

**By : DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI PERDANA
MENTERI MALAYSIA
Venue : HOTEL NIKKO, KUALA LUMPUR
Date : 03/12/2007
Title : KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE FIFTH EAST ASIA CONGRESS**

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN THIS MORNING BY THANKING ISIS MALAYSIA FOR EMBARKING ON THE EAST ASIA CONGRESS INITIATIVE. THIS IS THE FIFTH YEAR THE CONGRESS IS BEING HELD, AND I CONSIDER IT A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO OUR LONG-TERM GOAL OF BUILDING AN EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY. I SEE THE CONGRESS AS A FORUM WHERE THINK TANKS AND ACADEME TAKE CENTRE-STAGE, AND ENGAGE WITH GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS TO ENRICH THE PROCESS OF COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING. VENUES LIKE THIS THAT FACILITATE THE SHARING OF INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES IN A CANDID SETTING ARE OFTEN THE SOURCE OF MANY A USEFUL IDEA AND INSPIRATION. EAST ASIA AS A WHOLE BENEFITS ENORMOUSLY FROM FORA SUCH AS THIS.

THE THEME OF THIS YEAR'S CONGRESS IS THE MAPPING OF THE SECOND DECADE OF EAST ASIAN COOPERATION. THE THEME COULD NOT BE MORE RELEVANT OR TIMELY. BARELY A FORTNIGHT AGO I JOINED THE OTHER HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT OF THE ASEAN PLUS THREE COUNTRIES TO ISSUE THE SECOND JOINT STATEMENT ON EAST ASIA COOPERATION. THE JOINT STATEMENT USHERS IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS OF EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY BUILDING, AND IT IS COMPLEMENTED BY A COMPREHENSIVE WORK PLAN TO REALISE THE GOALS SET FORTH IN THE STATEMENT.

BEFORE I DWELL ON THE NEXT DECADE OF DEVELOPMENT HOWEVER, LET ME REFLECT A LITTLE ON THE DECADE THAT HAS JUST PASSED. IN MY VIEW, THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS HAS EVOLVED IMPRESSIVELY DESPITE THE MANY CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES IT FACED SINCE INCEPTION. AS WE ALL KNOW THE EAST ASIA IDEA INITIALLY MET WITH STRONG OPPOSITION, INTERESTINGLY FROM OUTSIDE THE REGION RATHER THAN FROM WITHIN EAST ASIA. IT TOOK THE FINANCIAL MELTDOWN OF 1997 AND 1998 TO CONVINCED EAST ASIAN GOVERNMENTS OF THE URGENT IMPERATIVE TO WORK TOGETHER. THE REST, AS THEY SAY, IS HISTORY.

THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS' IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE IS EVIDENT IN MANY FIELDS – THE VIGOROUS INSTITUTIONS LIKE THE NETWORK OF EAST ASIA THINK TANKS THAT IT ESTABLISHED; THE TWENTY OR SO DIVERSE AREAS OF COOPERATION THAT IT HAS GENERATED; THE ENTHUSIASTIC OWNERSHIP THAT THE PLUS THREE COUNTRIES HAVE TAKEN OF SPECIFIC ASEAN PLUS THREE PROJECTS; AND ABOVE ALL THE CLOSE COOPERATION THAT HAS DEVELOPED BETWEEN THE MEMBERS OF THE EAST ASIAN ENTERPRISE WITHOUT UNDERMINING EXISTING INSTITUTIONS LIKE ASEAN AND THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM.

THE EAST ASIAN REGION HAS ALSO RECOVERED FROM THE FINANCIAL CRISIS OF A DECADE AGO. IT CONTINUES TO PERFORM WELL. DESPITE OIL PRICES HOVERING AROUND THE US\$100 MARK, OUR ECONOMIES ARE SHOWING MARKED RESILIENCE AND STRENGTH. AT ANY OTHER TIME, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE ENERGY PRICES RISING AS FAST AND AS HIGH WITHOUT

SENDING THE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ECONOMY INTO AN INFLATIONARY SPIRAL, A RECESSIONARY VORTEX OR A STAGFLATIONARY SPIN. THIS, IN LARGE PART, IS DUE TO THE DYNAMISM AND GROWING RESILIENCE OF EAST ASIA.

