

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR.MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE 21ST CONFERENCE OF THE ASEAN FEDERATION OF ENGINEERING
ORGANISATIONS (CAFEO-21)FOR RECEIVING THE AFEO DISTINGUISHED FELLOW AWARD

VENUE: YOGYAKARTA INDONESIA

DATE: 22 OCT 2003

TIME:

Mr. Insinyur Pandri Prabono Chairman of the ASEAN
Federation
Of Engineering Organisations(AFEO);
Mr. Insinyur Rauf Purnama Chairman of the 21st
Conference of the ASEAN Federation of Engineering
Organisations (CAFEO);
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is truly a great honour and pleasure for me to
receive the ASEAN Federation of Engineering
Organisations (AFEO) Distinguished Fellow Award I would
like to
express my sincere gratitude to A.F.E.O. and its
country members

2. When the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or
ASEAN was first established on 8 August 1967 with five
members, the share of intra-ASEAN trade
from the total trade of the Member Countries was only
between 12 and 15 percent
However, today we are ten members with a population of
about 500 million, a total area of 4.5 million square
kilometres, a combined gross domestic product
of 737 billion U.S. Dollars, and a total trade of 720
billion U.S. Dollars
Within three years from the launching of A.F.T.A.,
exports among ASEAN countries grew from 43.26 billion
U.S. Dollars in 1993 to almost 80 billion U.S. Dollars
in 1996, an average yearly growth rate of 28.3 percent
In the process, the share of intra-regional trade from
ASEAN's total trade rose from 20 percent to almost 25
percent

3. This Association as stated in the ASEAN
Declaration,Bangkok, 8 August 1967, represents the
collective will of the nations to bind themselves
together in friendship and co-operation and, through
joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their people
and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom, and
prosperity

4. In 1997, the ASEAN leaders adopted the ASEAN Vision 2020, which called for ASEAN Partnership in Dynamic Development aimed at forging closer economic integration within the region. The vision statement also resolved to create a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN Economic Region, in which there is a free flow of goods, services, investments, capital, and equitable economic development and reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities. The Hanoi Plan of Action, adopted in 1998, serves as the first in a series of plans of action leading up to the realisation of the ASEAN vision.

5. In addition to trade and investment liberalisation, regional economic integration is being pursued through the development of Trans-ASEAN transportation network consisting of major inter-state highways and railway networks, principal ports and sea lanes for maritime traffic, inland waterway transport, and major civil aviation links. ASEAN is promoting the interoperability and interconnectivity of the national tele-communications equipment and services. Building of Trans-ASEAN energy networks, which consist of the ASEAN Power Grid and the Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline Projects, are also being developed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. These projects require highly sophisticated engineering inputs. I am glad to note that there are some 500,000 engineers of various disciplines in ASEAN countries. These are the very engineers that would help build ASEAN.

7. Many of the ASEAN member countries are also members of the World Trade Organisation. Unfortunately, unlike ASEAN where member countries are guided by fundamental principles of mutual respect and consensus, W.T.O. is strongly influenced by the rich nations. In this grouping, some countries are unable to speak their mind for fear of being victimised by the super powers.

8. Champions of free trade portray trade as the great leveller, allowing rich and poor countries alike to determine their fortunes and future. The W.T.O. agreements supposedly are about lowering the barriers to trade and ensuring that the W.T.O.'s member-states do not discriminate in their trade dealings. Unfortunately, rather than building a broad agricultural and industrial base which can substitute for imports, "free trade" doctrine requires countries to focus on their "comparative advantage" i.e. free competition between goods and services between the providers without regard for their sizes and strength. The result must be the ascendancy and increasing wealth of the giants of the rich and the

practical elimination of the business of the poor. There will be no hope for the poor to industrialise except to provide cheap labour to the foreign giants and enhance their investment and competitiveness further. In the meantime the rich will continue to subsidise their farm produce one way or another so as to compete with the produce of the poor countries not only in the rich countries but in the world market.

9. Like the World Bank and the I.M.F. the W.T.O. is now being made into yet another instrument to enrich the rich and impoverish the poor. Cancun is described by the rich as a failure because the agenda set by the rich was not agreed to. To the poor it was not a failure. It was the first time that the poor countries had stood up for their rights. We can celebrate. But the pressure will now be applied selectively on us to force us to break rank. The stick and the carrot will be extensively used. If we succumb then the future will be very bleak for us. We will be the worker bees for their queens, providing cheap labour, owning nothing and learning nothing. We will earn better pay and better standards of living perhaps but we will always be working for others chiefly our ex-colonial masters. We cannot be truly independent economically or politically. Our recent experience during the Asian financial crisis is still fresh in our minds.

