

PRESS RELEASE

91 - AM - 13

Release No: 43/JUL
07-1/91/07/24

**SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
AT THE OPENING OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE
MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT
HELD IN THE ENV BUILDING ON 24 JULY 1991 AT 9.00 AM**

Historically, Singapore and Malaysia have enjoyed close socio-economic and cultural ties. It is only natural that we seek to extend this closeness to other areas of mutual interest. The formation of the Malaysia-Singapore Joint Committee on the Environment (MSJCE) is an indication that we have now attained a synergistic relationship in the field of environmental co-operation.

The strength of this relationship is exemplified by the speed with which the MSJCE was formed. Within a very short span of six months, the MSJCE had met to discuss a variety of environmental issues affecting both countries and is now poised to implement co-ordinated programme for the management of a wide range of transboundary environmental issues.

I congratulate members of the MSJCE, especially the two Co-Chairmen, Dato' Jimmy Low, Chairman for the Johor State Committee on Tourism and Environment, and Mr Cheong Quee Wah, Permanent Secretary of the Singapore Ministry of the Environment for the excellent beginning that they have given to the MSJCE.

We have often heard of the statement - "environmental pollution knows no boundaries". It is easy to appreciate the truism. The recent eruptions of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines showed us how easily particulates can be transported over large distances across national boundaries. Six days after the Pinatubo eruptions, Singaporeans throughout the Island woke up to find a layer of volcanic dust on their cars and floors

Singapore and Malaysia are less than a mile apart at the narrowest point in the Johor Straits. This proximity with Malaysia, especially the State of Johor Darul Ta'zim, makes it critical that environmental practices in the two countries are well co-ordinated. It is fortunate that this situation has long been recognised by our governments. Even before the formation of the MSJCE, we have had regular exchanges of data and information on a number of environmental issues. We can now look towards strengthening the existing co-operation.

At the first meeting in Johor Bahru, the MSJCE set out to standardise the approach and procedure to reduce transboundary pollution from various sources. One of the issues discussed was the control of black smoke emissions from vehicles.

The MSJCE agreed to step up enforcement action against black smoke emissions. Information on repeat offenders was exchanged between Singapore and Malaysia to facilitate enforcement.

Pollution from vehicular emissions poses a risk to public health. Singapore and Malaysia are serious about controlling black smoke emissions. We both share a common standard of 50 Hartridge Smoke Units (HSU) in our enforcement against vehicular smoke emissions. We have appealed to vehicle operators time and time again to prevent black smoke emissions by sending their vehicles for regular maintenance. If this is ignored, the authorities in Singapore and Malaysia will have no choice but to resort to more stringent measures in order to protect public health.

Each and everyone of us has a part to play in environmental protection. To be successful, government legislation and enforcement will have to be complemented by the inherent desire of the individuals to fulfill their moral obligations towards the environment. Vehicle operators are no exception. If we allow them to pollute, the cost of their irresponsible actions would be our precious clean environment and good health.

Less than a year from today, countries around the world will gather in Brazil for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Much of the focus of UNCED will be on the issues of environment and development.

I have often advocated that environment protection and economic development are two sides of the same coin. Both are important goals which are complementary, not contradictory. We are able to see the consequences faced by countries that pursued economic development without due consideration for their environment.

In recent years, the economic performance of ASEAN countries has been impressive. To underscore this excellent performance, ASEAN countries will have to place more emphasis on environmental protection. This must include taking into consideration environmental protection in economic planning and development.

At the last meeting of the MSJCE, the Honourable Tan Sri Muhyiddin, the Menteri Besar of Johor announced that "environmental sustainability will always be part and parcel of Johor's development effort". It is a call that I would like to reiterate. The MSJCE can play an active role to ensure that the principle of sustainable development is integrated in the developmental policies of both countries.

Members of the MSJCE have a challenging agenda before them. I am sure that with the traditional spirit of collaboration between members from the two countries, this challenge will be surmounted. I know that the deliberations over the next two days will be open and constructive, as it has always been between us. On that note, it is now my pleasure to declare the Second Meeting of the Malaysia-Singapore Joint Committee on the Environment open.

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