

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, MR BERNARD CHEN, AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY AND PRIZE-GIVING OF THE 3RD ASEAN PARACHUTING CHAMPIONSHIP AT THE GARDEN BALLROOM, HOLIDAY INN, ON SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1980, AT 8 P.M.

Now that the 3rd Asean Parachuting Championship has been successfully completed, may I congratulate all the winners for the fine efforts they have put in over the past week and to the participants who have been left out of the list of winners, go our appreciation for their keen participation.

The very fact that this is the 3rd in the series of the championship is indicative of the stronger bond that has been forged amongst the parachutists from the five countries of Asean. It also typifies the closer relationship that has developed amongst the Asean members over the years. Since its inception in 1967, Asean has survived many votes of no-confidence made by skeptics who thought that the association would never have a chance, given the diverse interests and the different states of development of the member countries. It was true that in the early years of Asean, progress was slow and the usual teething problems took some time to resolve. Moreover, there was also a lack of a rally point for the member countries to demonstrate their solidarity. It was not until 1976 when substantial and visible progress was made with the declaration of the Asean Concord at Bali, Indonesia. As a result of this declaration, a series of measures were taken to foster closer economic co-operation amongst the member countries. However, political unity took more time and it was the recent events in the Indochinese peninsula that had really brought the Asean countries together for a common cause. The Asean resolution on Kampuchea which was unanimously adopted at the United Nations is a testimony that Asean has come of age. More recently, the common stand taken by Asean in condemning Soviet aggression in Afghanistan is another firm indication that Asean countries are convinced that they share a common destiny.

The framework of Asean has therefore been firmly established and instinctively, member countries react to crisis situations which affect them with the same fervour and in more or less in the same way. Much of this similar feel of the situation and desire to act together is however confined to the top levels of the government's administration.

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Ministers of the five countries who have established regular contacts with one another are able to communicate their views freely and expeditiously. Senior government officials keep in touch with one another on common issues affecting all of them. There are also regular meetings and conferences sponsored under the Asean umbrella, for a wide range of activities including this current Asean Parachuting Championship. In order to promote even closer co-operation and friendly relationship amongst our five countries, we would need to bring our people closer together. This can be done in two ways. First, we will need to expand the various activities whether in sports and games, professional and technical conferences, or reciprocating visits amongst government or private organisations, to increase our people's participation. It must be said that much of these contacts can be developed to lasting friendship that will remain long after the events are over. Second, we will have to encourage more travelling in our five countries. It is through first hand observation that our people can learn to appreciate one another's similarities and differences in lifestyle, cultures and aspirations. A better understanding of our people's characteristics will lead to a higher degree of tolerance of one another's shortcomings and make for better friendship amongst all of us. The development of a closer bond of friendship among our peoples will take a long time but it must be pursued relentlessly. Ultimately, our government's ability in dealing successfully with crises confronting Asean as a whole will depend very much on the response of our people. It will be that much more effective if our political leaders can act in the full knowledge that their people are fully behind them in every move and are prepared to give them the fullest support. Asean would then have moved on to a high plane of maturity which will make it even more effective to tackle any crisis ahead with greater confidence.

I hope that this championship will continue to serve as one of the avenues through which the bond of friendship amongst our people will be further strengthened. By the time we meet again in Malaysia next year, I am sure there will be many more renewals of friendship made in the past week. The fine efforts put in by the organisers and the enthusiastic support given by all concerned will then not be in vain.

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