

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY YAB PRIME MINISTER AT SYMPOSIUM
ON “ANCHORING ASEAN’S FUTURE IN SHARED WISDOM:
EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES FOR AN INCLUSIVE AND
SUSTAINABLE CIVILISATION”**

By : DATO’ SERI ANWAR IBRAHIM

Venue : TAMU HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR

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YAB DATO’ SERI ANWAR BIN IBRAHIM

PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA

SYMPOSIUM ON

**“ANCHORING ASEAN’S FUTURE IN SHARED WISDOM:
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26th JUNE 2025 | 4:00PM (THURSDAY)

TAMU HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh dan salam Sejahtera.

Alhamdu lillaahil lazeeee anzala ‘alaa ‘abdihil kitaaba,

Wa lam yaj’al lahoo ‘iwajaa,

Wa Nusalli Ala Rasoolilah Kareem,

Wa ‘ala alihi wasahbihi ajma’in.

Yang Berhormat Senator Dato’ Setia Dr. Haji Mohd Na’im bin Mokhtar,

Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department (Religious Affairs);

Yang Berhormat Dr. Zulkifli bin Hasan,

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department (Religious Affairs);

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Azam bin Abdul Rahman,

President of WADAH dan Keluarga WADAH;

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Dr. Mohd Yusof bin Haji Othman, Deputy
Chairman of IKIM dan Keluarga IKIM;

Duta-duta dan wakil kedutaan yang hadir;

Rakan-rakan yang saya muliakan.

1. Saya ucapkan tahniah dan penghargaan atas inisiatif atau ikhtiar IKIM dan WADAH untuk menyemarakkan kefahaman wacana. Wacana yang agak segar, membicarakan soal maqasid dan juga MADANI. Kebetulan pagi tadi saya luncurkan satu projek besar, tidaklah raksasa, tetapi sangat bermakna untuk menterjemahkan falsafah dan konsep negara MADANI dalam satu kota di pinggir Putrajaya yang dinamakan Kota MADANI.
2. Menterjemahkan konsep itu adalah satu cabaran yang besar, bagaimana isu kemampanan diertikan bukan sahaja sustainability dari sudut ketahanan dan ekonomi, tetapi pemerksaan rakyat yang berteraskan nilai dan etika. Bagaimana isu ihsan dan rahmah itu, serta daya cipta dan inovasi dapat dimaknai bagi rakyat yang hidup.

Bagaimana isu perumahan rakyat, terutama penjawat awam ditangani. Bagaimana kita dapat kurangkan kos anak-anak dengan sekolah, tadika, hospital dan kemudahan asas itu dalam kompleks yang sama, di sebuah kota. Alhamdulillah, dapat kita luncurkan walaupun dikendalikan oleh Perbadanan Putrajaya dan akhirnya menelan belanja RM4 bilion ringgit, tetapi ia agak menyenangkan kerana ia ada usaha menterjemahkan konsep ini.

Excellencies and friends,

3. I'm delighted to see not only friends from Malaysia but also representatives from overseas, some of them my old friends although they're still young and I am of course, very much encouraged that we use this as an important forum for recent discourse.
4. In this age of Islamophobia, where Islam is treated with such prejudice, we need to have this courage or conviction to engage in a reasoned discourse to present our case, not only to respond or to counter the offensives, but to state our position. Why can't Muslims happen to be majority in ASEAN, be able to embrace these values and ethical principles, at the same time, appreciate and understand the true spirit of Lita'arafu, to engage with others; the Christians, the Buddhist, the Hindus in our region without being unnecessarily apologetic or defensive.
5. We have a great civilization and tradition, and relatively very peaceful, with initial some problems in Myanmar which we're trying

to engage. Unfortunately, there's a certain incident now between the borders of Cambodia and Thailand, which is fortunately being contained, although it's still tense. But otherwise, ASEAN is relatively the most peaceful region in the world, and the most dynamic and vibrant economically.

6. We have therefore to promote these values. What is so, everybody talks about development. That's why in the Asian Renaissance, thank you Yang Berbahagia Dato' Dr. Mohd Yusof for making references there. We talk about economic empowerment. Economy remains the fundamentals. We can't organize a regional conference without some financial support, so we should not relegate the importance of the economy. Do whatever is necessary to proposing investments and Foreign Direct Investments but that is not the entirety economic empowerment, if it is not for a cause.

