

SPEECH BY MR HON SUI SEN, MINISTER FOR FINANCE, AT
THE OPENING OF THE 5TH ASEAN-CCI COUNCIL MEETING
ON THURSDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 1976, AT 9.35 AM AT THE
GARDENIA ROOM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL

The historic meeting of ASEAN Heads of State and Government early this year in Bali injected a sense of urgency into economic cooperation among ASEAN countries. Since then, the ASEAN Economic Ministers entrusted with the task of effecting such economic cooperation and their most senior government officials have met frequently to consider specific projects and proposals for such cooperation in the fields of trade, industry and agriculture.

Over the past few months, progress has been made, particularly on the principles for the establishment of ASEAN industrial projects, and on the details for the first five of these projects, namely, urea in Indonesia and Malaysia, phosphatic fertilizers in the Philippines, diesel engines in Singapore, and soda ash in Thailand. Within the Committee on Industry, the Committee on Trade and the Trade Preferences Negotiating Group, and in less formal consultations, fruitful negotiations have taken place on these ASEAN industrial projects and on the exchange of trade preferences, not only for the products of these ASEAN industrial projects, but also for essential commodities and products of interest to ASEAN countries for the expansion of intra-ASEAN trade.

Much of the work so far might be described as foundation work, the laying of a basic infrastructure on ground of which we are uncertain because it cannot be wholly investigated beforehand. I am glad to say, however, that the prevailing spirit of ASEAN cooperation which is frequently mentioned in the record of these meetings is entirely real, and all participants have been impressed with the

importance of greater economic cooperation and coordination of national policies in ASEAN for fully developing the resources of our region for the overall benefit of its peoples. A cross-fertilization of ideas, complementarity in industrialisation programmes, and a greater liberalisation of tariffs and non-tariff barriers to trade will pave the way for closer economic and political ties in the region, in the greater interdependence now commonly recognised as characteristic of economic and political developments in the countries of the world today.

Regional economic integration appropriately start at governmental level. Initiatives taken by the private sector organisations, however, will help to spur governments into even closer cooperative efforts. ASEAN Governmental endeavours should be complemented by equally active efforts on the part of the private sector in the ASEAN region. Official efforts will then effectively interact with those of the private sector, either directly or indirectly.

I am, therefore, pleased that the ASEAN-CCI have realised the importance of coming together and taking so many positive steps in the direction of economic integration. I have followed with close interest the progress made so far by the ASEAN private sector organisations towards closer economic cooperation in the fields of trade, finance and banking, tourism and shipping as manifested in the formation of the ASEAN Bankers' Council, ASEAN Automotive Federation, ASEAN Tours and Travel Association, the Federation of ASEAN Shippers' Councils, and the Federation of ASEAN Shipowners' Association. I would also like to congratulate your Working Group on Industrial Complementation for the progress made so far at their

two meetings, the last having just been concluded in Kuala Lumpur. All these activities are encouraging signs of support that ASEAN governments welcome, as private sector activities have a catalytic role to play in accelerating the pace of economic cooperation among ASEAN countries. Much of the cautious and step-by-step official approach towards economic cooperation has been due to a perhaps mistaken sense that the private sector industries already established in ASEAN countries are averse to greater liberalisation of trade and industry in ASEAN.

The ASEAN-CCI can, therefore, take advantage of the present firm political will to accelerate economic cooperation and work towards opening up intra-ASEAN trade, industrial complementation, shipping and banking and finance. I trust that the 5th ASEAN-CCI Council Meeting which will consider developments since the last Council Meeting wherein five Working Groups were established, will be fully responsive to the changing circumstances in the ASEAN region over the past one or two years.

I wish you all success in your deliberations. It now gives me great pleasure to declare this Meeting open.