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**SPEECH BY THE ACTING PRESIDENT, DR YEOH GHIM SENG,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF
THE ASEAN MINISTERS ON AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY
AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL ON THURSDAY, 20 OCTOBER '83 AT 9.30 AM**

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry and their respective delegations on the occasion of the Fifth Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry.

We are pleased to be able to host this Fifth Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry. ASEAN is an important agricultural region in the world. With the exception of Singapore, agriculture is the main sector of the economies of the ASEAN member countries. A total of 48 million hectares of land in ASEAN are being used for agricultural development. 153 million people or 58 per cent of the total population of 266 million people in ASEAN are engaged in agricultural production. Agriculture contributes nearly 25 per cent of the region's gross domestic product.

ASEAN is a leader among the Third World countries, having made tremendous strides in achieving greater agricultural production. It is a major exporter of a wide range of agricultural produce. In recent years, ASEAN has been particularly active in the international trade of rice, tapioca, rubber, palm oil, maize, sugar, copra, coffee and timber. Very significant achievements have been made in attaining greater self-reliance in the supply of meat and fish.

These achievements have been brought about mainly because of advances made in various fields of agricultural research and development. Some of the world's finest tropical agricultural research and development institutions are located in ASEAN.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the distinguished ministers from our neighbouring ASEAN countries present at this meeting for having successfully spearheaded the development of the agricultural sector in ASEAN. In doing so, they have contributed much in uplifting the livelihood and the living standards of many farmers and fishermen.

The ASEAN Committee on Food, Agriculture and Forestry has over the years embarked on a wide area of activities aimed at promoting food production and agricultural development in the ASEAN region. This is evidenced by the large number of projects that have been undertaken by this committee which will benefit both the farmers and the consumers. Singapore will continue to play a complementary role in the development of agriculture in ASEAN. We will work closely with our partners in ASEAN and contribute in whatever way we can, not only to increase food production but also in the endeavours of our ASEAN neighbours in the effort to uplift the livelihood and economic status of farmers and fishermen. We will continue to participate in the various projects, whether they are in the field of animal or plant quarantine, fisheries or livestock production or the handling and distribution of agricultural produce.

As a consumer of agricultural produce, our needs for food will increase and we will have to import increasing quantities of these from our ASEAN partners. We have, therefore, a vested interest in the agricultural development in ASEAN.

I see the gathering of the ASEAN Ministers on Agricultural and Forestry as a concerted effort by ASEAN in trying to resolve some of the problems related to food production which are currently confronting the world. Although, the issue of food supply has preoccupied mankind since the beginning of history, adequate food production and supply continue to be the major problem confronting developing countries.

A limiting factor which has prevented developing countries from expanding their agricultural production is the lack of appropriate technology. In order that agricultural production can expand rapidly, large investments will be needed to open up new areas and to apply modern technology which can increase productivity. Mechanisation must be encouraged judiciously where it will increase production without unnecessarily creating unemployment. It is only through the application of appropriate modern technology that there can be an overall increase in food production.

As food production increases, it is also necessary to ensure that the increased production is efficiently distributed with minimum wastage. Increased production must be accompanied by a corresponding improvement in post-harvest handling and distribution methods to bring about the expected benefits to both the producers and the consumers. I understand that cooperation in this area of post-harvest technology has already been established under the purview of the ministers here today.

Agriculture continues to play a central role in the economies of many countries particularly those in the developing world. A large part of export earnings of many developing countries still come from agricultural and forestry products. The role of trade in these agricultural produce has become one of the major factors

affecting the economies of many countries which have become so interdependent. For this reason greater efforts must be made to increase the developing countries' share of the world's earnings from agricultural exports.

In conclusion, I am confident that the ASEAN ministers present here today will be able to provide the necessary guidance for the greater development of agriculture and forestry within the ASEAN region.

It is now my pleasure to declare open the Fifth Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry and to wish you every success in your deliberations.

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