

By : DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB TUN ABD RAZAK
Venue: HOTEL HILTON, KUCHING, SARAWAK
Date : 04-08-2005
Title : OPENING CEREMONY OF THE FIRST ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING ON MINERALS (AMMIN)

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Senior Government Officials,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and a very good morning to all of you.

1. I am delighted to be here with all of you this morning and it is indeed my pleasure to welcome distinguished ASEAN Ministers and Officials gathered here for the inaugural ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Minerals (AMMin). This auspicious meeting represents another significant milestone which will pave the way towards further strengthening the cooperation that exists among ASEAN nations. Today our focus is on the vast opportunities presented by the region's rich store of mineral resources as part of our ASEAN economic agenda

2. In our common effort to deliberate and draw up a program to develop our mineral wealth, I believe the venue of this inaugural meeting is most appropriate. Sarawak is an ancient land, blessed with abundant natural resources, both above the ground and below. Here in Sarawak are the most ancient forests in the world. More than 75% of Sarawak is covered in pristine virgin jungle – older than the Amazon, unparalleled in biodiversity and containing unique and exotic species of fauna and flora found nowhere else, in the world. Beneath the surface, Sarawak is rich with both metallic and non-metallic mineral resources such as silica sand and coal. Sarawak is where we first found oil in 1910 and where we are still discovering oil fields offshore today. Indeed, it is most suitable that the first ASEAN Ministerial meeting on minerals is held in a part of the region that is noted for its abundance of mineral resources.

3. I wish to take the opportunity to extend my congratulations to Dato' Sri Adenan Haji Satem, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Malaysia for organizing this meeting, representing as it does a very pertinent new initiative, with a very clearly defined policy focus. As I see it, this initiative is another significant building block of regional economic cooperation that will hopefully contribute towards ASEAN's increasingly important role in the global economy, given its key position in what promises to be the most vibrant region of the new millennium.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

4. In four days (August 8th), ASEAN will be exactly 38 years old. In that almost four-decade period, this regional grouping, which was once regarded with skepticism in the early days of its inception, grew from strength to strength, heralding in an era of unprecedented cooperation and solidarity among the countries in the region. ASEAN

has indeed proven critics wrong and has served as an important platform for nations within the region to come together to deliberate on issues of mutual concern.

5. Today, ASEAN is regarded with respect. With a combined population of over 500 million people, a total area of 4.5 million square miles, a combined GDP of USD737 billion, and a total trade of USD720 billion, ASEAN as a region and a grouping of nations, has a significant voice in the global arena. To use the words of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan when he described ASEAN back in 2000, "ASEAN is not only a well-functioning, indispensable reality in the region. It is a real force to be reckoned with far beyond the region."

6. As the economic center of gravity moves inexorably from the West to the East, given the rising economic power of China and, of late, India, ASEAN is uniquely positioned to take maximum economic benefits arising from the shift. There being no other tenable regional architecture in the region to represent the collective voice and interests of east Asian nations, ASEAN has a significant role to play in this regard. We can take pride in the fact that ASEAN, was the first to take the initiative to bring about a definitive South East Asian community. It is obvious that ASEAN remains the anchor of any regional community building.

7. We have gained much through collaborative efforts. Undoubtedly countries within ASEAN has benefited greatly, especially in the economic sense, from the strong ties that exist between member countries as part of one common grouping. We are fortunate that the hallmark of ASEAN is collaboration and cooperation. And we can take heart in the fact that this has been re-affirmed again and again at every ASEAN summit.

8. This year, We note with pleasure the adoption by ASEAN leaders at the recent 38th ASIAN Ministerial Meeting in Laos, of the Vientiane Action Programme (VAP), which includes, among others, the signing of the Agreement on the Establishment of an ASEAN Development Fund (ADF) that will, to a great extent, further boost the resource mobilisation efforts to support the financing of the implementation of plans of action to realize the ASEAN Community.

9. In addition, the Summit reiterated ASEAN's commitment to make greater efforts to narrow the development gap among ASEAN Member Countries and work towards the establishment of an ASEAN Charter, which will reaffirm the objectives, goals and principles of the ASEAN Community and beyond. Indeed, the recent 38th ASEAN Ministerial meeting showcased to the world that the ASEAN spirit of cooperation and solidarity is alive and well, and will continue to thrive for a long time to come.

