



*Prime Minister
Singapore*

27 January 2008

Dear Ibu,

My wife and I are deeply saddened to learn of the demise of your beloved father.

Singaporeans will remember Pak Soeharto for his leadership, vision and statesmanship. He presided over 30 years of progress and development for Indonesia. His policies made a crucial contribution to the stability of Southeast Asia, and enabled all the countries to grow and prosper. His tenure as President ended abruptly and unhappily in 1998 in the wake of the ASEAN Financial Crisis, and the collapse of the Indonesian banking system and the rupiah. But with the passage of time I believe we will be able to make a balanced and objective assessment of what he had achieved for his country and Southeast Asia.

Pak Soeharto was a founding leader of ASEAN. He played a pivotal role in making it an effective organisation which safeguarded the interests of the region. In the 1980s, on the issue of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, Indonesia's firm support enabled ASEAN to forge a united stand, and wage a resolute and ultimately successful diplomatic campaign to reverse the military occupation and prevent a *fait accompli*.

More than once, Pak Soeharto's personal courage and leadership made the difference. In 1988, ASEAN planned to hold a summit meeting in Manila. The political situation in the Philippines was volatile, with the very real possibility of military coups. Pak Soeharto did not hesitate. He announced that he would be going to Manila. As a result, all the other ASEAN leaders attended the summit too, which passed uneventfully with rigorous security precautions.

In the 1990s, ASEAN needed to move beyond political to economic cooperation, and to deepen and institutionalise trade and investment links among the members. Again Indonesia's support was vital. Pak Soeharto backed his competent team of reformist economic ministers – the “Berkeley Mafia” – to revise Indonesia's long held policy of protecting its domestic industries, in order to create the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). In retrospect, this was a critical move which kept ASEAN relevant and effective, just as China and India were emerging as major players in the globalised economy.

Beyond ASEAN, Pak Soeharto was well respected internationally. He played an important role in developments in the broader Asia Pacific region. In 1994, he chaired the APEC Leaders' meeting in Bogor, and skilfully mustered a consensus among the leaders to declare a vision of free trade and investment for the Asia Pacific region. This entrenched the engagement between both sides of the Pacific.

Pak Soeharto was steadfast in pursuing cooperative relationships between Indonesia and its neighbours, based on equality and mutual respect. He deeply believed and often said that regional resilience had to be based on national resilience. In other words, for ASEAN to be strong, all the individual ASEAN members had to be strong.

Indonesia's relations with Singapore started off tense after Konfrontasi. But over time Pak Soeharto established close personal ties of trust and friendship with Singaporean leaders, and both sides gradually developed confidence in each other. Despite our very different circumstances – Indonesia being the largest country in ASEAN, and Singapore one of the smallest – we recognised that our two countries enjoyed many complementary advantages, and bilateral cooperation prospered.

I was involved personally in two of these projects. One was cooperation between the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and the Indonesian armed forces (then known as ABRI) to conduct joint air force training in Pekan Baru. The other was the very successful economic cooperation in Riau province, especially Batam, Bintan and Karimun

