EDUCATING ASEAN

SPEECH BY BAPAK ANINDYA NOVYAN BAKRIE

AT THE LAUNCH OF
THE BAKRIE PROFESSORSHIP IN SOUTHEAST ASIA POLICY,
S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,
NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY,
CHINESE HERITAGE CENTRE,
SINGAPORE

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Provost Professor Bertil Anderson, Dean Barry Desker,

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

As I stand before you today, I am both proud and humbled.

Proud to launch a historic public-private partnership that transcends the limits of national boundaries.

Humbled by the thought of what my late grandfather, Achmad Bakrie, would have felt had he stood before you in my place.

Caring for his family was the cornerstone of his life and business, and he would have been proud to see three generations of Bakries gathered here today continuing that tradition.

I thank members of both my direct and extended families, including spouses, for coming here for a historic and worthy cause.
Having said that, I am actually starting to feel nervous. If I fail to perform, my reputation will be tarnished among all three generations of family. And probably more.

I could get sent for public speaking classes with the fourth generation.

However, I’m sure my beautiful andung, grandma, who is seated right before me, will be a lot more forgiving.

I shall speak to you about three issues today.

The first is about ASEAN taking greater responsibility in world affairs.

The second is about the need for entrepreneurs to give back to society.

The third is about the need for private-public partnerships in the world today.

**RESPONSIBILITY: ASEAN IN THE WORLD**

Responsibility first.

It is truly heartening that, just two years into the 2008 global economic crisis, ASEAN has not only rebounded but is booming.

In Southeast Asia, growth is the catchphrase these days.

Growth has been marked by strong exports, firm domestic demand, and improved business sentiment.

In the larger Asian sphere, the presence of six nations in the Group of 20 has elevated the region in that economic league of nations.

All this is good news. What is even better is that ASEAN’s economic rise is accompanied by growing political maturity.
The maturing of Indonesia’s democracy is one of the big stories of the region in the 21st century. We have transformed from an authoritarian regime to the world’s third largest democracy in a decade.

It was not easy. It is no small feat.

Myanmar has just taken a step towards political reform with its elections, although the gesture will not satisfy those who want immediate and dramatic change.

The larger point is that ASEAN’s political status has begun to match its economic credentials.

It is a process. But that process has just begun.

Against this backdrop, the question that arises is this: is ASEAN capable of taking responsibility for a greater role in world affairs?

To be certain, it has made a start by integrating itself and deepening relationships with external powers such as China, Japan, India and America.

What began as the ASEAN Plus Three process has broadened into several processes. The East Asian Summit is one.

The eagerness of the United States and Russia to join ASEAN-centered processes is a sign of our region’s credibility and standing.

The dividends of open regionalism have been mutually rewarding. Look no further than the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement.

Can ASEAN go even further?

I ask this question because Indonesia assumes the ASEAN chairmanship next year, at a time when the East Asian Summit will see American and Russian participation.
ASEAN should aim higher, and a start can be made.

I would argue that Indonesia and Singapore should kick-start the journey into the future by developing capacity-building in the region.

Indonesia, ASEAN’s largest country, is rich in natural resources and is trying hard to develop its human resources. Singapore is a small country big on human resources. It is also the financial hub of ASEAN.

Together, we can lay the groundwork for an even more confident, outward-looking ASEAN.

**GIVING BACK: SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Let me turn to my second topic: Giving Back.

It could not have been more timely given that we have just celebrated Eid al-Adha. The “festival of sacrifice” commemorates the spirit of giving back to society.

The Bakrie Group is one of Indonesia’s leading business groups. But we want to be more than that. We want to be social entrepreneurs.

Here, I remember my grandfather.

Born into a family of modest means, he managed only a basic education.

He never had the chance to go to university. He built up his knowledge by reading widely.

He had to earn a living by working in a pharmacy. Then he started a commodity trading business in Teluk Betung, in the humble city of Lampung, South Sumatra.

To him education – *learning* – became a passion born of loss.
Rather than resenting those who had the opportunity for higher learning, my grandfather saw in them the qualities of hard work and a fervent thirst for information.

Today, the education system must prepare our children for an internationally competitive present and future. By freeing our children’s potential, we can transform them into citizens of the world.

Despite what we have accomplished in Indonesia, there still remains a lot to be done to achieve this transformation.

This is where the Bakrie Center Foundation, or BCF, has a role to play.

The BCF was created by the third generation in my family.

While my family has grown over the years, we would like it to grow more with the Bakrie Center Foundation.

We want to develop the human potential lying dormant in Indonesia.

For over a decade, my family has sponsored several programs on education. These include local scholarships and even a full-fledged university.

The BCF has an international dimension to it.

