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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MR LIM BOON HENG,
MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO,
AT THE 27TH ANNUAL DINNER AND DANCE OF
THE INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS, SINGAPORE (IES) AND
THE CONFERENCE BANQUET, 11TH CONFERENCE OF
ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATION (ASEAN)
FEDERATION OF ENGINEERING ORGANISATIONS
AT THE SHANGRILA HOTEL, ISLAND BALLROOM
ON FRIDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 1993 AT 7.30 PM**

I am pleased to have this opportunity to address such a distinguished gathering of engineering professionals from the entire Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) region. ASEAN is located in the most dynamic economic region in the world. As engineers, builders and creators of wealth, all of you will play an important part in creating the bright future that the 21st century promises to provide, if we put in place the necessary infrastructure and develop core capabilities.

Since independence, Singapore has placed a very strong emphasis on engineering and technical education. The National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University graduate 1,800 engineers of all disciplines every year. In addition a few hundred engineers educated in overseas universities return to Singapore every year. We have absorbed all these engineers easily as prime movers of economic development. Engineers are among the most versatile of professionals, and adjust easily to the changing demands of a developing economy.

The Institution of Engineers, Singapore (IES) motto: Engineers, Builders and Creators is entirely appropriate not only for Singapore, but for all the countries in our region.

Economic development depends on the creation of new wealth. A vital function of engineers is to create infrastructure of all kinds - construction, transportation, telecommunications, environment, even education. This build-up of infrastructure was a very important factor in the growth of the Singapore economy. Our experience is now being shared through engineering partnerships with our friends in the region. It is our hope that such infrastructure developments in the ASEAN region will help raise the overall level of economic development, benefit the 350 million people, and create a region of peace, prosperity and stability for all to enjoy.

Developing countries building their infrastructure provide the ideal environment for technology transfer. Singapore received technology transfer in the manufacturing sector primarily from multi-national companies. In infrastructure development, our statutory boards have continually searched for and adopted new technology appropriate to our needs. In the private sector, joint ventures with foreign partners have been a valuable means for absorbing new technology.

Each of the ASEAN countries has its own unique strengths and advantages in technology which can be shared with the others. We need to do more to promote partnership among our ASEAN engineering professionals, particularly in developing the infrastructure in each country. Over the last few years, Singapore has amended the regulatory structure of architects and engineers to enable them to form partnerships and larger practices that will allow them to venture into other emerging markets in the Asia Pacific. Whilst considerable attention is now focussed on China. We should pay more attention to our own ASEAN region and partner our friends in ASEAN to create world class infrastructure throughout the region, so that we can achieve the vision of a region of peace and prosperity in the near future.

Apart from developing infrastructure, we need also to develop our manufacturing capabilities. Products today have shorter and shorter life spans because of competition. In the light of this development, our engineers need to develop capabilities in two areas: process technology which remains relevant for different types of products, and product research and development.

Process technology allows the manufacturing sector to change with the market requirements. This is crucial to the survival of the sector. A manufacturing entity must be flexible. This flexibility is acquired through process technology. I am told that Singaporean engineers do not like production work. This unhealthy attitude must change if our manufacturing sector is to remain a major force in our economy.

Product Research and Development (R&D) will become increasingly important for higher cost economies such as Singapore. It is also an important capability in view of the growing East Asian market. Consumers have hitherto followed the consumer tastes of the developed countries. The emerging consumers of East Asia can be expected to influence global tastes in future. The prospects for Asian product R&D engineers are therefore good.

Both capabilities can only be achieved if engineers stay long enough in their jobs to deepen their knowledge. I am told that as there is a shortage of engineers, job-hopping is a problem. This problem must be solved - through training more engineers, and wage adjustments if justified.

With the creation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area, there are excellent opportunities for ASEAN manufacturing companies and ASEAN engineers to co-operate with each other to develop these capabilities.

It leaves me to congratulate The Institute of Engineers, Singapore on its 27th anniversary, and for successfully organising the 11th Conference of ASEAN Federation of Engineering Organisations (CAFEO-11). To the ASEAN engineers present, I wish all of you success in developing the infrastructure of the ASEAN region.

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