

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT, DR. BENJAMIN SHEARES, AT THE
STATE BANQUET IN HONOUR OF HIS EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT
FERDINAND E. MARCOS, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE
PHILIPPINES, AND MADAME IMELDA ROMUALDEZ MARCOS AT THE
ISTANA ON 27 JANUARY, 1976

Mr. President

Madame Marcos

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Your visit comes at a time of great changes in our part of the world. The era of complete Western dominance in Southeast Asia has ended. The phase when the great European powers and, later, the United States, ensured the security of the region and controlled the course of events, is now over.

However, we must keep our economic and cultural links with the Western industrial nations. Their economic strength and technological prowess can continue to have a beneficial effect on the development of the region. But more

and more, it is what Southeast Asians themselves decide and do, in economic and diplomatic co-operation, that will ensure our security.

For the first time in nearly two centuries of Southeast Asian history, it is possible for the peoples and governments of the region to take partial charge of their economic and political future.

Whether this phase of history will be one marked by greater achievements will depend on how the peoples and the leaders of the region respond to the opportunities and the challenges now before us all in ASEAN. The future is never pre-ordained.

No one nation in Southeast Asia can decide how Southeast Asia will be respond to the opportunities and challenges which will shape the geo-political future of the region. However, ASEAN, if the five governments so agree and decide, can enhance peace and prosperity in our region.

You, Mr. President, are one of the great leaders of ASEAN. You have contributed much towards the growth of ASEAN, from a vague concept into an organisation now taken seriously by those who wish us well, and more significantly, by those who do not wish us well. Without leaders like you,

President Soeharto, the late Tun Razak, and Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj, men able to see the great potentialities of ASEAN, this effort at regional co-operation will not have made it to this point when decisions await us at the first meeting of Heads of Government soon.

We may not have moved as expeditiously towards our objectives as we could have. But we have moved faster during a comparable period than many other regional organisations far older than ours. Had there been no ASEAN collective will, following the United States' military withdrawal from the region, events would have developed very differently and unfavourably for us. We would not have been able to co-ordinate and co-operate to overcome the new problems, and to seize the fresh opportunities the sudden change in fortunes has brought about. Our respective economic and social programmes, pursued vigorously and strengthened by ASEAN cohesiveness, can reduce the threats from guerrilla insurgencies, endemic in the region. Eventually, our co-operation can make security and stability a natural state of affairs for Southeast Asia.

You, Mr. President, are an ASEAN leader with the capacity to rise above the trivia of everyday problems. You take a wider view of the future for the peace and progress and prosperity of the peoples of the region.

The ASEAN meeting in Bali next month can be a turning point in the lives of our peoples. ASEAN Heads of State and Government will meet. They can decide to mobilise the considerable talents of our peoples, anchored in ancient cultures, but ready to move into the technological era the West has pioneered. We are ready for economic development to the benefit of all. Increasing wealth and strength, dependent on the decisions ASEAN leaders will take in Bali, followed by systematic and thorough implementation of plans agreed, can transform slow progress into rapid development, dispel unemployment into bustling economic activity. Then disaffection and bitterness will be expunged and pride in performance instilled.

Mr. President, your wide vision and capacity for leadership, combined with the co-operation of other ASEAN leaders, will make the world take note of ASEAN, that it is an organisation determined and able to move forward and play a significant part in a new stable and prosperous world order.

I express the hope that this visit of Your Excellency and Madame Marcos and members of your party will further strengthen the very close and cordial relations that have been gradually built between our two countries.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I request all of you to join me in a toast to the good health and happiness of His Excellency, the President of the Republic of the Philippines, to Madame Marcos, and to the progress and prosperity of the people of the Philippines.

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