It is reflected in the Bakrie Chair or Professorship – our Knowledge Centers for Southeast Asian Studies – and the Bakrie Graduate Fellowships.

We court the best Indonesian undergraduates from the country’s top universities to receive world-class graduate education at home and abroad.

Over the next year, we intend to send around 100 students for 12 to 18 month Masters degree programs. In two years, 200 first-rate graduates will be born.

For those going overseas, we don’t have any strings attached. All we ask them to do is to return to Indonesia and contribute to the public good.
The scholarship programs will flourish if both the number and the quality of students increase, coupled with more prestigious universities and institutions coming on board as partners.

We want to build an ecosystem of higher learning in the region.

I believe we have sown the seeds with the start of the BCF.

This ecosystem will grow when our partners and students grow, creating an intellectual infrastructure that will build human capacity in Southeast Asia.

The Bakrie Chair at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington DC and Bakrie Professorship at the NTU represent the upper end of this initiative.

With the NTU, it moves the theatre of scholarly action closer to Indonesia.

The professor who occupies this post will serve as an anchor in a region that continues to make waves beyond its shores.

He will lead his students beyond the surface of daily headlines to what remains important underneath.

As if that were not enough, the professor will mentor younger faculty members and research scholars, whose work in turn will attract top-level talent into the fold.

I wish the professor well as he juggles all these duties.

The Bakries and the Singapore government – which have set aside a matching fund for the endowment for which we are grateful – are tough taskmasters.

We both follow Warren Buffet’s two rules. *Rule No.1: Never lose money. Rule No.2: Never forget rule No.1.* , and if I may add, especially if it involves Bakrie and Singapore money!
PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP

I come to my third topic: Private-Public partnership.

The Bakrie Professorship is a template of a successful private-public partnership in education.

It is part of our wider attempt to tap on successful entrepreneurs and get them to take the lead in educating the next generation. We certainly hope it will inspire them.

The problem is that there are areas into which markets can’t or won’t move because, ultimately, markets are driven by the profit motive.

That is where not-for-profit organizations come in.

They move precisely into those areas of social need and aspiration that fall into the cracks between the state and the market.

For example, scholarships provided by civil society organizations keep poor but talented children educated.

This is exactly what the Bakrie Centre Foundation is doing.

It wants to create a pool of talent that will eventually drive economic growth.

Our efforts go back to the inherent conviction of our founding father: give back to society and build a more prosperous Indonesia.

Now, Indonesians cannot thrive in a vacuum.

Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.
Our future leaders must know how the world is changing around them.

And the place to start might well be Singapore.

The bond that we Indonesians share with you, our special relationship, comes from our commonalities.

Like other Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia and Singapore are rice eating nations.

I welcome this connection, with the proviso that our nasi goreng is better than yours.

Our Constitutions safeguard equality among our multi-racial and multi-religious populations.

US President Barack Obama captured just that spirit of my nation when he spoke at the University of Indonesia the other day.

He mentioned Indonesia’s spirit of tolerance.

Symbolized in mosques, churches and temples standing alongside each other, that is the spirit embodied in the principle of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika: Unity in diversity.

President Obama considered this spirit to be the foundation of Indonesia’s example to the world and the reason why Indonesia would play such an important role in the 21st century.

In this context, let me say a few words about the Chinese Heritage Centre, which has been so kind to play host to our launch.

This Centre proves that the lifeblood of nationality is enhanced rather than undermined by the wrenching pulls of ethnicity.

The Chinese in Southeast Asia exemplify the complex interaction between being part of cultural China but not being a part of the Chinese nation.

They are thoroughly Southeast Asian while retaining elements of a Chinese cultural identity.
I intentionally chose the Chinese Heritage Center because as a *pribumi* I want to tear down the walls of ethnic divide that are sometimes indelibly edged in our minds.

Indonesia and Singapore live in a global village where expanding networks of trade, investments and markets are making this a smaller world.

We have to focus on commonalities.

Certainly, our interests dovetail with Singapore.

Singapore is a global nation. True, the absence of size is a source of vulnerability for Singapore. It creates a perception of liability in terms of defence and survival.

However, Singapore’s economic policies have carved out a niche that allows both local and international stakeholders to have a stake in its continued success.

Singapore punches above its weight.

**CONCLUSION**

I have spoken about three issues close to my heart.

The first is about ASEAN taking responsibility for its future.

The second is about responsible entrepreneurs not forgetting that society produced them.

The third is for the private and public sectors to appreciate their common responsibility.

In this context, Indonesia and Singapore also have a responsibility to make ASEAN the building block of a confident, resurgent Asia.

My grandfather would have believed in these responsibilities and partnerships instinctively.
And so do we, the rest of his family.

The world is a single family indeed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much.