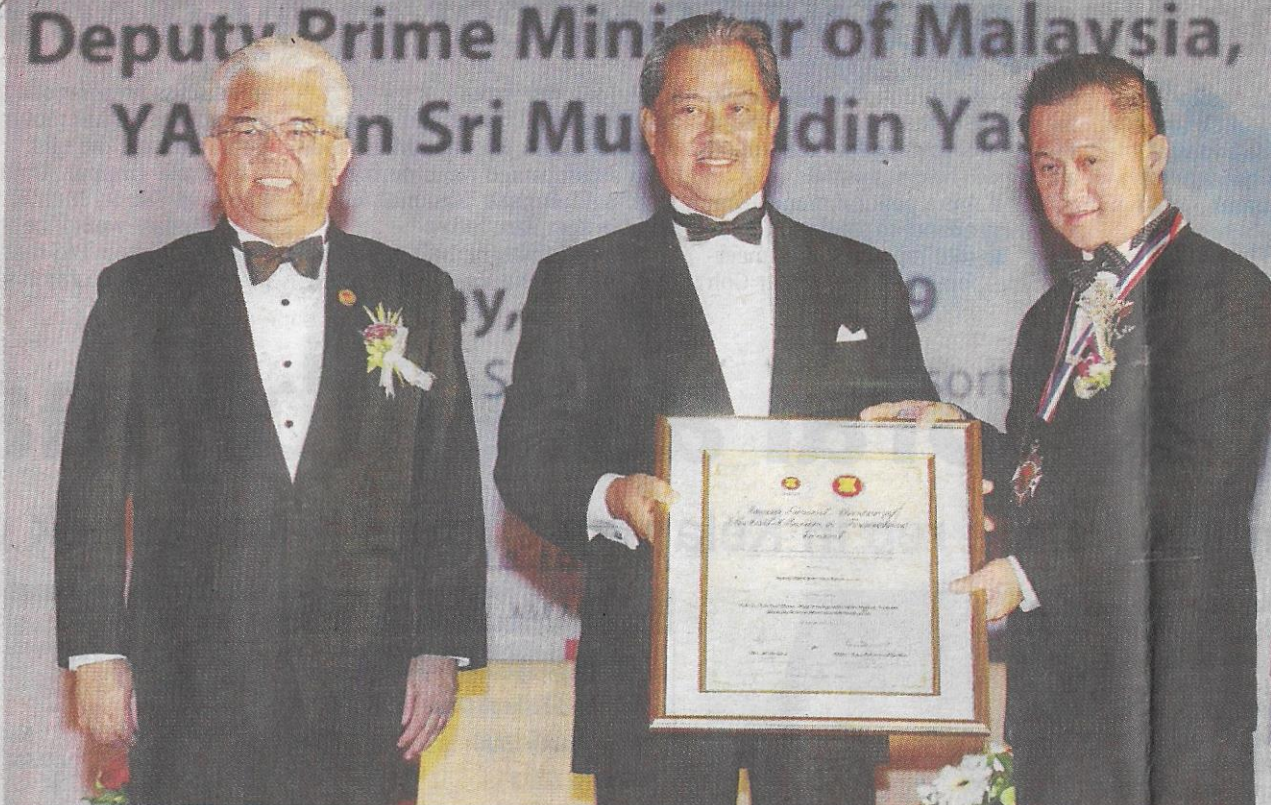


Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia,  
YAN Sri Muhyiddin Yassin



**Special honour:**  
Muhyiddin  
presenting  
England Optical  
Group CEO  
Datuk Dr  
Chin See Keat  
the Asean  
Grandmaster of  
Retail-Chains  
and Franchise  
Award during the  
Asean  
BAC-ARFF  
annual dinner  
in Petaling  
Jaya last night.  
With them is  
Asean BAC  
Malaysia Chapter  
chairman Datuk  
Syed Amin Aljef

## DPM: Asean can rival EU as economic powerhouse

**PETALING JAYA:** Asean can rival the European Union as an economic powerhouse by integrating its economies, particularly in the retail, franchise and tourism sectors.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the country's business volume could grow tremendously by forming strategic partnerships with its Asean counterparts.

He said Asean countries could become powerful economic rivals

to the EU with Asean Retail Chains and Franchise Federation (ARFF) leading the way.

"The retail or franchise and tourism sectors contribute significantly to the nation's economy with turnover running into excess of millions of ringgit," he said in his speech at the Asean Business Advisory Council (BAC) and ARFF annual dinner last night.

He added that the world had for a "very long time" depended on a few countries to be engines

of economic growth.

"It is also important to convince ourselves that economic integration is one of the ways to restore economic growth," he said.

Muhyiddin called for the region's inter-state relations to be more tightly knit, saying the commitment by Asean members towards realising its Economic Community by 2015 would enhance competitiveness in the region.

He said ARFF was actively work-

ing towards achieving its vision of making Asean a world-class tourism and shopping paradise, which would benefit every nation member.

"I urge all companies in Asean countries to actively participate with ARFF to form strategic alliances and partnerships and to create a strong network of collaboration to take full advantage of the market opening opportunities offered in the regional and global market," he said.