

SECOND INFORMAL ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (AMMST)

17 January 2003
Yangon, Myanmar

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT

Introduction

The Second Informal ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Science and Technology (AMMST) was held in Yangon on 17 January 2003. The Meeting was preceded by the Preparatory Senior Officials Meeting for the 2nd Informal AMMST on 16 January 2003.

The Meeting was officially opened by His Excellency General Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council of the Union of Myanmar. In his Inaugural Address, General Khin Nyunt underlined that Myanmar recognizes the important role of science and technology in developing the country's competitive edge in a global economy.

He further elaborated Myanmar's science and technology policy and strategic thrusts that included the promotion of information and communication technology as a base for building a software industry, for which Myanmar had established an ICT park in Yangon.

General Khin Nyunt concluded with a reaffirmation of Myanmar's commitment to ASEAN cooperation in all spheres, including science and technology. He called on the S&T Ministers to consider programmes and projects that would help the region boost its competitiveness in strategic and enabling technologies, as this is among the goals of ASEAN Vision 2020. He emphasized that among such programmes, human resource development should be accorded high priority, as it will contribute to the development of highly skilled S&T personnel in the region.

The Meeting was attended by H.E. Pehin Dato Hj. Hussin bin Hj. Sulaiman, High Commissioner of Brunei Darussalam in Myanmar, representing the Minister of Development of Brunei Darussalam; H.E. Mr. Nhep Bunchin, Secretary of State, Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy of the Kingdom of Cambodia; Dr. Ashwin Sasongko, Secretary to Ministry of Research and Technology, representing the Minister of Research and Technology of Indonesia; H.E. Prof. Dr. Souli Nanthavong, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office, President of National Science Council of Lao PDR; H.E. Dato' Seri Law Hieng Ding, Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment of Malaysia; H.E. Mr. U Thaug, Minister of Science and Technology of the Union of Myanmar; H.E. Dr. Estrella F. Alabastro, Secretary of Science and Technology of the Philippines; H.E. Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister of State for National Development of Singapore; H.E. Mr. Phinij Jarusombat, Minister of Science and Technology of Thailand; and H.E. Dr. Bui Manh Hai, Vice-Minister of Science and Technology, representing the Minister of Science and Technology of Viet Nam, and their respective delegations. Dato' Ahmad Mokhtar Selat,

Deputy Secretary General representing the Secretary General of ASEAN, and his delegation also attended the Meeting.

H.E. Mr. U Thaug chaired the Meeting, and H.E. Mr. Souli Nanthavong was elected Vice Chair of the Meeting.

The focus of the Ministers' discussions was the role of science and technology in supporting the twin regional goals of integration and competitiveness. The Ministers highlighted the vital role of a strong science and technology base in building a competitive knowledge economy in ASEAN, and the regional strategies and approaches that would lead to the achievement of that goal. They cited some of their national strategies that they believed could be successfully extended to the regional level such as forming smart partnerships with the private sector, targeting S&T human resource development to respond to the immediate needs of business and industry, and promoting an entrepreneurial culture among scientists and researchers.

Long-term vision for ASEAN science and technology cooperation

The Ministers reaffirmed their long-term vision of establishing an ASEAN Science and Technology Community for Innovation, Competitiveness and Knowledge (ASTICK). In this context, the Ministers tasked the Committee on Science and Technology (COST) to continue with the ongoing efforts to formulate the programme framework of ASTICK, bearing in mind the overall ASEAN economic and social development goals and the rapidly evolving policy trends in these sectors.

S&T activities for ASEAN integration

The Ministers noted with satisfaction the successful implementation of the country initiatives launched in the past year under the ASEAN-help-ASEAN scheme of COST, a programme designed to promote S&T capacity building in the newer member countries and facilitate their integration into the mainstream regional S&T cooperation activities. They shared the view that the momentum built up by the eight training activities launched in the past year should be maintained by offering other similar initiatives. They thanked ASEAN member countries who announced new offers of assistance under the ASEAN-help-ASEAN scheme. These were Malaysia, for its new offer of scholarships for ASEAN participants in various training courses on Precision Computer Numerically-Controlled Engineering to be conducted in 2003 at the Malaysian Technology Park in Kuala Lumpur; Thailand, for its offer to all member countries to use their ground receiving facilities for remote sensing satellite data, as well as training on remote sensing and geographic information systems technologies at fundamental and advanced levels; and Brunei Darussalam for its offer to hold a seminar on genetically modified organisms (GMO) and a seminar on infrastructure.