THE EAST ASIAN ECONOMIES ALSO CONTINUE TO INTEGRATE AT A RAPID AND MUTUALLY ENRICHING PACE. INTRA-EAST ASIAN TRADE IN MANUFACTURED PRODUCTS COMPARES VERY FAVOURABLY WITH THAT OF OTHER REGIONS. AT 54 PERCENT IN 2005, IT IS SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER THAN NAFTA'S 40.7 PERCENT, AND NOT THAT MUCH BEHIND THE 15 MOST ADVANCED MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, WHICH IS 59 PERCENT. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE PACE AT WHICH EAST ASIAN TRADE IN MANUFACTURES IS GROWING ECLIPSES THAT OF NAFTA, WHICH IS GROWING AT A NEGLIGIBLE PACE, AND THE E.U. 15, WHERE INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE HAS IN FACT DECLINED SIGNIFICANTLY.

THE EAST ASIAN PERFORMANCE IS MOSTLY THE WORK OF INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR. BUT IT IS TAKING PLACE IN AN ENVIRONMENT FACILITATING INTEGRATION THAT IS VIGOROUSLY PROMOTED BY THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS.

WE HAVE THEREFORE ACCOMPLISHED MUCH OF SIGNIFICANCE IN THE LAST TEN YEARS. ANY OBJECTIVE OBSERVER HOWEVER, WOULD ALSO NOTE THAT WE COULD HAVE DONE MUCH MORE HAD WE SUMMONED GREATER COMMITMENT AND POLITICAL WILL. AT THIS SAME FORUM LAST YEAR I NOTED THAT EAST ASIA WAS "NOT DOING ENOUGH WITH THE RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES AT HAND TO REINFORCE THE CONDITIONS AND CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT FOR PEACE, SECURITY AND PROSPERITY."

SOME OF US ALLOW OURSELVES TO BECOME VICTIMS OF OUR OWN INSECURITIES. WE PROJECT THESE FEARS OF OUR OWN MAKING TO OUR EXTERNAL RELATIONS. IT THEN BECOMES ALL TOO EASY TO MISREAD OTHERS' INTENTIONS. WE CONJURE THREATS AND DEVELOP BELIEFS THAT SUIT OUR INSECURITIES BUT THAT DO NOT ACCORD WITH REALITY AND THE FACTS. WE BECOME INFLUENCED AND MANIPULATED BY THOSE WHO SEE THEMSELVES AS DISADVANTAGED BY REGIONAL SOLIDARITY AND BENEFIT FROM REGIONAL DIVISIVENESS.

THE EAST ASIA IDEA HAS NEVERTHELESS TAKEN DEEP ROOT. POLITICS AND NARROW NATIONALISM CAN OCCASIONALLY GET IN THE WAY AND CAUSE SOME DISARRAY. BUT THERE IS NO DENYING THE INEXORABLE LOGIC OF REGIONAL COOPERATION NOT ONLY IN EAST ASIA BUT ELSEWHERE AS WELL, NOT LEAST HERE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. AS OUR ECONOMIES BECOME HIGHLY INTEGRATED, SO DO OUR SECURITY, PROSPERITY AND WELLBEING. FINDING WAYS TO COME TO TERMS WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS AND OUR REGION IS NO LONGER AN OPTION. IT IS AN OBLIGATION.

THAT THE NATIONS OF EAST ASIA REALISE THIS ONLY TOO WELL IS REFLECTED IN THE SECOND JOINT STATEMENT ON EAST ASIA COOPERATION THAT THEY COLLECTIVELY ISSUED LAST MONTH. IT IS TO THIS HISTORIC DOCUMENT THAT I WOULD NOW LIKE TO TURN TO.

THE SECOND JOINT STATEMENT IS A RINGING REAFFIRMATION OF THE EAST ASIA IDEA. IT SEEKS TO BUILD ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF ASEAN PLUS THREE COOPERATION THAT HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED IN THE PAST DECADE. EAST

ASIA COOPERATION WILL BE DEEPENED AND BROADENED, AND BROUGHT TO AN ALTOGETHER HIGHER PLANE IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS. AT THIS MEETING I WOULD LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT JUST FIVE CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN THE JOINT STATEMENT THAT DEFINE THE NATURE AND CONTENT OF ASEAN PLUS THREE COOPERATION, AND THAT HAVE SPECIAL RELEVANCE TO THE FUTURE WELL-BEING OF THE REGION AND ITS PEOPLE.