10. After Sept. 11th the world has learnt to fear terrorism, the indiscriminate attacks and killing of innocent people in bids to achieve some goals or merely to seek revenge. The terror attacks are not just by irregulars acting on their own. States too have their own programmes of terror. Indeed we see states launching vicious massive retaliation, not just to kill suspected terrorists but his family, his home, his village and his towns. It would be ridiculous to think that such attacks do not terrorise the innocents. In fact the terror is even greater, for it is systematic and executed with heavy weapons in the hands of trained soldiers. It would seem that the great exponents and practitioners of democracy believe that the way to spread the doctrine and to break down resistance is by terrorising the world.

11. But terrorism can take many forms. Economic terrorism instils as much fear and damage to life and property as bombs and guns. Thriving economies can be destroyed, impoverishing whole countries and regions, throwing workers out of jobs by the millions, disrupting the peace and tranquillity of human society

with riots, killings and crimes. Simply because the speculative and manipulating rogues and their own media do not describe their acts as terrorism does not mean that they are not acts of terrorism, acts which cause fear and terror among their victims. The economic terrorists are as bad as other terrorists. They cause damage and death if not directly, certainly indirectly. And their after effects are much more prolonged.

12. Nations are bankrupted and forced to submit to foreign directions. Businesses are bankrupted or forced to sell out, usually to marauding foreign companies. Banks and industries collapse.

13. If Government tries to help, it is called a bail out. Governments are accused of cronyism. All these accusations are thrown by the very people who in their own countries practise bailouts and cronyism whenever they are faced by even minor failures on the part of their own companies and funds, including the hedge funds which destroyed the economies of the developing countries. In fact the Government personnel bail out the very companies in which they have personal investments.

14. Truly they practise double standards. It is a case of telling others to do as they are told and not as they do. And this applies to technical standards as well. We must comply with their standards or else we may not enter their markets.

15. Still we should comply to standards even if they are not set by us. As engineers you understand the importance of establishing high standards and upgrading them all the time.

16. ASEAN engineers have proven their professional capabilities and have been able to produce goods and products of very high standards which comply with world standards. Civil works by ASEAN engineers are exportable items as are their 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 standard for the rest of the world.

17. For this purpose I believe there is a move to establish a register of expertise, skills and knowledge among ASEAN Professional Service providers. This can facilitate the match making of skills within the region and those from outside the region. The ASEAN Engineers Register is already in place with the secretariat hosted by the Institution of Engineers Malaysia. The ASEAN Engineers Register can form the basis of enhanced cooperation between ASEAN Engineers. Mutual recognition of qualifications would enable our engineers to practise within all the ASEAN countries.

18. The register can also provide sufficient data regarding the qualification of individual engineers for the benefit of prospective employers; encourage a continuous updating on the quality of engineers through setting, monitoring and reviewing standards, promote cultural and professional links among members of the engineering profession within ASEAN and enhance wealth creation in the member countries.

19. Malaysia is prepared to act as the hub to help pool the available resources in the region and develop a directory of the experts and their skills. The hub can facilitate the exchange of ideas and pool resources for joint work as well as facilitate the movement of professionals within and outside the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. It is important that professionals take note of the latest developments and prepare for them. 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 the crumbs.

21. It is not that ASEAN Engineers are less capable and unable to undertake the job. It is just that the collective strength is not marshalled for the collective good of the profession in the region.

22. Obstacles need to be overcome and this includes a change in mindset. Instead of competing with each other in the region you should pool your resources and expertise and undertake jobs that are being undertaken by your counterparts from the U.S. and Europe. Pooling of resources will

also enable you to get bigger jobs and projects both at home, within the region and outside the region.

23. The impediments should not be viewed as obstacles and hindrances.

They should be seen as challenges and you should seek ways to deal with them and to move ahead.

24. There is need for win-win solutions for countries in the region and 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.

25. Attachments for the younger engineers should be encouraged and formalised within the region. While I understand this is already being done, it should be done in a more concerted manner. This will facilitate the matching of skills that are available and help identify skills that are needed in the region instead of having to look for them from outside the region. Similarly, training of postgraduate engineers has to be harmonised and aligned to ensure that benchmarked requirements are met. The ASEAN Engineers so trained will then be primed to mature, over time, into captains of industries and leaders of important asset owning institutions and enterprises that will generate wealth. The goodwill generated will lead to the greater integration of ASEAN nations. I am told that this initiative has been started and is being implemented by the ASEAN Engineers Register. Through an M.O.U. between A.F.E.O. and I.K.R.A.M. (Institut Kerja Raya Malaysia), I.K.R.A.M. is the training provider for and on behalf of ASEAN Engineers Register. It carries out training programmes. In fact our Malaysian Technical Corporation Programme has been utilised for some of the training programmes.

26. Our hopes and aspirations for peace and harmony, and unity of purpose for the region now rest with the youths of ASEAN. We shall offer them the space, the opportunities and the guidance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

27. May I say once again how honoured I feel that you

should confer the A.F.E.O. Distinguished Fellow Award
on me.

Thank you.