The Ministers further noted that there were many possibilities and opportunities to enhance the ASEAN-help-ASEAN programme by leveraging on activities that the member countries undertake nationally or in cooperation with multilateral organizations and extending the benefit of such activities to the other ASEAN member countries. In view of this, the Ministers agreed as a basic commitment that whenever possible, a country's national programmes and also those activities they carry out in cooperation with UN and other similar bodies be extended to the other ASEAN member countries.

Public awareness programme in S&T

Recalling their continuing concern with the need to heighten public awareness of ASEAN S&T cooperation programmes, the Ministers reviewed the progress of the public awareness programmes that have been initiated. They looked forward to the imminent re-activation of the website of the ASEAN Science and Technology Network (ASTNET) which is envisioned to serve as ASEAN's gateway to science and technology information and knowledge in the region and in the rest of the world. They commended the partnership of the ASEAN Secretariat and the Indonesian Ministry of Research and Technology in working on the website and acknowledged the technical assistance of the Indonesian government in arranging the use of its document-sharing software for the exclusive use of ASTNET and committing to mobilize human resources as needed for the continuing maintenance and updating of the ASTNET website.

The Ministers also commended the cooperation initiated by COST with the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI) to implement more public awareness programmes. They encouraged the further mobilization of COCI networks and resources to bring out more information materials and publications, such as and ASEAN S&T Development series of articles that would highlight global technology developments and ASEAN's niche in such developments.

The Ministers also called for more public awareness activities that would promote public discussion and debate on the impact of science and technology on society, citing as examples the current issues of genetic engineering and cloning. However, the Ministers emphasized that national activities could contribute greatly to the regional effort of promoting public awareness not only in science and technology but to the overall ASEAN image as well.

ASEAN Science Fund

The Ministers reviewed the progress of the augmentation of the ASEAN Science Fund, which they launched by way of signing an agreement during the First Informal AMMST in Malaysia in April 2000. They agreed that the Fund needed to be financially strengthened further so that it could support more projects. The Ministers agreed that tapping the private sector was one way of obtaining additional resources for ASEAN science and technology cooperation programmes. They directed the ASEAN COST to lay the groundwork for engaging the private sector by developing concrete business plans for enterprises that could be spun off some joint R&D activities of COST and which could attract investments from, and partnerships with, the private sector.

ASEAN+3 cooperation in science and technology

The Ministers welcomed the opportunity to add value to the separately active and successful S&T cooperation programmes with China, Japan and the Republic of Korea through the opening of a broader platform of cooperation under the ASEAN+3 framework. To this end, they directed COST to accelerate laying the groundwork for a productive ASEAN+3 cooperation in science and technology by proposing concrete mechanisms for identifying projects and funding modalities and looked forward to a possible S&T ministerial meeting among the ASEAN+3 countries sometime in the future.

In this regard, the Ministers agreed that the mechanism of country-led initiatives that is proving to be effective in the case of ASEAN-help-ASEAN schemes could also be applied to ASEAN+3 activities. Bilateral projects with China, Korea and Japan and ASEAN+1 projects with the three could be expanded into ASEAN+3 projects, with one country acting as lead shepherd or coordinator of certain projects where they have national strength.

With regard to funding of ASEAN+3 projects, the Ministers agreed that ASEAN would be prepared for cost-sharing, but would also tap the resources of the +3 Dialogue Partners if they would offer some support, with the newer member countries Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam accorded priority in accessing such resources.

Next ASEAN S&T Ministerial meeting

The Ministers noted that Lao PDR was tentatively scheduled to host the next meeting of the S&T Ministers in late 2003, pending approval by the Lao PDR government. In accordance with a previous decision of the AMMST, providing for yearly but alternating formal and informal meetings, the next meeting would be the 10th Formal AMMST .

The Ministers expressed their sincere appreciation to the Government of the Union of Myanmar, in particular the Ministry of Science and Technology, for the generous hospitality accorded them and the excellent arrangements made for the Meeting.