THE FIRST IS THAT THE LONG-TERM GOAL OF ASEAN PLUS THREE COOPERATION IS THE BUILDING OF AN OPEN EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY, AND THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS WILL BE THE "MAIN VEHICLE" FOR BUILDING THIS COMMUNITY. THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS IS NOT JUST ABOUT COOPERATION. IT IS ABOUT COMMUNITY BUILDING, AND THIS DISTINGUISHES IT FROM ALL OTHER PROCESSES FOR COOPERATION IN THE WIDER ASIA PACIFIC REGION THAT INCLUDES OTHER PARTICIPANTS. THE EAST ASIA SUMMIT, THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM, THE ASIA PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND THE ASIA-EUROPE MEETING ARE ALL IMPORTANT PROCESSES WHOSE ACTIVITIES WILL CONTRIBUTE TO COMMUNITY BUILDING IN EAST ASIA, BUT THEY PLAY COMPLEMENTARY ROLES IN THIS RESPECT. THEY ARE NOT THE MAIN VEHICLE.

WE MUST NOT BE UNDER ANY ILLUSIONS. COMMUNITY BUILDING IN EAST ASIA WILL BE A LONG PROCESS. GIVEN THE HISTORICAL ENMITIES AND FRESH RIVALRIES THAT ARE PRESENT IN THE REGION, IT WILL ALSO OFTEN BE AN ARDUOUS PROCESS. CRITICS FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT WILL EVEN RUBBISH THE WHOLE CONCEPT. BUT WE CANNOT POINT TO PREVAILING DIVISIONS AND SUSPICIONS AS ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE FEASIBILITY OF A SENSE OF COMMUNITY EMERGING IN EAST ASIA. THERE ARE SUSPICIONS AND ACRIMONY AMONGST ASEAN MEMBERS THEMSELVES. INDEED, THERE ARE DEEP CLEAVAGES, EVEN VIOLENT CONFRONTATIONS, WITHIN SOME ASEAN COUNTRIES THAT THREATEN THEIR NATIONAL UNITY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. YET FEW IF ANY QUESTION THE NOTION OF AN ASEAN COMMUNITY, MUCH LESS THE NATIONAL INTEGRITY OF ITS MEMBERS. THE ASEAN COMMUNITY IS IN FACT THE SOLID, UNEQUIVOCAL AND COMMON ASPIRATION OF ALL ASEAN MEMBERS. IT IS AN ASPIRATION THAT IS DEEPLY EMBEDDED IN THE ASEAN CHARTER.

COMMUNITY BUILDING IN EAST ASIA HOWEVER WILL TAKE LONGER, BECAUSE IT IS LARGER AND MORE DIVERSE. THE COMMUNITY THAT EMERGES WILL IN ALL LIKELIHOOD ALSO BE UNDERSTANDABLY WEAKER. THE KEY, WHETHER IN ASEAN OR THE BROADER EAST ASIA, IS POLITICAL WILL AND THE FOSTERING OF A SENSE OF COMMON IDENTITY AND SHARED VALUES AND ASPIRATIONS.

THIS IN FACT BRINGS ME TO THE SECOND CRITICAL ASPECT OF THE JOINT STATEMENT. THIS IS THE CENTRAL ROLE AND CONSIDERATION GIVEN TO ASEAN. ASEAN WILL REMAIN THE DRIVING FORCE OF THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS. I BELIEVE THIS IS NOT JUST THE DESIRE OF ASEAN BUT ALSO THAT OF THE PLUS THREE COUNTRIES. IMPORTANTLY TOO, THE JOINT STATEMENT AS WELL AS WORK PLAN UNDERSCORE, IN MORE PLACES THAN ONE, THAT THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS WILL SUPPORT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ASEAN COMMUNITY BY 2015. AMONG OTHERS, THEY ENJOIN UPON THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS "TO ENGAGE CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEVELOPING A PEOPLE-CENTRED ASEAN".

