

SPEECH BY MR MAH BOW TAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF CONSULTING ENGINEERS (FIDIC) ANNUAL CONFERENCE HELD AT SUNTEC SINGAPORE ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2007

Mr Jorge Diaz Padilla, President of FIDIC
Mr Chan Kok Siong, President of ACES
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to warmly welcome our overseas participants to Singapore for the FIDIC Annual Conference 2007. It is good to see so many professionals and practitioners from all corners of the globe gathered here to share their collective wisdom and experiences.

Challenges of Globalisation

Thomas Friedman said in his best-selling book of the same title that “the world is flat”. By that, he meant that the competitive playing fields between industrial and emerging market countries such as China and India are being leveled. As I speak, technological advancements and trade negotiations around the world are on-going to lower or remove barriers between borders to promote freer trade of goods and services.

The theme of this year’s conference “Global Services, Enhanced Partnerships” befits the situation we are facing. The world’s markets are increasingly facing more intense competition with globalisation. The global nature of the construction industry has also led to more discerning customers, and a growing demand for world-class quality and higher standards.

To meet the challenges of increasing globalisation, effective partnership and collaboration - among professionals across the world, and also among professionals, industry and government, is key. This is where FIDIC and ACES can play an instrumental role. Some examples of partnership and collaboration are (a) Ride on the expertise and experience of the international practitioners to develop and share your best global practices; (b) Promote networking on a global scale, through conferences such as this one, to break down barriers and facilitate collaborations in this global economy; and (c) Benchmark against the best practices over the world.

Singapore’s Experience

Let me illustrate with the case of Singapore.

Open Market Policy

When we gained independence 42 years ago, the government made a critical decision not to adopt protectionistic measures, but to open up our market and welcome foreign investments. As a result, Singapore has benefited from the presence of MNCs, bringing in capital, technology, management know-how and access to world export markets. In order to keep up in this era of increasing globalisation, we continue to network and foster links with other economies, and build up capabilities that offer us a competitive advantage in delivering value-add to our investors.

Collaborations

We also recognise the importance of international collaborations in our journey to build a distinctive global city.

Our construction market has always been open, and ideas for many of our world-class infrastructures were sourced globally, such as the integrated resorts at Sentosa and Marina Bay and the Gardens by the Bay. We welcome international and local consultants and contractors to collaborate in undertaking our projects.

Benchmark Against the Best Global Practices

To ensure that our buildings measure up to the best global standards, we also benchmark our regulatory requirements, processes and practices against the international standards. In this regard, we have appointed an International Panel of Experts comprising eminent practitioners from USA, UK and New Zealand to objectively review our building control framework and share their views on where we can make further improvements.

Sharing our Experiences

In recent years, we have seen more of our local professionals offering their services overseas. Last year, Singapore construction and engineering firms clinched more than \$2 billion worth of overseas contracts. Increasingly, the Building and Construction Authority's (BCA) policy and regulatory experiences are also being sought after by other countries. In January this year, we incorporated the BCA International Private Limited, a new subsidiary that offers BCA's expertise in areas such as building control regulations, quality and environmental schemes. It is heartening to see Singapore sharing and contributing to the sector in the international arena.

I believe these experiences – networking and delivering value-add, welcoming collaborations, developing best global practices, and sharing of experiences – are also applicable to FIDIC and ACES in managing the challenges of globalisation.

Sustainable Global Development

While the globalisation of services poses challenges, opportunities are also abound for consulting engineers with the current boom in the global construction market driven by rapid development worldwide. And with increasing awareness and emphasis on environmental concerns, consulting engineers have an important role to play in promoting sustainable construction practices and methods.

In line with global trend, Singapore is also doing its part to promote sustainable development. We plan to legislate minimum standard on environmental sustainability of buildings. We are encouraging R&D on environmentally sustainable building designs and construction. In this regard, we welcome collaboration and contribution of our international partners to play an active role in sharing and recommending suitable green building technologies and best practices on environmental sustainability.

Conclusion

This year's theme of "Global Services, Enhanced Partnerships" is highly relevant in the face of increasing challenges from the globalisation of services. I am confident that our distinguished speakers and guests will share their knowledge and insight on the necessary ingredients for successful partnerships to meet the ever-increasing demand for quality infrastructure. This Conference will also be an ideal networking platform for interaction and exploration of opportunities for partnerships and collaboration.

I wish all of you a very successful conference, and a pleasant and rewarding stay in Singapore. Thank you.