



สถานเอกอัครราชทูต  
ณ กรุงเทพมหานคร

# ข่าวสารนิเทศ Press Release เมธวัชรพงศ์การ

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Speech by H.E. Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand. At the 10th International Conference on "The Future of Asia". Tokyo, 3 June 2004

June 4, 2004

Mr. Ryoki Sugita, President and CEO of Nihon Keizai Shimbun,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year, I had the honour of accompanying my Prime Minister who addressed this Forum. This year I am grateful to Nihon Keizai Shimbun for inviting me to address this Conference.

The trend towards integration both globally and regionally has gained increased momentum as evident throughout the various regions. Last month, we witnessed the fifth enlargement of the European Union. Similarly, Asia is going through a major transition. Asia has re-emerged from the financial crisis. We stand at the threshold of a new and exciting era. Prime Minister Koizumi's vision as announced at the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit in Tokyo last December has set a clear direction in strengthening our relations as "open partners that act together and advance together".

As we seek closer partnership, I cannot but emphasize enough the important leadership role that Japan has to play in the process of regional integration. The process must go beyond economics and lead towards the goal of fostering a sense of community among Asian nations to realize the full potential of integration.

Our move towards an Asian community will not mirror that of European integration. An Asian community must be one that reflects our unique diversity in historical background, cultural heritage and, most of all, our inherent strength. Increasingly, our peoples are bound by a common desire to build a new chapter of Asian prosperity.

Today, I wish to focus on various building blocks and dimensions for the realization of an Asian community. Japan can indeed complement and add value to these cooperative endeavours for sustainable development and mutual prosperity.

First, our economic dynamism provides the driving force for an Asian community. In realizing the vast potentials and resources of Asia, our cooperation needs to embrace all the sub-regions of the continent. Last year, my Prime Minister expounded his vision on the emergence of a new Asia. He envisaged the Asia Cooperation Dialogue or ACD as an empowering process of self-reliance and of building partnership from the strength of our diversity.

Encompassing 22 member countries from all corners of Asia, the ACD has within three years proven itself as a promising forum in fostering partnership for Asia-wide cooperation. The dialogue dimension of the ACD has provided the opportunity for the ACD Foreign Ministers to enhance their comfort level. The project component, now comprising 18 areas of functional cooperation, will steadily reach out to the entire Asian continent. Japan has made commendable efforts in strengthening the legal infrastructure, and environmental education issues. China as host and chair of the Third Annual ACD Foreign Ministers' Meeting in two weeks time is in an excellent position to make further contribution towards Asia-wide cooperation.

Secondly, expanding trade among and within Asian sub-regions through bilateral and regional trading arrangements serves to capitalize on resources of the region. Such arrangements do not necessarily detract but can indeed add to the WTO process. The signing of the frameworks for comprehensive economic partnership between ASEAN and China, ASEAN and Japan, as well as the ongoing talks with the Republic of Korea is a testimony to the gradual pace of economic integration in the region.

In this connection, the future direction of Japan has been clearly set by Prime Minister Koizumi whose political will has made it possible for Japan to simultaneously proceed with bilateral EPA negotiations with Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and the Republic of Korea. Japan can accelerate and deepen the pace and scope of intra-economic integration among East Asia by negotiating and concluding each EPA as the world's second largest economy, rising above vested or ministry interests to demonstrate that it not only has the vision but also the capability to lead in this area.

On our part, Thailand is also pursuing "Look West" policy in building economic partnership with South Asia. While ASEAN and India have signed a framework agreement on comprehensive economic cooperation, Thailand is the first country in Southeast Asia to have signed an FTA with India. Next month, Thailand will host the BIMST-EC Summit, the first ever sub-regional Summit among Heads of Government of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Thailand. The BIMST-EC Leaders are expected to declare their commitment to the establishment of a free trade area. Looking further to west Asia, during my visit to the Gulf States, I suggested that the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council or GCC should meet to enhance our linkages. Strengthening economic ties with South and West Asia as well as Central Asia will propel forward the realization of an Asian community.

Thirdly, Asia is also a region of economic disparity. Another building block is to reduce the development gap, particularly in the Mekong Sub-region so that we can move together and advance together. With Thailand representing as much as 91 percent of all the GDP of Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia combined, we believe that the principle of "Prosper Thy Neighbour" for our immediate neighbours in ASEAN is imperative. Thailand initiated an economic cooperation strategy with adjacent neighbours as well as Viet Nam. We aim to generate income and employment of people in our neighbouring countries based on comparative advantage.

Within less than a year of its inception, this forum already comprises over 40 common development projects and some 200 bilateral projects between each pair of countries. Thailand has contributed 250 million US dollars to our neighbours. Moreover, there have been several countries which have agreed to work with Thailand in these projects. At the Japan-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, Prime Minister Koizumi already pledged to invest 1.5 billion US dollars for a three-year period in the development of the Mekong Sub-region. This development package and the current drafting of the Japan-Thailand Economic Partnership would reinforce Japan's role in the Mekong sub-region which will enhance strategic role of Japan in Southeast Asia.

Fourthly, another key building block of integration is financial stability. Asia is home to three nations with the largest foreign reserves but yet as experienced in the 1997 financial crisis, we were unable to mobilize those resources. Due to under-development of our financial markets, our wealth had to be invested in the major financial markets beyond Asia and reinvested back in our region with a premium.

We need to move forward with a sound and solid financial infrastructure. A key instrument is the development of an Asian bond market as initiated by my Prime Minister. The idea has gained increased region-wide support through the ACD process, and has been concretized with the creation of an Asian Bond Fund last year. We expect a second Fund to be established in local denominated currency. We are working on the second step regarding the supply side and the removal of impediments to bond trading across the region and beyond. Japan, as an international financial center which stands to gain from the Asian bond market, must assume its rightful place in this development. For Asian financial architecture to be realized, Finance Ministries of Asian countries will have to be assertive, outward-looking and work together closely. The stronger financial position of Asia will enable us to be a stronger trade and investment partner with other regions.

Fifthly, as we look ahead, regional integration must not be an inward-looking process. Our prosperity is bound with other regions. We are building bridges to Europe, to the Pacific, to Latin America, and we are reaching out to Africa. ASEAN is strengthening linkages with Africa through the New Partnership for Africa's Development or NEPAD. Japan is recognized for its contribution through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development or TICAD. Thailand is ready to work with NEPAD countries and other partners in extending technical cooperation and sharing Asia's best practices with Africa. In my discussions yesterday with Foreign Minister Kawaguchi, we agreed to work together for development in Africa.

Finally, our Asian community must be people-centered. Our people are bound together in meeting common challenges arising from the impact of globalization and the scourge of poverty. Government efforts must be complemented by networking amongst parliamentarians and civil society to ensure social justice and human dignity.

To realize the full potential of Asia, the process of integration must go beyond economics. We must work together the goal of fostering a sense of community among our peoples. We have witnessed how diversity of culture, of actors, of interests, and of issues, can precipitate friction and hinder the process of integration. The international community must not only learn to live with and tolerate differences, we must seek partnership from diversity. Asia is no exception. By enhancing dialogue and understanding through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, we can contribute to the building of a sense of community amongst our peoples that would underpin regional integration in Asia. It is ultimately the people of Asia who will sow the seeds for peaceful co-existence and mutual prosperity.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The future of Asia depends on partnership and leadership. Partnership on the part of all of us. Leadership on the part of those who are able and willing to lead such as Japan. I have no doubt that with the rebound of the Japanese economy and the vision of Prime Minister Koizumi, Japan can be at the forefront of our process of integration and the building of a new Asia.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

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