IT IS CLEAR THEREFORE THAT THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS DOES NOT UNDERMINE ASEAN BUT RATHER SUPPORTS AND ENHANCES IT. THOSE WITHIN ASEAN WHO HARBOUR SUSPICIONS THAT THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS IS

INTENDED TO SIDELINE AND DILUTE ASEAN OR THE ASEAN COMMUNITY MUST THEREFORE REALISE THAT THEIR APPREHENSIONS ARE BASELESS AND UNFOUNDED. ASEAN PLUS THREE IN FACT EMPOWERS ASEAN FURTHER, AS DO THE EAST ASIA SUMMIT (E.A.S) AND THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM (A.R.F). THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ASEAN. IT IS AN OPPORTUNITY IT HAS HAD FOR THE LAST TEN YEARS, AND NOW FOR THE NEXT TEN AS WELL. MEMBERS OF ASEAN HAVE ONLY THEMSELVES TO BLAME IF THEY DO NOT SEEK FULL BENEFIT FROM THIS STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY AND ARE INSTEAD AMBIVALENT. ESPECIALLY IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE, ASEAN IS MORE SUSTAINABLE AND VIABLE ONLY IF IT EMBRACES THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND SYNERGIES OFFERED BY THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS.

THIRD, THE NEXT TEN YEARS WILL RIGHTLY DEMAND MUCH MORE FROM THE ASEAN PLUS THREE COUNTRIES. COOPERATION IN MANY MORE AND DIVERSE SPHERES IS REQUIRED. SIGNIFICANTLY, POLITICAL AND SECURITY COOPERATION HAS NOW BECOME A PROMINENT PART OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME. THE PROCESS MUST MANAGE THIS RESPONSIBILITY WITH DUE CARE AND SENSITIVITY.

THE NORMAL SECURITY AGENDA CONSISTING OF MATTERS SUCH AS SECURITY AND DEFENCE DIALOGUE; MEASURES TO COUNTER PROLIFERATION AND ELIMINATE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION; COUNTER-TERRORISM; AND MARITIME COOPERATION, ARE RELATIVELY STRAIGHTFORWARD ENOUGH. SUBJECTS SUCH AS GOOD GOVERNANCE WHICH INCLUDES HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW HOWEVER MUST BE TREATED WITH SUBSTANTIAL SENSITIVITY AND PRAGMATIC WISDOM. I WILL BE THE FIRST TO ASSERT THAT THEY ARE CRITICAL AND FUNDAMENTAL TO THE WELL-BEING OF THE PEOPLE OF EAST ASIA. A COMMUNITY THAT DOES NOT VALUE GOOD GOVERNANCE AND RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW IS NOT A COMMUNITY WORTH STRIVING FOR.

BUT THE ISSUE IS NOT JUST CHANGE BUT HOW CHANGE IS BEST INDUCED ESPECIALLY FROM OUTSIDE. WE HAVE A TENDENCY TO EMPHASISE DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS; WE HARDLY EVER MENTION THE OTHER RIGHTS THAT ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT TO HUMAN DIGNITY. WE MUST PRESS FOR CHANGE, BUT SOME OF US BECOME VERY INTOLERANT AND IMPATIENT. SOME OUTSIDE THE REGION AS WELL AS WITHIN TEND TO JUDGE INSTITUTIONS LIKE ASEAN AND NOW, I AM SURE, THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS AS WELL, BY WHETHER THEY TAKE A HARD-LINE STANCE ON SELECTED COUNTRIES AND SELECTIVE ISSUES. WHETHER SUCH A STANCE WILL BE EFFECTIVE OR IN FACT RENDER THE ENTIRE PROCESS IRRELEVANT DOES NOT SEEM TO BE OF MUCH CONCERN.

VITAL, CRITICAL AND INDISPENSABLE AS THEY ARE, DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL RIGHTS ARE NOT THE ONLY CONCERN OF THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS OR ASEAN. OUR AGENDA FOR NATIONAL AND HUMAN WELL-BEING IS MUCH, MUCH BROADER. PEACE AND GOODWILL AMONG NATIONS; FREEDOM FROM HUNGER AND DISEASE; SHELTER; JOBS; A DECENT STANDARD AND QUALITY OF LIFE; THE WELL-BEING OF THE ENVIRONMENT; AND MUCH, MUCH MORE, ARE IMPORTANT TO US. I WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED FOR INSTANCE IF FULLY A QUARTER TO A THIRD OF THE POPULATION OF ASEAN PLUS THREE IS POOR. RESCUING THEM FROM POVERTY IS A WORTH-WHILE AND HUMANE PRIORITY. FEW THINGS DETRACT FROM HUMAN DIGNITY AS MUCH AS ABJECT POVERTY.

