

REFLECTIONS ON ASEAN'S 30 YEARS AND VISION OF THE FUTURE

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In order to understand ASEAN and its behavior when it began as the ASEAN FIVE, perhaps it would be useful to peek a little into its history which began this way:

For some reason which is the subject of another topic, the formation of Malaysia was opposed by Indonesia and the Philippines. While the disapprobation by the Philippines was expressed in non-violent but diplomatic ways affecting the diplomatic relations of two countries, the Indonesian led by President Sukarno who was very much under the influence of PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) expressed it in the form of "konfrontasi" (confrontation) which in part violent means were used and all the hostile acts of diplomacy and propaganda thoroughly confusing the Malay peoples of both countries.

In order to blunt the violent edges and to ensure the return of brotherly relations as enshrined in the Malaysia-Indonesia Treaty of Friendship, Tun Abdul Razak who was the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister responsible for the formation of Malaysia had tasked me to seek ways and means of ending the "konfrontasi". A special political action was established which initiated a credible contact after a number of endeavours.

The Indonesian side was led by General Suharto who tasked his unit's intelligence officer to be the contact man. The officer concerned was Col. Ali Moertopo (later General Tan Sri) and was assisted by a Major Moerdani (later General Tan Sri). Moerdani was stationed in Bangkok with a cover job as a staff of Garuda Airlines station and played an extremely important role in assisting the return of normalcy in relations between Indonesia and Malaysia. Ali Moertopo's team was answerable only to Suharto as ours was only answerable to Tun Abdul Razak. Sukarno was not at all in the picture lest the PKI would abort any endeavours.

Both Tun Abdul Razak and Suharto were *ad idem* that not only "konfrontasi" must cease but it should not happen between any countries in South East Asia. Accordingly, these objectives became the beacons for the two sides to aim.

When Ali Moertopo and I met for the first time, never did I feel any discomfort. We relied a great deal on our common cultural heritage. One of these natives instincts was the pull of togetherness in the face of a common danger. In any dangerous situation, the people would together or "berkampung". The root word "kampung" does not mean a village although the common usage now is that of cluster of houses or village. Now "kampung" is generally understood as "desa". "Kampung" means to collect or to gather. As we dug deeply into our

common cultural heritage, we arrived at the conclusion that Indonesia and Malaysia could survive or even thrive only in togetherness.

The late Tun Adam Malik and I also met secretly once in Bangkok. He was a brave and honourable man and allowed me to attend to his security in Thailand chiefly from PKI agents. Pak Adam said that our enemy who threatened our security was not so much the communist idea of expansion by all means including violence, but both Suharto and Tun Abdul Razak feared most was the countries of South East Asia, if in disarray, would adopt the habit and practice of "konfrontasi" and all the ugly acts as means of solving problems between them. The problem was real enough in view of the East-West rivalry at that time with its pull and push methods. Only in togetherness could peoples of South East Asia manage security problems. Otherwise South East Asia would be catastrophic and would have to choose sides which would only bring harm to themselves. Adam Malik was fully supportive of "berkampung". Later, when the concept of ASEAN was being bandied around, it was Adam Malik who coined the acronym ASEAN for the Association of South East Asian Nations. (Mr. Adhyatman, Personal and Special Assistant to the late Adam Malik, could vouch for this).

Moertopo and I and also our respective teams met in different places like Bangkok, Hong Kong to avoid detection by national and international supporters of "konfrontasi". As the number of contacts increased, both sides were more than convinced that SEA "berkampung" was the correct idea and it would be sufficient if the beginning the concept of togetherness was limited only to Indonesia and Malaysia. At a propitious time, the concept and its spirit must cover the whole of South East Asia and later perhaps East Asia culminating to Asia and then the whole world which would be the only concept that could obviate would catastrophe. However, it had to begin at some point somewhere.

Ali and I were working on the two pronged objectives of ending the "konfrontasi" and working out ideas that a new relationship should subsist in South East Asia. Indonesia and Malaysia should be the mainstay of the South East Asian entente. This new relationship need not express itself through Treaties or Agreements which might become too stiff and inflexible or even pedantic in the interpretations for policies and action.

