



# SIARAN AKHBAR

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SPEECH BY

THE PRIME MINISTER

DATO SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD (P)

AT THE FIRST ASEAN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY WEEK

AT THE PUTRA WISATA TRADE CENTRE, KUALA LUMPUR

ON THURSDAY, 24TH. APRIL, 1986

AT 9.00 A.M.

**PERPUSTAKAAN  
BERNAMA**

First of all I would like to express my appreciation to the First ASEAN Science and Technology Week Organising Committee for inviting me to address this gathering of eminent scientists, distinguished ASEAN dignitaries and also distinguished representatives of Dialogue Partner Countries.

2. It is gratifying to see the high rating that science and technology are accorded in ASEAN countries. As these related areas of knowledge have helped build up the economies and standards of living of the developed countries, so will they for the developing ASEAN countries.

3. It is said that the Pacific will replace the Atlantic region in terms of development and advancement in the 21st. century, if not now. Before we get carried away by this

rosy prospect, let us examine the true strength and potential of the different regions of the Pacific. We see the growth of Japan and the burgeoning economies of South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong as undeniable facts that will contribute towards the bright future of the Pacific. But do we really have reason to believe that the ASEAN countries will contribute their portion.

4. True the growth of the ASEAN countries in the 60's and 70's has been remarkable. But is that growth really sustainable? Has it got a sound basis? Already that growth has slowed down and we know that it is due to too much reliance on primary commodities. Prices of primary commodities have slumped and they will never again be what they were in the last two decades. Clearly the ASEAN nations have structural difficulties in terms of economic growth. They have to reexamine themselves and take corrective measures if they want to make the Pacific dream come true.

5. What are the weaknesses of the ASEAN countries? Certainly their poor knowledge and application of Science and Technology is one of them. But there are others.

6. Scale is one of them. In a mass consumption economic world, the ASEAN countries can only claim to be members of the junior league. We like to talk of our 250 million population. It sounds like a big market. But we are not

one market. We are a fragmented market. In terms of purchasing power together we are equivalent to only 25 million Americans or Europeans or Australians. Since we are fragmented we do not even have the leverage of a 25 million American market. Such is the weakness of the fragmented ASEAN market that only 3% of Malaysia's production of rubber can be consumed domestically. ASEAN needs the world more than the world needs us. As more research and development of substitutes are done in the developed countries, the threat to ASEAN commodities will continue to increase.

7. ASEAN's strength is derived from political co-operation. In this field we work closely and are quite effective. But there is a limit to political leverage. The price of goods are still determined by supplies and demands. Cartels and agreements can work for a time but not forever. The collapse of the Tin Agreement is a very recent reminder of the facts of economic life.

8. While ASEAN is fragmented economically Europe forged ahead with the European Economic Community. The EEC is not a complete success but the already powerful purchasing power and consequently economic leverage of each European country has been tremendously enhanced by the common stand of the Community countries. In the face of this, it is naive to dream of ASEAN as a part of a new Pacific economic locomotive.

9. Other weaknesses beset the ASEAN countries but sufficient has been said, I think, to correct the wrong perspective which distort our approach and planning. Now, we can go on to speak about ASEAN science and technology.

10. There is no doubt that there is an indigenous ASEAN science and technology. We probably never defined them as science and technology. We just devised things that work without going into any depth the scientific or technological basis of the things we devised. But the basis are there. It only needs modern systems and approaches to relate them to modern science and technology. In fact if we do we are going to find ourselves quite advanced. The only problem is that our science and technology relate to a way of life that we no longer lead. Like it or not, we are now a part of the mass consumption economy of the world. Therefore, our science and technology must be reoriented to this economic fact.

11. We cannot go back to invent the wheel. We have to leap-frog and go straight into more modern science and technology. Here we have to learn from the advanced countries. The basics are easily available but when science and technology are needed to improve our productive capacities, we will need help. This is where for ASEAN, our dialogue partners are most needed.

