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OPENING STATEMENT BY MR S DHANABALAN, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS AND MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AT THE 18TH
ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING, KUALA LUMPUR, 8 JULY 1985

ASEAN has now been in existence for 17 years. We have come far - further than expected by those who launched the concept in 1967. We have completed or are engaged in a series of cooperative projects in the fields of science and technology, culture and information and social development. These projects interlock and intertwine our interests. Slowly but steadily we have developed a regional consciousness.

We have developed an equable and comfortable relationship with each other in the group. It is a relationship that has enabled us to focus our attention and devote our national resources to the betterment of our people's lives.

Over the last three years, we have started reviewing a number of ASEAN activities. In the past year, we began reviewing our relations with the dialogue countries. These reviews have not been completed. But I hope that a more effective, substantive and fruitful relationship will result from this review.

A number of developments in the past year are worthy of note.

At the 5th ASEAN-EC Ministerial Meeting in Dublin last November, we agreed that the ASEAN-EC Economic Cooperation Agreement, which is due to expire in October this year, should

be extended for another two years. During these two years a comprehensive review is to be made to strengthen cooperation between the European Community and ASEAN.

An important decision made at the Dublin meeting was to convene an ASEAN-EC Ministerial Meeting on economic matters. This is now scheduled to be held in October this year. I hope that the Economic Ministers of both sides would give fresh policy directives to the officials to enhance ASEAN-EC economic cooperation.

The 2nd ASEAN-Japan Economic Ministers Meeting was just completed two weeks ago. I am happy to note that the latest Japanese announcement on tariff cuts on over 1,800 products have benefitted some ASEAN countries, although they are still far below ASEAN's expectations.

I share the views of my colleagues that wider coverage for ASEAN products should be included in the next package of market opening measures; and that Japan's latest concession will do little to redress the trade imbalance if the Japanese government does not remove a large number of non-tariff measures.

The informal meeting between ASEAN Economic Ministers and former US Trade Representative, Ambassador William Brock, in February this year has laid the ground work for possible establishment of a more dynamic ASEAN-US trade relationship. I am told that ASEAN trade officials and USTR officials will meet later this year for preliminary technical discussions on the matter.

I am aware that there are some who feel that ASEAN is making little progress in economic cooperation within the group and that a new impetus is needed. I would agree that more needs to be done in ASEAN economic cooperation. As we have been reminded this morning by Prime Minister Dr Mahathir,

we should not sit back and wait for economic opportunities but must create them. But we should always remember that regionalism is a new experience for us. It has still to mature.

It is important that we do not subject this new endeavour to the strains of ambitious supranational projects and policies. Similar problems have occurred amongst countries in other parts of the world in their attempts at regional cooperation. We have done well to tread carefully and we should continue to do so.

Mr Chairman, when you first chaired the Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur ten years ago, the war in Vietnam and Cambodia had just ended.

North Vietnam had occupied South Vietnam. There were new communist regimes in Laos and Cambodia. The Americans had withdrawn. There was much uncertainty.

Malaysia saw a historic opportunity to make Southeast Asia a region of peace, freedom and neutrality.

In his opening address at that meeting 10 years ago, the late Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak expressed these hopes, but he also wondered what the countries in the region would make of this historic opportunity. He asked: "Shall we engage in recriminations over the past, stimulate ancient fears born of the cold war and follow policies which divide and distort Southeast Asia? Or shall we look to the future, conscious that the things which unite us are far more important than the things which may have divided us in the past - our wish to avoid big power involvement, to bring peace, a decent life and a measure of happiness to our peoples, to build a strong and cohesive Southeast Asia, which will be the foundation of our hopes for a secure, just and prosperous future?".

Other observers at that time did not see new opportunities but new dangers and wondered whether ASEAN would be able to avoid being engulfed by the communist tide.

Ten years have passed. ASEAN has forged ahead with closer regional cooperation and economic development. Unhappily "peace, a decent life and a measure of happiness" have not been the lot of the peoples in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

This year the Vietnamese Government has little to celebrate on their tenth anniversary of the end of the war in Vietnam. We see a country run not by heroic leaders of independence who have turned their energies to reconstruction and regeneration. Instead we see the country run by old men out of touch with the world and trapped in a mindset of endless fighting and confrontation.

The reality in Vietnam, ten years after, is one of chronic economic stagnation, continued political repression, alienation between the people of North and South Vietnam, crippling dependence on the Soviet Union and international isolation. The Vietnamese won the war but did not find the peace.

Vietnam's old ambition to dominate its neighbours resurfaced and frictions with Cambodia got out of hand. Under the pretext of a Chinese threat through Cambodia, Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978. Some of us may have been initially persuaded that Vietnam had done this to save the Cambodian from the Pol Pot genocide. But six years later, Vietnamese forces are still in Cambodia and even the Cambodians who were "saved" know that the Vietnamese are the new colonizers.

For six years, ASEAN and the international community have tried to persuade Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia and reach a negotiated settlement, whereby self-determination by

the Cambodians would remove leaders unacceptable to them and the establishment of an independent and neutral Cambodia, guaranteed by the big powers, would satisfy Vietnamese security concerns.

In these six years, the Cambodian problem has grown and changed somewhat its complexion, from aggression and foreign occupation to one of total colonization. Vietnamese colonial policies and practices threaten to end the Cambodians as a culture and nation.