We submitted our recommendations to our respective masters. On this point I must confess and emphasise, that as far as Ali and I were concerned, our inclination was to make our representations orally without any written documents for reasons of security. This was agreed to by the two princes of peace.

For the reconciliation between Indonesia and Malaysia, emphasis was made that for political problems to be effectively managed, leaders and officials at all levels and in all sectors should be constantly and consistently exposed to one another. This would certainly bring about a kind of intimacy which would banish inhibitions so that, for example, an Indonesian minister or an officer could pick up the phone and call on a personal name basis, his Malaysian counterpart and share with each other the thoughts and basis of any issue in

question, and vice versa. Exchanges of visits would certainly create mutual trust as intimacy would create confidence in each other, which would bring greater understanding of any issue when there was transparency, candour and above all, sincerity in terms of thinking for each other instead of making a point or indulging in one-upmanship. "One may lose a friend by strenuously trying to win an argument" was the adage we advocated to be practised in relations between the two peoples of one language and a common cultural heritage and values, and between peoples of the region.

Suharto soon achieved power regarding security from Sukarno and the idea was at once implemented. Suharto put out the fire of "konfrontasi". The world at once noticed that, on the arrival of Indonesian top military brass in Kuala Lumpur with the Indonesian C-130, they met the Tunku at his private home in Alor Setar where the Indonesian delegation went, accompanied by Tun Abdul Razak and other Malaysian ministers. This time to Kedah, the Indonesian and Malaysian delegations were conveyed by a MAS Fokker Friendship aircraft instead of the Indonesian C-130.

Only the Malaysian Chief of the Armed Forces Staff and I flew to Alor Setar by the C-130. We avoided overflying the Australian Air Base in Butterworth since the Australian authorities had denied the C-130 to fly over the base on the ground that the Australian Government was unaware of any peace or truce being concluded between Indonesia and Malaysia as if we were in a state of war. I had already informed the Australian High Commissioner that "konfrontasi" had ended then and that we were friends again.

On the arrival of the Indonesian C-130 Ali Moertopo and I hugged each other on the Kuala Lumpur (Subang Airport) tarmac exposed to the mass media and eyes of the world signalling the end of "konfrontasi". Not long before that, Tun Abdul Razak and some Malaysian ministers went to Jakarta to sign a document connoting the return of traditional brotherly relationship between the two peoples. Tun Abdul Razak followed by some ministers and officials paid a courtesy call on President Sukarno who I was told, showed delight at Tun Abdul Razak's meeting with him. As far as I could recall, only Minister Sardon Jubir (the late), a great Sukarno fan, failed to call on Sukarno because the car conveying him was immediately behind mine and mistakenly followed me to the guest house straight from the airport. I had arranged that I would not call on President Sukarno because of my utter disappointment in the man for consorting with the CCP and PKI and launching such a severe "konfrontasi" including violence and loss of lives for reasons which could be attributed only to feeble mindedness.

Suharto who was charged with the security of Indonesia, had cleansed the country of PKI and its vestiges. Sukarno then passed away and the gentle and shy smiling General, Suharto, was elected President. The question which Suharto had to immediately apply his mind in regional politics was that of the South East Asian cooperation which had become high on the diplomatic agenda of both Indonesia and Malaysia.

It may be recalled that Moertopo and I had recommended that not only there would be a special relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia, but that special relationship should also encompass others in South East Asia. This special relationship contained such ideas as that inter-state problems should NOT be aired openly no matter how insignificant they might be. Mechanisms or apparatus should be set up to resolve border problems locally and not at the capitals which would turn a pimple into a boil due to undue publicity. If there were border uncertainties, they were to be worked out together or jointly surveyed or together develop for mutual benefit. If an area defied survey or development like a gully or deep valley or gorge, then that area should be left alone for the time being and not be turned into a border dispute.