TO ACHIEVE THESE REGIONAL GOALS WE WILL HAVE TO FULLY DEVELOP OUR HUMAN RESOURCES, PRODUCE MORE, TRADE MORE AND INVEST MORE TO PROSPER OUR ECONOMIES AND OUR PEOPLE. WE MUST RID OURSELVES OF THE EXTREME CORRUPTION THAT RIDDLES SOME OF OUR SOCIETIES. WE NEED A STABLE AND PEACEFUL ENVIRONMENT AT HOME AND ABROAD. WE WANT THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS TO BE RELEVANT TO ALL THESE TO THE EXTENT THAT IT CAN BE REASONABLY EXPECTED. WHEN WE JUDGE ASEAN PLUS THREE, OR ASEAN FOR THAT MATTER, WE MUST BEAR ALL THESE IN MIND. IN THE PROCESS, WE MUST NOT FORGET THAT THE ONUS RESTS MOST ON THE INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES AND WHAT THEY ARE ABLE TO DO FOR THEIR OWN CITIZENS WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE BORDERS. A REGIONAL PROCESS IN WHICH WE HAVE INVESTED VERY MODEST AUTHORITY AND CAPABILITIES MUST ALSO BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE, BUT IT CAN ONLY DO SO MUCH.

THE FOURTH ELEMENT IN THE JOINT STATEMENT THAT I WOULD LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT IS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ASEAN PLUS THREE COOPERATION FUND. MY GOVERNMENT IS PARTICULARLY GRATIFIED THAT THE FUND HAS BEEN APPROVED. IT IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE COLLECTIVE SERIOUSNESS OF ALL PARTICIPANTS TO UNDERTAKE CONCRETE STEPS TO IMPLEMENT THE ASEAN PLUS THREE AGENDA. THE MODALITIES ARE STILL TO BE DEVELOPED, BUT I HOPE THAT THE FUND WILL BE SUBSTANTIAL ENOUGH TO HAVE THE ABILITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. I HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE THAT ALL ASEAN PLUS THREE COUNTRIES WILL CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFULLY TO THE FUND, EACH ACCORDING TO ITS CAPABILITIES. MY GOVERNMENT WILL DO ITS PART.

THE FIFTH AND FINAL POINT I WOULD LIKE TO EMPHASISE IS THE ALL-IMPORTANT IMPERATIVE OF IMPLEMENTATION. INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES ARE NOT PARTICULARLY NOTED FOR SUCCESSFUL AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMMES. SANS IMPLEMENTATION, ALL WE HAVE IS RHETORIC AND IMPRESSIVE DOCUMENTS THAT GATHER DUST.

THANKFULLY, THE ASEAN PLUS THREE PROCESS WOULD LIKE TO AVOID THIS. A TIME-FRAME FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORK PLAN; A STRENGTHENED UNIT IN THE ASEAN SECRETARIAT; REGULAR REVIEW THAT INCLUDES A MID-TERM REVIEW AND NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS; AND IMPROVED CONSULTATION AND JOINT PROJECTS, ARE ALL MEASURES THAT HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED TO FACILITATE PROPER IMPLEMENTATION. IN A PROCESS WITH VERY MODEST EMPOWERMENT OF THE ASEAN SECRETARIAT, THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL GOVERNMENTS WILL BE CRITICAL.

