



**Building a brighter future for all Malaysians**  
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**Najib Abdul Razak**

Forty-six years ago today, Sabah and Sarawak united with peninsular Malaysia to complete what we now know as modern Malaysia. As we celebrate this anniversary, it is an important time to reflect upon our shared past, including the indispensable contributions that Sabah and Sarawak continue to make to the development of our nation.

Minding these lessons, we must also concentrate our efforts on building a better future. On this Malaysia day, I would like to share my reflections on the contributions of Sabah and Sarawak, as well as my vision to build a better future for all Malaysians.

Sabah and Sarawak, our two largest states, separated by an ocean, are integral to the dream held by all Malaysians of a united and harmonious nation. They are vibrant examples of how Malaysians of different racial, religious and ethnic roots can come together around the many things that unite us, instead of allowing the few things that divide us to drive us apart.

The story of Sabah and Sarawak is the story of 1Malaysia, and has informed and inspired my commitment to this concept. They are a testament to the fact that our differences unite this country, and that the true power of Malaysia is revealed when Malaysians of all races, religions and ethnicities live in harmony with one another.

When I see the longhouse celebrations of Gawai Dayak in Sarawak, and feel the strong sense of solidarity among all of the people of Sarawak as I did during a recent two-day visit, I cannot help but think that we are moving closer every day to the unity of 1Malaysia that I have committed to pursuing.

In fact, I have concluded that the people of Sarawak had already adopted the values of 1Malaysia long before I explained its various elements. This example has driven my commitment, and, I believe, has had an important and lasting impact on Malaysia's development. Malaysians of any race or creed need simply look to Sabah and Sarawak to gain an understanding of the incredibly strong and harmonious unity that can be found in accepting and respecting the diversity of our nation.

While we, as Malaysians, have learned a great deal from our easternmost states about achieving our dream of a united and harmonious nation, this is not the full story. We must also thank these states for what they have taught us about working towards a brighter future.

Since they joined peninsular Malaysia in 1963, Sabah and Sarawak have played a vital role in the development of Malaysia's economy, and that role continues to evolve. Although both states face challenging economic situations, they also demonstrate great promise in terms of their potential contribution to achieving a self-sufficient, stable and economically vibrant Malaysia by the year 2020, as outlined in Vision 2020.

### **Lesson from Sabahans**

During a recent visit to Sabah, I saw a vision of the bright future of Sabah and Sarawak. Though Sabah has experienced strong growth across many economic sectors, after many



years of underdevelopment, what impressed me the most was the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit I saw in the Sabah people in their development of a thriving ecotourism industry. This spirit, which I believe is shared by all Malaysians, has driven tremendous growth in ecotourism and is turning Sabah into a significant contributor to the nation's economy.

In basic terms, Sabah has taken steps to shift away from an economy that was largely reliant on non-renewable resource based exports, towards one based on a sustainable service sector. The most important impact of this shift is the effect it will have on the people of Sabah, who will benefit from sustainable long-term employment options that will not disappear when resources run dry, not to mention the positive impact on the environment and preservation of natural habitats.

As I have outlined in my reflections, these states have had a lasting and significant impact on the development of Malaysia and we have all learned from their example. It is true that Sabah and Sarawak have experienced impressive growth, but they need the government's help to reach their true potential.

Currently, economic progress in these states is being hampered by inadequate transportation networks, underfunded schools and insufficient provision of services. That is why I have extended federal government grants to local authorities in Sabah and Sarawak. These funds, and future investment, will be directly applied where they are needed the most - they will be used for important infrastructure projects, the provision of services by local authorities and for improving educational opportunities, particularly in rural areas, all of which will provide both immediate and lasting benefits.

The Bakun National Hydroelectric Project in Sarawak is one example. The World's second tallest concrete faced rockfill dam with a surface area roughly the size of Singapore, this amazing project will generate 2,400- megawatts of clean energy in a sustainable manner, making it the largest power project in Southeast Asia. The developers will work with the local community to provide areas for exhibiting local handicrafts and has plans for creating nature walks and eco parks in the surrounding area to further the needs of the local community.

To build towards a unified and harmonious Malaysia with a bright future, we must develop our nation as 1Malaysia. The renewed and expanded investment in the future of Sabah and Sarawak that I have proposed is a step in this direction. Doing so will ensure that we are providing the same opportunities to all and improving the lives of all.

Doing so will ensure that we are providing the same opportunities to all and improving the lives of all Malaysians, regardless of race, religion or the corner of Malaysia that they choose to call home. In the end, whether we live in a remote longhouse or a high-rise in Kuala Lumpur, we are all Malaysians and we are all part of the 1Malaysia that we love.

***NAJIB ABDUL RAZAK is the Prime Minister of Malaysia. This article first appeared in his 1Malaysia blog to commemorate Malaysia Day on Sept 16.***

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