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Malaysia ready to be hub for Asean resources

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MALAYSIA is prepared to act as a hub to pool available resources in Asean and develop a directory of experts and their skills, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said the hub could facilitate the exchange of ideas and pool resources for joint work as well as facilitate the movement of professionals within and outside the region.

Mutual recognition of qualifications would enable the professionals to practise within all Asean countries, he said, adding that the Asean Engineers Register was already in place with the secretariat hosted by the Institution of Engineers Malaysia (IEM).

Addressing the Asean Federation of Engineering Organisations (AFEO) here which conferred him its Distinguished Fellow Award, Dr Mahathir believed Asean professional service providers should establish a register to facilitate the match-making of skills within and outside the region.

Reminding them of the double standard being practised by rich nations in various matters, the Prime Minister said it was important that professionals take note of the latest developments and be prepared.

"With increased liberalisation and free trade, you may find that you are dictated to by others from outside the region and that the available jobs at your doorsteps are being undertaken by others and you are left to pick up the crumbs."

The AFEO award was given to Dr Mahathir, who is stepping down on Oct 31 after 22 years in office, for his immense contribution to infrastructural development in Malaysia.

AFEO is a body of national institutions and organisations of engineers in Asean countries.

It had its beginnings in 1973 from the engineering convention held between IEM and Institution of Engineers Singapore (IES).

Besides IEM and IES, its other members are Persatuan Insinyur Indonesia, the Philippine Technological Council, the Engineering Institution of Thailand, Brunei's Pertubuhan Ukur Jurutera dan Arkitek, Vietnam Union of Science and Technological Associations, Myanmar Engineering Society, Engineering Institution of Cambodia and Lao Union of Science and Engineering Associations.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen was the award's recipient last year.

Dr Mahathir said Asean engineers had proven their professional capabilities and had been able to produce goods and products of very high standard which complied with world standards. Civil works by them, he said, were exportable items, together with fabricated and engineering products. "Asean must be a centre of excellence in the engineering field. Asean engineers must not wait for others to innovate and establish new methods and systems for them to copy.

"They must do research and development on their own and establish their own methods and systems which should become standards for the rest of the world."

Dr Mahathir said the impediments faced by Asean engineers should not be viewed as obstacles and hindrances but as challenges where ways to deal with them should be sought. Instead of competing with one another in the region, he said they should instead pool their resources and expertise and undertake jobs being done by their counterparts from the United States and Europe.

"Pooling of resources will also enable you to get bigger jobs and projects both at home and within and outside the region."

He said Asean engineers were not less capable; it was just that the collective strength was not marshalled for the collective good of the profession in the region.

The Prime Minister said there was also a need for win-win solutions for countries in the region especially for the benefit of the less developed among Asean members.

"It is important that the region's capacity is enhanced and the standards improved for mutual benefit. The more developed members, through suitable out-reach programmes, should offer transfer of expertise and technology to the less developed members in an effort to prosper your neighbour."

Among these programmes are attachments for younger engineers which should be encouraged.