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“The Need to Promote a Balanced Development Concept in Asia”

Asia has achieved economic development at an intense pace, growing to the point that it is now seen as a world center. This expansion in economic power has been accompanied by greater military strength and increased political influence. Vigorous discussions are taking place in the region on economic development and integration, but there is still a tendency to refrain from talking about political development. This is the topic I wish to bring up in my speech today.

The transformations that took place with the fall of the Berlin Wall in September 1989 and the 1990 adoption of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe brought the Cold War to an end and gave birth to a new Europe. The system that emerged placed greater emphasis on the concepts of market economics, democracy and human rights, and pursued political and economic affairs in a balanced fashion. This wave of democratization later moved on to Africa, Latin America and the Pacific island countries but did not reach Asia.

After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, efforts were made in many Asian countries, especially those in East Asia, to emphasize economic growth rather than political development. This is a major point of difference from Europe in the post-Cold War era.

Interestingly enough, countries such as South Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia have a history of achieving economic development even under authoritarian systems. As is the case with China's present economic development, authoritarian regimes are not regarded as all bad. Economic growth itself is the primary goal of Asian countries, and political development has not particularly come up for discussion as long as the fruits of this economic growth have been available.

Asia's concept of development gives great weight to economic growth, and this has created an imbalance between political and economic affairs, with the result being that Asia is the region lagging furthest behind in democratization. Indonesia achieved dramatic economic growth under the Suharto regime. As the economy slumped in the wake of the Asian currency crisis, however, the regime's exclusive dependence on economic development to maintain its rule proved its downfall and Suharto was eventually compelled to resign. Democracy was subsequently made an important pillar of reform, and Indonesia's democratization has achieved great progress over the past ten years.

ASEAN has focused entirely on economic development and economic growth, avoiding mention of political or security cooperation. ASEAN presently has both democratic and non-democratic members, and huge disparities can be seen among them both economically and politically. To build a more robust ASEAN, we should pursue balanced development supporting political development as well as economic development.

In 2002 Indonesia proposed that ASEAN establish cooperative frameworks for political and security matters, and thereafter fledgling efforts to advance democracy, human rights and good governance began to appear within ASEAN. Practical progress in this regard will nevertheless likely take some time. It is quite unimaginable that ASEAN will have achieved democratization by 2015 and, given that it took Europe 15 years to get from the 1975 Helsinki Final Act to the 1990 Charter of Paris, the democratization of Asia by 2028 is perhaps not a realistic prospect.

Indonesia launched the Bali Democracy Forum (BDF) in 2008 and has endeavored to make the promotion of democracy a key strategic agenda item for Asia. The BDF has garnered considerable interest, with the number of participating states growing from 32 at the outset to 53 by 2010. Today, even non-democratic states can no longer ignore political development. If much can be learned from the present circumstances in Middle East and North Africa, Asia's democratization movement may pick up still more steam.

Those Asian countries that have achieved democratization must cooperate and extend a helping hand to other countries desiring democratization. Indonesia is actively involved in Egypt's democratization process, and my thanks go out to Japan for also cooperating in this process. I would like to see Indonesia collaborate with Japan in continuing to assist in Egypt's democratization.

In addition to economic development, political development leading to a more democratic Asia is necessary, and pursuing these equally will allow the fruits of economic growth to truly be enjoyed and the people of Asia to live in peace and safety. Continuing these efforts will enable Asia to play a central role in the world and make it a leader for the 21st century.