Vietnam has embarked on a systematic domination of Cambodia through the control of the Heng Samrin puppet regime at all levels, the social-economic integration of Cambodia into Vietnam and the massive transfers of Vietnamese settlers into Cambodia. There are too many reports on this process of systematic colonization for us to dismiss them as the products of a fertile imagination. We should not forget that when the horrors of Pol Pot began to be reported in the international media between 1975 and 1978, the Vietnamese and the Soviets dismissed them as mere capitalist propaganda. At the 38th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1983, ASEAN drew world attention to this grave development of colonization in Cambodia. This process of Vietnamese colonization of Cambodia merits the most urgent attention by the international community.

In his address to the 39th UNGA in September 1984, CGDK President Sihanouk reviewed the evidence that was then available and concluded that the colonization of Cambodia had reached an alarming degree. He spoke of the complete control of Vietnamese advisers at all levels of the Heng Samrin regime; of purely Vietnamese zones being set up where the Vietnamese settlers are armed to fight the Cambodian resistance; of the compulsory teaching of Vietnamese language in schools; or school children learning the distorted version of Cambodian history so that they are taught to feel as

members of a "Great Vietnam" or the Indochinese Federation of Ho Chi Minh; of encouragement of mixed marriages; of Vietnamese being granted Khmer citizenship in large numbers.

The issue of Vietnamese colonization is something that none of us can dare to ignore, especially if we recall the tragic exodus of almost a million people from Vietnam including over a quarter million "boat people" from Vietnam in the 10 months between October 1978 and July 1979. This recent record of Vietnamese actions should be a reminder to the world of the brutal methods Vietnam is prepared to undertake to achieve its objectives.

The world must not allow Cambodia to disappear under the Vietnamese shadow. Vietnam's security interests and concerns should no longer be allowed to stand in the way of an early settlement of the Cambodian issue. The central issue must be the survival of Cambodia as a nation and people.

Fortunately there are developments which will stop the ambitions of the aging leadership of Vietnam and force them to face the glaring realities of today. Vietnam cannot delay indefinitely the reassessment of its relations with China. The future for a perpetually isolated Vietnam, next door to a modernizing and technologically advanced China, cannot be bright, especially if its current ally, the Soviet Union, does not wish China for a mortal enemy.

Vietnam must also wish to increase its options by improving its relations with the US. But Vietnam's hope for the normalization of US-Vietnam relations cannot be fulfilled as long as it remains in Cambodia.

Another factor is the costly economic stagnation within Vietnam. Vietnam would want the world to believe that its people are supermen who would bear any economic burden for any length of time. But Vietnam cannot afford to lose another ten years while non-communist Southeast Asia and East Asia race ahead.

Finally, the most decisive factor is the increasing resistance in Cambodia to Vietnam's continued occupation. After six years, Vietnam is still struggling to put down the resistance in Cambodia. Guerilla activities have increased, stretching Vietnamese military capabilities. While the last dry-season offensive had earned some publicity, it is in reality a strategic defeat because it failed to eliminate any guerilla force. The coalition forces have not been destroyed but merely dispersed deeper inside Cambodia.

ASEAN and the international community must assist and strengthen the resistance. We seek a political solution, not a military solution. But we must distinguish a political solution from a peaceful solution. A peaceful solution is not possible in the face of armed aggression and brutal repression. There will be and must be armed resistance, but we think ultimately neither side can force a military solution. There must be a political solution.

A war against a national liberation struggle cannot be won. The Vietnamese will realise this at great cost to themselves.

The question now is what kind of political settlement can be reached and who will decide this settlement. It would be to Vietnam's best interests to seriously consider the process of negotiations while there remains a measure of goodwill from ASEAN and other interested parties to see that a fair settlement which safeguards the legitimate interests of all countries is reached. It is in Vietnam's interests to begin negotiations while it is still in a position to make the decisions on the kind of compromise it is prepared to accept. Let us hope that the leadership in Vietnam is now taking stock on how they wish to be remembered in history - as proud heroes of Vietnamese independence or as the architects of a bankrupt policy, out of touch with the times.

ASEAN has a great store of goodwill but it is not inexhaustible especially if Vietnamese aggression extends to threaten the security of the ASEAN countries. The ASEAN countries condemn the numerous incursions into Thailand by Vietnamese forces that have occurred since November 1984. The Thai Government has reported more than ten serious acts of violation of its territory by Vietnamese forces, the biggest intrusion having occurred in March 1985 in Surin Province where 3,000 Vietnamese troops intruded up to 10 km into Thailand. Vietnam is playing a dangerous game if its intention is to intimidate the Thai Government and broaden its aggression into Thailand.

ASEAN will continue to consider proposals and initiatives to solve the Cambodian problem. Over the last few months, for example, we have explored the Malaysian proposal for proximity talks involving the CGDK and Vietnam. Our Indonesian friends have looked at how a settlement can be promoted through the interest expressed lately by Vietnam for a normalization of relations with the US. It is an initiative ASEAN has agreed that Indonesia will undertake as interlocutor. Our interest in these initiatives demonstrates ASEAN's preparedness to explore all avenues to help extricate Vietnam from Cambodia and restore Cambodia's independence and freedom. Vietnam should respond to these efforts and abandon the belief that with enough military force and persistence it can achieve its objectives in Cambodia. By withdrawing from Cambodia, Vietnam can ensure that it would not be mired for another ten years in conflict and strife, while the rest of the world, including Vietnam's few close friends, move on.

In the meantime, ASEAN and the international community must reaffirm and reinforce our determination to assist the Cambodian people in their struggle for a free and independent nation.

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