IN THIS REGARD, I WOULD LIKE TO PLEDGE THE FULL SUPPORT OF THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT TO THE INCOMING ASEAN SECRETARY GENERAL, HIS EXCELLENCY MR SURIN ABDUL HALIM PITSUWAN. WE HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE THAT UNDER HIS STEWARDSHIP OF THE ASEAN SECRETARIAT, ASEAN AND THE IMPORTANT PROCESSES IT DRIVES WILL REACH NEW HEIGHTS. THE CHALLENGES THAT THE NEW ASEAN CHARTER AND THE SECOND JOINT STATEMENT ON EAST ASIA COOPERATION POSE ARE WORTHY OF HIS TALENTS AND ABILITY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

LET ME CONCLUDE WITH A NOTE ON LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL WILL. ALL THE GREAT POLITICAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF HISTORY WERE THE WORK OF MEN AND WOMEN WITH LEADERSHIP, CONVICTION AND VISION. OUR REGION HAS HAD

A FAIR SHARE OF THEM. WE ARE FORTUNATE THAT WE HAD STATESMEN WHO COULD LOOK BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THEIR NATIONS AND THEIR TIMES TO LAUNCH AND BUILD ON INITIATIVES WHOSE BENEFITS WE CONTINUE TO ENJOY TODAY.

AMONG THESE ARE THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF ASEAN. THEY WERE MEN OF STATURE, WISDOM AND FORESIGHT. ALTHOUGH RECENTLY EMERGED FROM COLONISATION, THEIR MINDS WERE COMPLETELY DE-COLONISED AND THEIR SPIRITS WERE FIERCELY FREE. THEY WERE LEADERS OF VERY POOR, THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES WITH UNCERTAIN FUTURES, YET THEY HAD A TREMENDOUS CONFIDENCE IN THE POTENTIAL OF THEIR PEOPLES, THEIR NATIONS AND THEIR REGION.

THEY PARROTED LITTLE OF FOREIGN JARGON THAT HAD LIMITED RELEVANCE TO THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR PROBLEMS. THEY DEvised THEIR OWN CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGIES SUITED TO INDIGENOUS NEEDS, CONCEPTS LIKE "COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY", "NATIONAL AND REGIONAL RESILIENCE", "TREATY OF AMITY" AND "ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY". WEAK AND IMPOVERISHED THOUGH THEIR COUNTRIES WERE, THEY WERE BOLD ENOUGH TO DECLARE NEUTRALITY AND REFUSE TO BECOME PARTISAN INSTRUMENTS OF EXTERNAL POWERS AND INTERESTS. THEY BEQUEATHED A REGIONAL ORGANISATION THAT ENGAGED FULLY WITH THE WORLD, BUT THAT CHARTED ITS OWN COURSE.

ASEAN AND EAST ASIA COULD DO WELL WITH LEADERS OF SUCH VISION, SPIRIT AND STATURE. IF WE CAN CLOSE RANKS AND WORK WITH FEROCIOUS DETERMINATION IN PURSUIT OF A COMMON CAUSE, VIRTUALLY NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE. IF NEIGHBOURS CAN FREE THEMSELVES FROM THE SERVITUDE OF HISTORY AND PLOT A NEW PATH OF FRIENDSHIP THE PROSPECTS FOR COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING WOULD BECOME INFINITELY BRIGHTER.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

THE EAST ASIA CONGRESS IS ONE OF ONLY A SMALL HANDFUL OF FORA TO DISCUSS MATTERS CANDIDLY. I URGE YOU TO GO BEYOND THE FORMAL PLEASANTRIES AND ENGAGE IN SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS, EVEN ON MATTERS DEEMED SENSITIVE. WE HAVE SOMETIMES TENDED TO BE LESS THAN FRANK, AND LEFT PROBLEMS SIMMERING UNRESOLVED FOR MANY YEARS. OUR ONLY CONSIDERATION SHOULD BE THAT WE SHOULD TRY AT ALL TIMES TO SPEAK WITH CIVILITY AND AMITY.

IN CLOSING, I WOULD LIKE TO COMMEND ISIS MALAYSIA AGAIN FOR ORGANISING THIS CONGRESS. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO HAVE HAD TO TRAVEL TO BE HERE. YOUR PRESENCE IS GREATLY VALUED AND APPRECIATED. I TRUST THAT YOU CAN ALL COME UP WITH SOME NOVEL AND ACTIONABLE IDEAS OR FRESH PERSPECTIVES OVER THESE TWO DAYS. I WOULD BE MOST INTERESTED AND WELCOME SUCH IDEAS.

IT ONLY REMAINS FOR ME NOW TO WISH YOU WELL IN YOUR DISCUSSIONS, AND TO OFFICIALLY DECLARE THIS FIFTH CONGRESS OPEN.

THANK YOU.