If the ambience was positive, it would be easy to resolve such difficulties without acrimonious wrangling. The formation of the Thai-Malaysia Joint Development Authority (TMDJA) was a very good example of this principle of "drinking from the same well" from which the TMJDA Agreement was signed at the most informal kway teow (noodle) shop in front of the University of Chiangmai by the Prime Ministers of Thailand and Malaysia demonstrating the habit of the ASEAN mind.

The special kind of relationship should now also be applied to other countries of South East Asia, conscious of the fact that the current situation had been heavily influenced by colonial thinking, particularly on issues relating to borders. The cultural heritage of the peoples of South East Asia seldom concept but they were always regarded as bridges connecting peoples on both sides. This proximity in peoples's relationship should not be governed by a spirit of exclusiveness or selfishness. People to people contacts including commercial and trade relations must encouraged.

However, this special relationship would be easy to laud but there must exist a political will to implement. For example, in order for migration to be orderly between Indonesia and Malaysia it was implemented by a special body on each side. I recall that Admiral Sudomo was charged on the Indonesian side to ensure that labour movement from Indonesia to Malaysia should be orderly and that the people who moved were acceptable by both sides without the odium of "Pendatang Tanpa Izin" or illegal immigrants.

Perhaps, because Ali and I made the recommendations of the Special Relationship, we both tasked by our respective governments to promote the idea to countries of South East Asia. We were in a quandry because countries of South East Asia were being the subjects and objects of the Cold War. We thought we would never be able to persuade those countries that adhered to the communist system like the Indo-China states. Burma (now Myanmar) who claimed to be non-communist and non-aligned, saw Tun Abdul Razak talked to Ne Win direct, even then without success.

I remember an occasion when then Vietnam Foreign Minister, Nguyen Co Thach visited me at my house, we talked inter alia of ASEAN's idea of a

Zone of PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY (ZOPHAN). He confided in me that he liked the idea but was not at all agreeable to the word FREEDOM. Instead he preferred the word INDEPENDENCE. I understood him because of the adherence of Vietnam to communism and decided not to get into a circular argument. And the Vietnamese people, years later, subscribed to all the conceits of ASEAN including ZOPHAN when Vietnam became a full member of ASEAN. One of ASEAN's virtues is SELF-CONFIDENCE AND PATIENCE. Some day in the not too distant future, all South East Asia will subscribe to the message of peace and wellbeing for all peoples of South East Asia.

Indonesia had to take the lead by showing that socialism need not be a hindrance to this special relationship. However, this became easier when Indonesia began to enter the world free market system although old ideological warriors were slow in the uptake. We managed to persuade Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines to join the wagon of which the Free Market System was the main criterion as a common denominational element. And it took nearly two years to get the five together.

There was a common approach that the birth of ASEAN should be in the form of Declaration demonstrating a common political will on a number of principles which would form the basis of the cooperative actions. The Declaration also welcomed new members from South East Asia. In their relations with one another, they were to be commonly consistent with the spirit and Charter of United Nations and the ten principles adopted by the Asian-Conference in Bandung (1955).

I think a through look at the Bangkok Declaration and other ASEAN agreed documents would be helpful in understanding what ASEAN is all about. It will be noticed that the Declaration represented the collective political will of five South East Asian countries to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation. ASEAN through joint efforts are even prepared to make sacrifices to secure for their peoples and for posterity, the blessings of peace, freedom and prosperity.

The Bangkok Declaration 1967, 30 years ago was clearly political. The only mechanism provided by the Declaration was the Annual General Meeting and the special meetings of Foreign Ministers not Ministers of finance or Trade (international or otherwise). Even the Standing Committee was under the chairmanship of the Foreign Minister of the host country. Ambassadors which means political officials, would carry on the work of the Association in between meetings of Foreign Ministers.

Was this political colour camouflage of ASEAN a shortfall when ASEAN was regarded especially by the press as an Economic creature?

