

Address by YAB Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Bin Tun Hj Abdul Razak

**Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia
at the
Opening Ceremony
of the 4th Informal Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers of Science and Technology
(IAMMST)
Kuantan, Malaysia, 28th August 2006**

The Honourable Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation of Malaysia,
Dato' Sri Jamaludin Mohd Jarjis

Honourable Ministers of Science and Technology of ASEAN Member Countries

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamualaikum and a very good morning

1. First and foremost, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology (ASEAN-COST) for inviting me to officiate at the Opening Ceremony of the Fourth Informal Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers of Science and Technology (IAMMST). Malaysia is indeed pleased to host this important event and I am delighted that it is taking place in my home state, Pahang Darul Makmur.

Ladies and gentlemen,

2. ASEAN celebrates its 39th Anniversary this year, and as it approaches its 40th year – that magic number which signifies maturity- it is a suitable time for ASEAN to reflect on its achievements and more importantly to take a serious look at the way forward; on the real and tangible benefit that ASEAN can continue to bring to the peoples of this region.

3. We are pleased that ASEAN has done very well as a group. The policies adopted by us collectively on a broad range of issues, ranging from trade to environmental protection, from social welfare to the development of ICT among other things, have thus far ensured that the region continues to remain cohesive and stable, progressing steadily whilst holding firm to the principles upon which the grouping was founded. Moving ahead, ASEAN must stay the course and hold true to these principles of mutual cooperation, community building, and regional integration.

4. Perhaps most importantly, ASEAN must work towards ensuring adequate preparedness of all member countries to face the onslaught of globalization. Clichéd though the discussion on globalization may have become, we cannot escape the fact that this phenomenon is an inevitability, the early effects of which we are already

experiencing today and the long term impact of which we must prepare for or face serious repercussions.

5. For a region like South East Asia, where trade is of paramount importance, changes arising from the emergence of a borderless world cannot be ignored. In light of the harsh realities of today –which include soaring energy prices, and fluctuating market conditions, apart from ever intensifying competition- ASEAN member countries must be dynamic and stand ready to make necessary changes in the name of survival.

6. It goes without saying that one of the key elements of survival in the current global scenario is the mastery of science and technology (S&T). It is often said the “knowledge is power”, and never has this been more true than here and now in the 21st Century. It is obvious for all to see that nations in which science and technology are widely embraced and applied, are the nations who top the list in terms of growth and development.

7. Last April I had the pleasure of speaking to the delegates and participants of the ASEAN-China ICT Week in Penang. I shared my view then, as I wish to share with all of you today, that ASEAN as a group must look into strengthening the S&T capabilities of all member countries so that the entire region can benefit. The stark reality today is that there is a painfully obvious disparity between the Science & Technology “Haves” and “Have-nots” across the globe, and even in our own backyard.

8. Whether it be due to financial constraints, political instability or prohibitive geographical conditions, the fact of the matter is that a large part of the world is still detached from the rapid pace of development brought about by advances in science and technology. In many countries, a considerable section of the population living in rural areas still lacks even basic amenities such as continuous electricity and clean water supply, let alone internet access and connectivity. As a result, these places become isolated from mainstream development and the much spoken of ‘digital divide’ widens.

9. If this pattern continues unchecked, nations that face this problem will continue to be left further and further behind, and this may spell the beginning of a vicious downward spiral. Economic development is sure to be slow if not entirely retarded. Poverty will rise and this may lead to a host of problems including an increase in crime rates and social disease, political instability and outward migration. For countries grappling with such problems, the future would seem none too promising.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. ASEAN cannot afford to allow such problems to occur in our region. In the name of community building and collective growth and prosperity, we must all commit ourselves towards taking every possible measure to prepare our peoples for the challenges of today and tomorrow.

11. I believe that at the core of the problems, lies the question of attitudes and mindsets. Governments may spend billions towards infrastructural development and physical modernization, but if the people are not conditioned to modernize and develop, then whatever progress attained will be short-lived. On the other hand, if the people are suitably prepared, well conditioned and given adequate knowledge and exposure, the

pace of progress and development will accelerate significantly.

12. Science and technology are enablers. S&T empowers people and opens new avenues and opportunities in numerous fields. The peoples of ASEAN must be made aware of the power of S&T and they must be encouraged to embrace it in their daily lives. They must be made to understand that whether they like it or not, there may soon come a time when their livelihood will depend on their knowledge of science and technology on some level. Today the world speaks excitedly of biotechnology and nano technology apart from the endlessly unfolding marvel of ICT. ASEAN must be a part of these exciting developments if we are to be assured of a place on the ride to the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. ASEAN's S&T thrust into the future must be undertaken jointly by governments and the private sector. In order for the Science & Technology objectives of ASEAN to be fulfilled, there must be strong participation from the private sector of member countries. There has to be increased scientific research and development (R&D) in various fields and across all sectors. To this end, Governments must put in place mechanisms and incentive structures so that the private sector is more inclined to participate in furthering the development of science and technology in their countries.

14. In the same vein, governments must also create a business friendly environment specifically catering for S&T based ventures so as to attract more investments, particularly foreign investments which bring with them the potential for the transfer of technology.

15. The ultimate goal is to create a functioning S&T community across the different disciplines and sectors, who will become pioneers and innovators in their respective fields. ASEAN must evolve to become producers of new technology instead of mere consumers.

16. For too long now ASEAN's industries have depended on foreign technology. Its time for us to develop our own, and to meet this objective, we must harness all our resources and capitalize on the advantages that we have. ASEAN is fortunate to enjoy strong ties with most countries around the world and we can leverage on these ties to share knowledge and experience on the development of science and technology across the various disciplines.

17. In this regard, I am delighted to note the close rapport that has been established between the ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology and all its Dialogue Partners. I understand that during this informal meeting the Committee will be engaging with dialogue partners China, Japan, India, Korea, Australia and New Zealand, and the discussions will focus on a broad range of topics including human resource development in S&T, emerging technologies, infectious disease and technology for disaster contingency, among other things.

18. This openness in exchanging views and ideas is most welcome, for it paves the way for greater cooperation towards the development of science and technology across ASEAN and in the long run I believe this will prove mutually beneficial for ASEAN and

all its partners.

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. I understand that the ASEAN Ministers of Science and Technology meet every year alternating between the formal and informal meetings. In my opinion this is absolutely critical towards implementing the ASEAN agenda relating to science and technology as decided by the Heads of Government in their annual summit.

20. As we know, ASEAN leaders have recently agreed to bring forward the target for the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community by 5 years, to 2015. In the same vein, I would suggest that the ASEAN Committee on S&T look into ASEAN Action Plan on Science and Technology and explore the possibility of also expediting its full implementation for the benefit of ASEAN collectively.

21. I am told that the idea of this informal meeting was conceived so as to create a more cordial and friendly environment in which all the ASEAN Ministers and the Dialogue Partners can discuss and deliberate on issues in a more relaxed manner. Indeed, sometimes decisions and resolutions can best be made amongst friends gathered together, free from the shackles of protocol.

22. Yet informal though the sessions might be, I know that all of us here understand the seriousness of the matter at hand. Science and technology is an essential component of the future of ASEAN and we cannot afford not to place emphasis on its development in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

23. I hope all of you here will use this opportunity to discuss thoroughly the way forward for ASEAN's S&T agenda and I hope this meeting of minds will yield positive results for the benefit of ASEAN. I wish you all the best in your deliberations, and on that note it is with great pleasure that I declare open the 4th Informal ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Science and Technology.

Thank you.

*Deputy Prime Minister's Office
Putrajaya
28 August 2006*