

**Opening Speech by
H.E. Pongsak Ruktapongpisal**

International Symposium on
Underground Excavation and Tunneling
(Urban Tunnel Construction for Protection of Environment)

08.30 Thursday February 2nd, 2006
Pimanmek Ballroom, the Grand Hotel

President of the Engineering Institute of Thailand,
President of the International Tunneling Association,
Oversea delegates,
Honorable guests,
Ladies and gentlemen.....

It is my honor to preside over this opening ceremony, of the international symposium on Underground Excavation and Tunneling. The timing of this symposium could not have been more appropriate, considering that the Thai government has just initiated a partnership for development program, to attract and invite worldwide talents, to develop the country's infrastructure. This includes the improvement of transportation systems which is under my supervision, many of which involved underground construction and tunneling. I would like to express my utmost appreciation to the International Tunneling Association, for its supports in this symposium, and for recognizing that the knowledge, and technology in this discipline, is crucial for

Thailand's infrastructure development. I also congratulate the Engineering Institute of Thailand, on their success in bringing together delegates from abroad to participate in this event.

Since the financial crisis in 1997, the Government's priority has been to rehabilitate its economy, as well as its infrastructure. This year, the government is ready to embark onto the next phase; a comprehensive infrastructure development programs to increase Thailand's productivity, and its competitive edge in the global arena. These developments include Bangkok Mass Rapid Transit Network, Highway, Expressway, Railway networks, and Port facilities, which undoubtedly will keep civil engineers busy for the foreseeable future.

Under the supervision of the Ministry of Transport, Thailand completed her first underground MRT routes in Bangkok two years ago. As a matter of fact, one of the route passes in front of this hotel as I speak, and underground engineering played vital roles in the development of the whole 20 kilometers of this line, as it was placed underground. Despite prior apprehension of the general public, regarding the notorious soft ground condition of Bangkok, the tunneling works, and excavation of all stations in the project, were safely carried out without a single major mishap.

With the confidence gained, the government is now launching the next phase of the Bangkok's MRT system, involving construction of 10 more routes, to serve the Bangkok Metropolitan area. Some of it may pass underneath the old city area, of which a great consideration must be paid, to minimize impacts to the country's national heritage

and its environment. The content of this symposium is pertinent to the next phase of Bangkok MRT's development.

The government has scheduled the MRT system for completion within 5 years. Under the Partnership for Development program, we have invited prospective investors, constructors, and engineers, from various countries around the world to bid on the projects. I am looking forward to the exciting outcome of the initiative as the routes are laid down beneath Bangkok's ground.

Once again, it is my honor to welcome all of you in joining this International Symposium on Underground Excavation and Tunneling; I hope that you find this symposium beneficial, both technically and as a learning experience. Thank you.