If it was a shortfall, then people like me and the late Tan Sri General Ali Moertopo should be blamed. At every meeting of ASEAN or the Summit, Ali and I advocated that all matters should be discussed, including political ones. Without the glare and blare of publicity behind closed doors. This became the standard practice. Many of the shortfalls of other regional cooperative bodies

stemmed from the fact that they could not make any progress because they insisted on regarding themselves as high-powered political associations in character. That put such a diplomatic association at a disadvantage because the press, particularly those unfriendly ones, would highlight failures of the roles of foreign ministers in trying to solve political issues. Even trade issues were and are always on the plane of international relations and therefore, in the final analysis, political.

ASEAN on the other hand always down played the political issues and publicly for press conferences post ministerial meetings, economic cooperative issues were announced with great emphasis. This way, although it looks untruthful and non-transparent to the press and the public at large, in reality political issues were always aired and debated without the participants trying to score a point playing to the gallery. Thus many political problems received better treatment than otherwise and were often resolved. Such political problems could be reduced to their basic essentials encouraging a spirit of togetherness and better understanding among participants.

Ali and I thought that as a demonstration of the closest relations would be the cooperation between former adversaries Malaysia and Indonesia which under the influence of the PKI, Sukarno had a very negative view of Malaysia.

Immediately after the end of "konfrontasi" the Indonesian and Malaysian had a number of joint security exercises to eliminate the violent communists who were once supported by the PKI and Sukarno at the Kalimantan border. That boggled the mind of people particularly Western, because of the very rapid switch into a position for both sides chasing after the communists, the common enemy which was once an ally of Sukarno. That kind of cooperation had to be rationalised sooner or later and it came in the form of the General Border Agreement. Consequently the creature which came out of the agreement was the MALINDO General Border Committee (GBC) which came into being 25 years ago. The GBC was not intended to belong solely to the military on both sides, working together at the Border. Indeed the purpose of the GBC was to ensure that both countries at their borders would be free from subversive and negative forces which could destabilise the two countries. The meant internal security which in Malaysia's context belong to the Police.

The MALINDO GBC was to be a kind of attraction and model for the others. Soon Thailand-Malaysia GBC came into being. There is a web of interlocking security arrangement and there are also mechanisms for the exchanges of intelligence among ASEAN, and this is not to mention the very special relations between Malaysia and Singapore. Needless to say there exist a defence and security arrangement which in fact would be a civilian police responsibility except in Indonesia and Thailand. In those countries the Police and the command and control are not free from the authority of the armed forces staff. From my experiences as a Minister responsible for internal security, the concentration was more on the work of the police who have power of arrest.

Here again there is misconception as if the two GBCs belonged to the armed Forces and not as in the case of Malaysia to the Police. The reality is that both Indonesia and Thailand, Malaysia immediate neighbours, have had their countries more influenced by the armed forces than the civilian police.

There are a number of post at the borders which are jointly manned. Most local problems were resolved at these posts even without the interference by the respective foreign offices. This very idea of solving local problems without the interference of respective capitals was encouraged through the GBC arrangement. I have just returned from Parapat where the first official MALINDO GBC was held 25 years ago. Parapat was chosen because of the common semantic of the name of the place "That which conduces towards togetherness". There the MALINDO GBC had produced a book recording the achievement of the MALINDO GBC which clearly illustrated the Malaysian delegation was always headed by a civilian Minister and the Indonesian side by the Chief of the Armed Forces Staff with a ministerial rank.

It was also the hope of earlier ASEAN leaders that there would be such arrangements between all countries of South East Asia. This is now becoming even more important and relevant with the membership of Myanmar and Laos which should have GBCs with Thailand. Likewise, between Laos and Vietnam, and when Cambodia becomes a member of ASEAN, GBCs with Laos, Vietnam and Thailand would seem to me to be imperative. Through such an arrangement, hopefully, the odium of "golden" will evaporate from the "triangle".

What am I suggesting here is that ASEAN and all its programmes and documents aim at nothing else but to ensure the security and wellbeing of the people. The MALINDO GBC has a programme for social and economic wellbeing.

