ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE OPENING OF THE TENTH ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING, AT THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, ON TUESDAY, 5 JULY 1977

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a month's time, ASEAN Heads of Government will meet in Kuala Lumpur. This ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting will have to sort out the issues, and decide the agenda between important and more important matters which the Heads of Government must resolve since they met 17 months ago in Bali.

Amongst the items with a claim to place on the agenda are those which the ASEAN Economic Ministers discussed last week. They reached some degree of understanding on the first five ASEAN industrial projects, and also agreed upon 71 product items which will enjoy tariff preferences and other forms of preferential trading. You may well decide that these, as well as those areas which require consultations and discussions at the highest level, should be placed before the heads of Government.

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Ten years after its formation, ASEAN has to grapple with difficult geo-political problems of a world in a state of transition. The simple fact is that our future now depends primarily more on what we do than what others will, or can, do for us. We have to take the initiative, through cooperation among ourselves, especially in the economic and political fields. Together, we must establish closer, more constructive and complementary relationships with Japan, and perhaps also with Australia and New Zealand. These closer economic ties will increase the chances for a stable and thriving Southeast Asia. Unlike the conditions prevailing ten years ago, today this stability depends more on our own efforts. However, we may be helped by the major powers creating conditions favourable for a stable and peaceful East Asia and Pacific.

In your deliberations, you will have to take into account the vastly changed power relationship, not least of them the fact that, like the Japanese, we have to live with a continuous landmass which is communist, all the way from Siberia, China, down to Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea. Fortunately, it is no longer a monolithic communist bloc.

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We have each sought varying degrees of equidistance from the Soviet Union and China. As important, we must build our relations with our new communist neighbours in Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea on a constructive and

productive basis. We must emphasise in our relations with them our desire for peaceful relations, however different our systems of government. They have our full assurance that we do not wish to interfere with their internal affairs. And, naturally, we expect them to respect our sovereign right to decide our own economic and political systems, matters for our own governments and peoples to decide. And we intend to counter and dissolve incipient guerilla insurgencies that are trying to expand, and will seek outside aid. We have begun to address these problems on our own.

A strong, vigorous and thriving ASEAN becomes a desirable economic and trading partner. Then we are friends who are desirable assets to be more closely associated with, not embarrassing liabilities to be shied away from. This is our best contribution to the stability and security of this part of the world. The converse is just as stark in its implications. The future of ASEAN depends largely upon what we choose to make out of it. The stronger ASEAN is, the better it is for each of us. This is not rhetoric. It is the simple truth.

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You will have read the statement of America's role in Asia, made by the US Secretary of State, Mr. Cyrus Vance, on 29 June in New York. You will have noted how he spelt out the interests of America in East Asia. His emphasis was on the economic relationships, that America's trade with East Asia and the

Pacific is now one-fourth of her world trade, more than that with any other region, including the European Economic Community. He stated that the United States sold US$22 billion worth of products in the region. Of this US$22 billion, US$3.7 billion, or 16.82%, were sold to ASEAN. He pointed out that from ASEAN, America bought one-tenth of her crude oil, and a higher percentage of her rubber, tin, cocoa, bauxite and other important raw material imports.

He then expressed the hope that out of US-ASEAN consultations expected within a few months, there will be a basis for stronger American support of Southeast Asian regional efforts.

It is a speech totally devoid of rhetoric, and free from any ideological overtones. The emphasis of the speech is on the economics of America's relationship with East Asia and the Pacific. The speech recognised the importance of overcoming the difficulties that lie ahead. With industrial countries plagued by inflation and unemployment, the countries of East Asia and the Pacific will go through a difficult period. And we all have experienced how under these adverse conditions, governments in industrial countries talk bravely of the importance of liberal trade, whilst quietly putting the pressure on for voluntary restraints, or erecting more tariff and non-tariff barriers.

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In August, ASEAN Heads of Government will be meeting the Prime Ministers of Japan, Australia and New Zealand. We have serious issues to discuss with them about our immediate and our long-term economic relationships, both collectively as a group in ASEAN, and bilaterally.

The question before the foreign ministers of ASEAN is not whether ASEAN can help enhance the development, progress and stability of member states. We all know ASEAN cooperation will make that difference. But will this be done in good time? The answer to this question depends on how long we take to work out the implications of the new situation, make the political adjustments, and take substantive steps to give regional cooperation substance rather than form. We have to cultivate new habits of accepting the responsibilities of working together in order to enjoy the benefits stemming from greater cooperation and cohesion.

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How willing are we to adopt new economic strategies to make it worthwhile for industrial countries, like Japan, the United States and the EEC, to invest in ASEAN and speed up our industralisation? For before we can ask the industrial countries for the best terms possible, we must decide among ourselves how much we are prepared to do to make ASEAN worthwhile for industrial investments. For ASEAN is no more and no less than what its partners are

prepared to make it, by expanding the list of ASEAN industrial projects, by agreeing on more preferential trading arrangements, by expanding the list of product items for preferential tariffs, and in other ways tried and found successful in other economic groupings.

Industrial countries will want to broaden their economic links with us if we take these steps which will benefit them, and us. Thus we can the more surely increase our economic strength. And with economic strength, all other social and political problems will become that much easier of solution.

I now formally declare open the Tenth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.

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