress the dual problems of poverty and the identification of race with economic functions. This policy had been subject to severe criticism from foreigners. But we have been honest to ourselves and have remained committed to the idea of distributive justice and affirmative action to redress economic and social imbalances.

After almost a quarter of a century, we have seen the fruits of this policy. Wealth is now no longer identified with race. Poverty has been reduced tremendously. And above all, we can almost feel the sense of confidence of the people of all races in the future of the nation. The validity of our policy of affirmative action is not only proven by the positive results I have just described, but also more convincingly by recent events in the United States.

Contrary to the belief held in some quarters that affirmative action stifles growth, our economy achieved consistently high growth rates throughout the intervening years. As a result, now we are in a position to promote investment overseas as well as continuing to attract foreign investment into this country.

At this point in its history, Vietnam faces a different set of problems. It has to determine its own priorities and directions. Many of the specifics of our own experience may not be directly relevant to Vietnam. The same is true for the specific experiences of other Asean societies. Nevertheless we believe that in the spirit of partnership these experiences, when shared, are mutually enriching and provide sure guidance for avoiding costly errors.

Southeast Asia Beyond 2000 Confidence Building And Cooperation

Finally, I would like to congratulate the organizers of this symposium — the Institute for Policy Research, Malaysia, the Information and Resource Center, Singapore, and the Institute for Long-Term and Regional Planning, Vietnam — for their excellent efforts. May your deliberations be successful.

BUILDING A NEW SOUTHEAST ASIA

*Nguyen Khanh**

First of all, let me on behalf of the Vietnamese delegation extend to H.E the Prime Minister, H.E the Minister of Finance, H.E the Representative of the Asean Secretariat, the distinguished participants from Asean member countries, and the honoured guests here for the symposium our greetings of veneration and our feelings of sincerity. Your presence at this symposium is indeed a manifestation of the importance that you attach to it as well as the attention you pay to promoting the cooperation between Asean countries and Vietnam. This symposium will be noted as a joint effort to enhancing mutual understanding, sympathy and trust, and as a basis for an ever more profound cooperation among us—the countries of Southeast Asia.

Vietnam now is conducting a process of renewal with a view to soon overcoming economic difficulties, getting out of poverty and underdevelopment, step by step achieving modernization, joining the mainstream of nations in the region and the world over. Having completed a long-lasting struggle for independence and freedom, for national reunification, the Vietnamese people took the road of development in line with their national historical characteristics, with the natural, economic and social conditions of the country, and with the noble ideals of humanity. That is the road of socialist-oriented development the core of which is everything for the people, of the people and by the people, everything aimed at making the people prosperous and the country strong, bringing about to the people a life in abundance, liberty and happiness, in a rich cultural life and social justice, in friendship and cooperation with all other nations and states in the region and throughout the world. The Vietnamese people have no greater interests than such. That is why Vietnam is in itself an active constructive factor to all the cooperation for peace, national independence, stability and development.

The course of renewal in Vietnam has produced important preliminary results. In the economic field, the renewal focuses on shifting the centrally planned and subsidized economy to a market economy along with diversifying the ownership system. We do not hold that market economy contradicts socialism while the former can only healthily develop under the state's macro regulation and management. It is also our opinion that in the market economy,

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ownership should be diversified, meaning that different economic sectors co-exist and all members of the society are free to operate in conformity with the laws so that the resources can be maximally and efficiently utilized. In the specific conditions of Vietnam, it is necessary for the State-run economy based on the whole people's ownership to exist and develop in the key sectors of the national economy. All the economic sectors including the State-run economy, and the collective economy, private capitalist economy, State capitalist economy, do not operate separately but in unison with the forms of specialization and cooperation, joint ventures and integration, and economic relations. This is a fundamental and consistent policy which has been reaffirmed in the 1992 constitution passed by the national assembly of Vietnam. All that can be looked upon as new and dynamic in the Vietnamese economy during the past few years has been underscored through the implementation of this important policy.

At present, our emphasis is on economic structural transformation with priority given to the development of agriculture, food production in particular, and consumer industries; promotion of export and broadening of foreign economic relations; attracting foreign investment, technologies and management experience. Exploitation of oil and gas and other mineral resources; construction of infrastructures; and the expansion of services are also our priorities. We endeavor to mobilize all available domestic resources in combination with all possible foreign resources. All these activities are geared towards efficiently exploiting Vietnam's advantages in terms of natural resources and geographical location so as to both develop its economy and solve social problems.

In the socio-political field, Vietnam's renewal centers on perfecting democracy in all aspects of social life, establishing realistic conditions and mechanisms for the people to master their lives and providing them with true rights and the ability to deeply and practically participate in national management at all levels, from the grassroots up to the highest organs of power. The Vietnamese people acknowledge the leading role played by the Communist Party of Vietnam over the country and the society since it is the Communist Party of Vietnam who led the people in winning and maintaining national independence, bringing land to the tiller and the right to master the country to the people, and who is at the present the initiator and the leader of the process of renewal in Vietnam.