During my tenure of office responsible for internal Security working with the Malaysia-Thai GBC and MALINDO GBC and the meetings of the Intelligence Five not counting the numerous meetings with the Singapore security personnel, I was often chided for the frequency of meetings of officials of the two GBCs. I was able to blunt the edges of criticisms by justifying the necessity of the personal contacts among officials of all levels. A straitjacket meeting of Ministers or officials would not produce the kind of rapport among officials which should characterise the relationship in ASEAN. Although meetings of officials are expensive but in the interest of a stable South East Asia, that cannot be measured in terms of money.

The exchanges of officials and people to people relationship had conduced towards the formation of an ASEAN habit of mind. In the meantime, other economic, financial, trade and cultural issues also received a better attention because of the ASEAN spirit and habit of mind. ASEAN would not have crowned itself with such success if its work was bedevilled and impeded by political issues aired in public. Once the political matters were mutually understood if not removed all together, it would be very smooth sailing to go into thorny issues as exemplified in the discussions on the ASEAN Free Trade

Area (AFTA). Although there was a great deal of bargaining in the work to establish the Free Trade Area, its timing and subjects, it was facilitated by the political understanding of each other. Indonesia, which was understandably once a great opponent of the concept, has become one of the greatest enthusiasts for the idea. During the negotiations, it had been easy to speak of the difficulties because other members could easily understand the objections which was not done in the spirit of one-upmanship but of clear understanding, sympathy and even sacrifice as enunciated in the Declaration.

Could that hiding behind economic and trade issues be a shortfall or an advantage? I do not think if political ministers had not paved the way for the establishment of an ASEAN habit of mind, ASEAN would have received such world approbation. Its practical successes have become the evidences of excellence in international relations. ASEAN is not a half baked agroupation (*kampung*). The various ASEAN documents revealed the mature thoughts of their authors. AFTA and the agreement to admit new members are splendid examples.

What of the future? Now ASEAN will have embraced all except for the moment one in South East Asia. The door for entry is always open. This shows its wisdom and maturity. The ASEAN nine will have new challenges and responses. Despite the paradigmatic shifts, I think many of the principles of special relation among its member are still valid and relevant. I think this friendly approach seemingly non-political and non-preaching and non accusative may help new members to appreciate the need for togetherness, sacrifices and to subscribe to the ASEAN principles of believing in the validity of the Bandung Principal of co-existence-nay-better still the principal of cooperation in the furtherence of the promotion of peace, freedom, independence, intergrity, abstention, from the threat and use of force as a menas of settling disputes and above all the respect for justice, the rule of law and the respect for the fundamental human rights as enshrined in the Charter of the UN.

The potential pitfal of ASEAN which should be avoided would be in the euphoria of success. ASEAN might forget the special relationship which had hitherto characterised the relationship between its members. With the entry of new members who are unaccustomed to the free market system, should the old members insist on applying the rules as is the playing field is already level, that would spell disaster for ASEAN.

ASEAN should continue to strictly adhere to its enunciated principles of mutual respect to nuture the habit of BERKAMPUNG, that is ASEAN. It will be noticed that ASEAN did not simply throw up its hands in despair with regard to the latest situation in Cambodia. ASEAN took the initiative without intrusion, to find peaceful solution for the Cambodian people. ASEAN must deny those who had openly disapproved of Myanmar's membership now the satisfaction to frustrate through the unsavoury situation in Cambodia, the ASEAN dream of ten (10) members. I am sure this will be realised soon. Cambodia must never be isolated by ASEAN which should accept Hun Sen's various assurance bona fide.

It was difficult once before the power of Pol Pot and to return Cambodia to her sovereign and people, yet ASEAN found a solution in the appointment of Norodom Sihanok as head of state and the diffusion of the share of Pol Pot in the government of Phnom Penh by getting important factions to form the Coalition Government of Democratic Kamboja (CGDK) which was welcomed internationally. The new contact point for negotiation was Sihanok which led to the UN sponsored elections. The leaders of Cambodian people share with the rest of ASEAN a common fate and destiny.

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Opinions and views expressed are entirely his own.