Ladies and gentlemen ,

10. We must continue to exploit the advantage that we have as a cohesive regional grouping. At the 10th ASEAN Summit, we adopted the ASEAN Vision 2020. The long term Mission took as its primary task the development of intra regional trade and the transformation of ASEAN into a competitive region, functioning as a single market and with growing industrialization creating a production base that worked on the modern principle of complementarities.

11. In 1992 we launched a scheme for an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) at the Summit in Singapore. The strategic objective of AFTA is to create a single production unit -eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers. Step by step, we are moving towards

strengthening the key elements within ASEAN towards making the ASEAN Vision 2020 a reality. The ASEAN Telecommunications sector is moving to provide the interconnectivity mandated by an increasingly interconnected, cyber-based way of life, whilst the power sector is developing an ASEAN Grid, for the purpose of a better and more efficient distribution of power within the region.

12. Today, we assemble here to deliberate on the Minerals Sector. ASEAN is a region rich in mineral resources. Many ASEAN countries still have huge untapped mineral-rich areas within their borders. Whether it be because of a lack of capacity or lack of technological capability to efficiently harness the mineral wealth, the fact remains that much of ASEAN remains to be exploited for valuable minerals. This is where joint cooperation and capacity building among ASEAN member countries become absolutely critical for the growth of the ASEAN Minerals sector. ASEAN countries must stand ready to help each other in technology transfers and other forms of capacity building and cooperation.

13. At the same time, as we move forward, we must be cautious of the fact that not only are our natural resources not limitless, but we must also be mindful of the manner with which we harvest those resources. Whatever ways we adopt to maximize our potential in the minerals sector must take into account environmental sustainability. Much as there is to be gained from the wealth of minerals found in our region, there is also just as much to lose if we take the wrong approach in extracting those minerals.

14. This is where Ministerial meetings such as this is most important. We must formulate collective policies and guidelines for acceptable methods in sourcing for minerals. Governments must play their role to ensure that their respective countries observe best practices in the management of natural resources for the collective long-term benefit of the entire region.

15. On a more technological level, it is absolutely imperative that ASEAN governments recognize the importance of research and development (R&D). For ASEAN's minerals sector to prosper, member countries must place greater emphasis on R&D to determine greater efficiencies in sourcing mechanisms; in new utilization of minerals and in management of resources and stocks. At the same time, ASEAN countries ought to look into ways to increase and strengthen intra-regional trade of minerals as a first step towards finding a more global acceptance of ASEAN minerals.

16. AMMin can be the platform for the contemporary image we need to give to ASEAN's Minerals Industry in the 21st Century. Perhaps it can be said that the AMMin is a perfect opportunity to re-position or re-brand the ASEAN minerals industry, which seems to be somewhat lackluster. AMMin can plan and deliberate on how to coordinate the development of the industry on a broader scale. We need to update and modernize our approach. We need to revitalize ASEAN's Minerals sector for our common benefit.

17. Today, this meeting of ASEAN ministers to specifically discuss ASEAN's minerals industry is another crucial step for ASEAN in the name of cooperation for the mutual benefit of member countries. To realize the full potential of the minerals industry we need to combine the technological genius of man, the blessings of the earth, and the commercial impetus of business. The multifaceted minerals industry can be instrumental in helping to bind the community we know as ASEAN. It is a sector that must not be neglected. In fact it is a sector that must be rejuvenated and

invigorated. This is our purpose here today, and I think this purpose will be fully realized.

18. But of course, governments alone cannot accomplish this. The private sector of every member country must be involved in order for this initiative to be successful. I believe this is a first and crucial step towards bringing a more active involvement of the private sector of ASEAN in the efficient management and marketing of ASEAN minerals. I am certain that pursuant to this meeting, the governments of member countries would engage their private sectors directly to translate into practice the ideas and resolutions adopted at this meeting.

19. This, in turn, would ensure that our greater objective, which is to strengthen economic cooperation among member countries will be fulfilled. In the process we will be contributing to the move to enhance ASEAN integration and narrow the development gap within the ASEAN family.

Ladies and gentlemen,

20. I would like to express my gratitude once again for having been invited to be a part of this important meeting. I hope your deliberations here will be successful and would yield tangible and concrete plans that can be implemented for the benefit of ASEAN's Minerals sector.

21. To all of you who have journeyed from around the region here to make this meeting a success. I Do hope you will spend some time to take in the beauty and uniqueness of Malaysia and that upon your return home you will remember Malaysia not only as place where you attended this momentous meeting, but also a country of warm hospitality and charm.

22. I wish all of you every success in your deliberations, and on that note, I declare open the First ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Minerals (AMMin).

Thank you.