In the course of national construction and development, we consider the Vietnamese people to be a decisive factor. Driven by their will to build a prosperous and strong country, and by their creativeness and industriousness, based on the existing cultural grounds, and motivated by correct policies, the huge potentials of the Vietnamese people are being tapped and

brought into play.

Stemming from these fundamental ideas, the State of Vietnam has always paid attention to cultivating the people's strength, improving the people's livelihood in the practical conditions, developing education and training in order to upgrade the people's intellectual standards; prepare the human resources, select and adequately use the talented, expand the public health care network, enhance the quality of preventive and curative medicine for all. We attach high importance to the development of culture, arts, information, sports, the preservation and promotion of the Vietnamese national cultural identity in parallel with absorption of the quintessence of humanity. We are deeply aware that the materials and moral civilization of a nation comes from and can only be fortified by the culture of that nation herself.

In this connection, we look forward to listening to the valuable experience of Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries in tackling the relationship between economic growth on the one hand and cultural development, justice and social progress on the other.

The world of today is witnessing great and profound changes. We are living at a time when common acute regional and global problems are to be shouldered by all nations regardless of their size, social system and level of development. In the current development, full of complexity and diversity, we think humanity has ever greater and more real possibilities to prevent disasters and overcome barriers on the way to the new heights of civilization. It is therefore a sound and healthy to strive for cooperation, integration and linkage in competition for mutual development, non-acceptance of confrontation, and mutual development, and the non-acceptance of confrontation.

Extremely important changes have also taken place in the Asia-Pacific. With its growth rate of 5-6.5 percent last decade as against the world's average growth rate of 1.2 percent, the Asia-Pacific is predicted to be the most dynamic region in the years to come.

The world economy on entering the nineties has seen a clear tendency towards regional integration. Enhanced regional economic cooperation constitutes the economic development current of the world and a requirement for the Asia-Pacific, while increased coordination and complementary relation is a common aspiration of all nations. However, it is noteworthy that the establishment of regional cooperation organizations does not mean the enhancement of the policy of protectionism and regional isolationism.

Vietnam supports any form of regional economic cooperation which is positive, fair, and mutually beneficial for development. Such regional economic cooperation could and should be diversified, from bilateral to multilateral, piecemeal to comprehensive, sub-regional Southeast to Asia-Pacific as a whole.

Having experienced many decades of upheavals in terms of politics, security and economy, Southeast Asia is now enjoying an unprecedented opportunity to consolidate peace, stability, friendship and cooperation, and is in fact developing dynamically at a high rate of growth and in a steady forward posture. I fully share the idea of H.E Dr. Mahathir Mohamed on "a Southeast Asia embracing the nations that are economically prosperous, socially dynamic, strategically secured, internally stable, and politically united; building a new Southeast Asia including all nations in the region which peacefully co-exist and participate in the dynamic and forceful relations on the basis of respect and mutually beneficial cooperation." This conforms to the general trend of the time and so does it to the basic interest of each State, each nation in our region.

It is our opinion that differences between nations in their ideologies, religion, political institutions, as well as those in their national and historical characteristics do not constitute a hindrance to the building of a new and prosperous Southeast Asia. Let us select and make full use of similarities while considering the application of differences with a view to enriching the interaction for the common goal of our region. Regarding economic development alone, Vietnam at present is in a lower position than the ASEAN countries. This is something deserving of attention as to the mechanisms and forms of cooperation so that the principle of mutual benefit can be realized in a reasonable manner. Vietnam does not want to be nor can it become a burden to anyone engaged in these economic relations. On the contrary, Vietnam will contribute actively to the cooperation and general development of the whole region.

In reality, cooperation between Vietnam and ASEAN has been broadened through bilateral forms. There are many issues of multilateral cooperation awaiting in which Vietnam can take part according to her ability. At present Vietnam's participation in the Bali Treaty will serve as an important hallmark in laying the foundation for longterm and all-sided cooperation. Cooperation in the socio-cultural fields is desirable for there are many similarities between Vietnam and ASEAN countries in terms of culture and history that help us to come closer to each other and sympathize with each other. We can help each other by sharing experience and transferring knowledge and training skills. We can learn from one another in the fields of culture, arts, sports, etc. Mutual

understanding, sympathy and trust will contribute to cooperation and development.

Today, human rights are much spoken of in the world, and this question in our region seems to be emphasized too. As developing and neighboring countries, more than anyone else, we understand that the most fundamental right of a human being is the right to live in peace, independence, freedom, justice and social progress. And what is decisive is the fact that the people in our respective countries truly master their own destiny and cooperate with each other in protecting those rights. The Symposium's theme "Human, Social and Institutional Dimensions" lends itself to mutual understanding and interest.

With all this, I sincerely hope that our Symposium will proceed in an open, straightforward, constructive and practical atmosphere, thereby contributing to increasing mutual understanding and trust, and at the same time shed more light on the content and forms of the broadened cooperation between ASEAN and Vietnam in the future.