

We have to illustrate our seriousness in doing business here by having a long-term, strategic plan which may not yield immediate pay-offs.

We have a cultural advantage in Canada that many of our competitors lack. That advantage is found in the large and growing number of Canadians of Asian origin. The contribution of these Canadians to the productivity of our society is a tremendously enriching factor in our polity, our culture, and our economy. They bring with them business, financial and family connections which play an important role in Asian society and which are already having a positive impact on Canadians. Canadians are learning about Asia in this way, and Canadians of Asian origin are contributing their values of selflessness and community.

Enhanced language capability and cultural awareness is fundamental to international competitiveness, now more so than ever. This is the prime reason why the Canadian government established the Asia Pacific Foundation a decade ago in Vancouver and why, several years ago, we launched a multi-million dollar initiative called "Pacific 2000" with an emphasis on encouraging Canadians to become more "Asia-literate."

Canada has for some time recognized that a stronger and more confident ASEAN and Southeast Asia can contribute to our own prosperity. It is why we have had for several years a development co-operation program that supports ASEAN as an institution and contributes to a large number of innovative, ASEAN-wide programs. And it is why we have created the Canada/ASEAN Centre, located in Singapore, to promote non-governmental linkages and networks in such key areas as education, science and technology.

An increasingly important element in Canada's trade and economic linkages with the Asia-Pacific is the development and encouragement of government and private sector dialogue, principally through the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation, APEC. You all know that leaders of the APEC member economies, including Prime Ministers Chrétien and Goh Chok Tong, met in Seattle last November. That was an historic occasion. APEC leaders and their foreign affairs ministers now have decided to hold their consultations regularly. APEC finance ministers have already met and trade ministers will meet this autumn. In addition to promoting the habit of regular dialogue, these meetings have helped launch APEC on creation, refinement and implementation of a visionary agenda.

What APEC governments are seeking to do is anticipate and prevent trade problems from occurring, rather than simply reacting to cure them after the fact. The latter is inevitably more wasteful and fraught with danger. APEC members are seriously at work on charting a long-term, progressive course towards freer, if not free, trade in the region.