

The 38th Meeting of the ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology Singapore, 27-29 October 1999

*Strong commitment from ASEAN-10 on science and technology
-- US 10M ASEAN Science Fund established*

The ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology (COST)* concluded its 38th Meeting at the Orchard Hotel in Singapore on 29 October 1999 with an agreement to raise US \$10 million amongst member countries to seed projects in science and technology. Called the ASEAN Science Fund, it will be a catalyst for further commitments by ASEAN's dialogue partners and other public and private sector donors.

At present, COST has more than 60 projects in a range of technology areas including biotechnology, microelectronics, information technology, new materials and non-conventional energy. The total cost of the projects is estimated to be at some US \$50 million.

Among the projects which are ongoing and in the pipeline are the development of a multi-media digital archive, quality assurance systems for food, and wear-resistant and thermal barrier coatings.

The projects demonstrate how COST works towards the goal of using technology for social and economic benefit of the region. One of the recently completed projects is the "Interdisciplinary Scientific Methodologies for the Sustainable Use and Management of Coastal Resource Systems." It was undertaken as a cooperative activity of ASEAN and the European Union. The project developed a useful decision-making tool for coastal zone managers, environmental planners, policy-makers and researchers, in the form of an expert system, SIMCOAST. SIMCOAST consists of a knowledge base, a set of rules and interdisciplinary protocols, problem solution sets and guidelines for action in integrated coastal zone management. The expert system has been installed and is now in use by the institutions participating in the project

The COST Meeting took on added significance as it was the first time that all ten members of ASEAN were represented. Cambodia, as the newest member of ASEAN, received a warm welcome into the science and technology community of the region.

With ASEAN now consisting of ten member countries, COST acknowledged that there are new challenges facing science and technology development in the region. Noting the varying levels of science and technology capabilities of the ASEAN member countries, Mr. Chong Lit Cheong, Managing Director of the National Science and Technology Board of Singapore and currently Chairman of ASEAN COST, remarked, "This meeting is an important occasion for us as we continue our efforts to identify and pursue activities that will be responsive to the needs of ten individual countries and the group as a whole."

He highlighted the value of the support and counsel of the older and more experienced

member countries in COST's efforts to integrate the new member countries into the mainstream of COST programmes and activities. "Over the years, COST has established this strong network of individuals who have continued to dedicate their time and effort to promote cooperation under COST," he further stated.

Another challenge - that of responding to the emerging global knowledgebased economy -- was thrown at COST by H.E. Mr. Lim Swee Say, Singapore's Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology who was Guest-of-Honour.

In his opening statement, the Minister acknowledged the important role played by COST in helping ASEAN move ahead in the development and exploitation of new and emerging technologies in a knowledge-based economy. He suggested that COST should establish a process of regular evaluation to strengthen the work of the Committee and find new and innovative ways for S&T communities in ASEAN to work together.

He also recalled the recent initiative on E-ASEAN launched in Singapore during the recent meeting of the ASEAN Economic Ministers. The E-ASEAN initiative aims to position the region as a dynamic hub of information technology facilities and applications for business, health, education and other services. He challenged COST to exploit E-ASEAN as an instrument to leverage on each others' strengths in technology, infrastructure innovation and human resource.

Responding to the Hanoi Plan of Action endorsed by the ASEAN Heads of Government at the Sixth ASEAN Summit in Hanoi in December 1998, COST has reviewed its strategic thrusts to make its programmes more responsive to the needs of long-term sustained economic growth of the region through human resource development and information technology.

* COST is the ASEAN body for regional science and technology cooperation. It meets twice a year to review progress of projects, deliberate on new programmes and set strategic directions for implementation by its nine Sub-Committees. COST is chaired by rotation among the member countries. Singapore will be handing over chairmanship of COST to Thailand on 1 January 2000. The next meeting of COST will be hosted by Lao PDR in April 2000.