12. I am glad to say that in most instances this help is given ungrudgingly. Various projects have been initiated where new technologies have not only been made available but in many instances financed by dialogue partners. The presence of representatives of ASEAN Dialogue Partners at this Conference is further evidence of the interest and willingness of the Dialogue Partners in the development of ASEAN science and technology.

13. Still there has been much talk about the unwillingness of the advanced countries to transfer technology. While this may be true in some cases, it is also important to consider the readiness of the ASEAN people to accept new technology. At the risk of stepping on some toes, I would like to say that sometimes we are neither psychologically nor attitudinally prepared to receive the technology we need.

14. The fact is that if we have some special scientific or technological knowledge we would also be unwilling to impart such knowledge to our potential competitors. If we are going to get anywhere in the acquisition of technology we must prepare ourselves fully and go after what we want. Beginning with the basics that we can acquire fairly easily, we have to do our own research and development.

15. With a population of merely 25 million by western economic standards, research and development in ASEAN cannot be fragmented into duplicating national approaches, except where the finer refinements are involved. Already with the cooperation of dialogue partners a lot of common research is done. Indigenous ASEAN science and technology could also benefit from a cooperative approach.

16. The field of science and technology is vast. No single country can afford to go into all. ASEAN will have to specialise and find a suitable niche. Even then, there is a need for each ASEAN country to identify what it can specialise in from the identified niche. The limited resources in men and money of the whole region can then be allocated more effectively.

17. In the meantime, the Malaysian Government has launched the Fifth Malaysia Plan which places greater involvement of the private sector in R & D activities. The government will introduce tax and other incentives to encourage private sector participation. The private sector involvement in R&D could be through in-house R & D or research collaboration with institutions that exist in the country. The private sector may also contribute towards the central R & D fund.

18. Since 1982, the government has established a Trust Fund for research under the National Council for Scientific Research and Development. This fund has been used to

support research activities in a number of areas such as health, agriculture and industry. Since its formation, the fund has supported a fair number of projects and these activities shall continue to grow with the support of the private sector.

19. The vulnerability of the Malaysian economy to changes in external demand for its primary commodities has made us realise the need for further diversification into manufacturing for export. R&D activities therefore has to be directed towards increasing productivity and diversifying the industrial base to ensure that Malaysia has a competitive edge and to enable entry into overseas market. Greater emphasis will be directed towards R&D activities in processing our primary products and adding value for exports.

20. In order to strengthen the indigenous technological capacity and capability, serious efforts will be made to transfer technology from abroad. In order to achieve maximum results, Malaysians will be educationally and psychologically prepared to receive new technology. This will be done through a number of activities and policy instruments.

21. Science will be demystified by exposing the Malaysian men in the street to the scientific basis and explanations of everyday happenings. This will be achieved through

informal exposure to exhibits at science centres, botanical and zoological gardens, science-based museums and simple planetarium. The exposure will be done as early in life as possible. It is hoped that eventually the Malaysian society will consist of large numbers of people with enquiring minds and a desire to search and research their environment. In other words Malaysians will become more scientifically inclined.

22. I believe that the rest of ASEAN also share some of the aspirations of Malaysia. We must promote greater efforts to strengthen our cooperation in science and technology so as to minimise cost and share the benefit. Malaysia will continue to contribute to the development of ASEAN in all spheres of common interest, including the field of science and technology. I would also like to urge that the dialogue partners of ASEAN continue to support the efforts of ASEAN to improve its technological capability and to promote the growth of science and technology. In the past, a number of dialogue countries have made generous contributions to ASEAN. Their generosity will not go unrequited. In an interdependent world a prosperous ASEAN resulting from a balanced and scientifically based development will be able to contribute more towards world trade and prosperity than if it were poverty-stricken.

23. I wish the conference, the exhibition and the ~~Canada Science~~ ~~Circus~~ success. I now have much pleasure in officially declaring open the First ASEAN Science and Technology Week.

KUALA LUMPUR,  
24th April, 1986 (dikeluarkan pada pukul 2.00 petang)