7. That is why we talk about cultural empowerment. When we talk about Kuala Lumpur, one of my first task is to make sure that it is not recognized by the huge, mega buildings, the towers and the impressive buildings. And I also remind them of what Mark Twain used to refer to when he first went to Washington, D.C., "Impressive buildings, modern technology, gigantic, impressive" but he made reference to what is now popularly termed as 'culturally barren' (gersang budayanya). But to us, of course, it's not just the culture, it is values, it is ethics, it is akhlak, It is the sahsiah, the character, which it should differentiate our understanding and what is development, what is sustainability, and why we should be proud of Kuala Lumpur not because of these major impressive towers, but also the small stalls and food stalls, what we call here as warung, restoran kecil.

8. That makes a difference. How percent goes to these impressive hotels? 15–20%? How many in terms of population, make use of these stalls and small restaurants? 80%. But why is these 80% being neglected? Dirty, unimpressive building, no basic facilities and amenities. It is something wrong with our understanding about values and ethics and what is justice. So that is why I said to the authorities here, I said, “we have to do more to make sure that every single stall, food stall, given the basic amenities.” That is to my mind, the criteria of empowering our people.
9. And, of course, in terms of other facilities as well. We talk about education, one of the first thing. That is why MADANI is a concept to instill that spirit and awareness about values, of ethics and compassion, rahmah and ihsan, and a balanced community, ‘ummatan wasatan’, Islah Mastata’tu, but for whom? It’s for the common people. So, I think, don’t worry I’m not going to read the text.
10. So, you see, how do you translate these impressive concepts and philosophical constructs in a society that is fragmented and polarized in a systemic society that have faced the issue of systemic corruption? Where everyone once he’s given the authority or the privilege to lead, he must be corrupt, he must amass wealth. Otherwise, he’s known to be not too smart. It is changing mindset that’s a major problem.
11. You’re not battling in a vacuum. I have huge problems here with some of our educated elites who some, of course, calls for immediate reform and change. But I also detect some growth inconsistencies.

When it comes to anti-corruption drive, it's just against one man. Those who have squandered billions are being ignored and nobody mentioned them. I find it odd, utterly hypocritical to be talking about corruption and confined to one person, the former Prime Minister for example and ignoring the fact that billions have been squandered and when the Anti-Corruption Commission went after them, not one word, not one sound, what more support. What is wrong with our system? We should be able to express, I'm not saying there should be drawn to partisan politics which we drawn to ethics and values. Just because these billionaires support you or support your organization or support your party or support your civil society, it does not mean that you should erase or ignore the corrupt practices of the past. I mean, that is just one example.

12. So, when you talk about MADANI, you are talking about the whole society, a nation. This morning when launching this Kota MADANI, I mean of course, Ibnu Khaldun' thesis in 'The Muqaddimah' where he talked about 'umran al-badawi' (nomadism) and then focusing with this 'asabiyyah' esprit de corps and centre on the city with idealism, with values, with principles, with ethics, we want to achieve unity. With this unity, we want to propel growth. With the growth we use it for the benefit of our society and mankind. We are grounded with idealism therefore, strong values and ethics. But 1, 2, 3rd generation passed then you find this degeneration of ethical values and principles, we have lost that idealism.
13. Those in power would want to amass wealth. Those elites? Yeah, for whatever reasons, either support on site or obsessed with their particular values or interests, disregarding the totality and the

complexity of a problem. So, corruption became endemic and later systemic.

14. Beginning of course, with the leadership and from this 'umran al-hadhari', a city that propelled and became a great civilization, then became more decadent. He studied these North African societies and, of course, very detailed analysis that influence modern sociology. So, our concern particularly for younger generation is how do you then protect this? How do you then stop this trend towards decadence? By instilling values and calling for reform in 'islah mastata'tu' change as much as you can possibly to, and that is the only possibility to my mind. Do you have a choice? We don't have a choice.
15. Malaysia, as many of the other countries in ASEAN, has enormous potential. Yes, we have problems. It's a very multiracial society, Islam is from the majorities, 60%, Islam is the religion of the federation, but it is a multiracial, multi-religious society. There are calls from every racial groups demanding to be protected and there are some form of dissatisfaction. Probably that's the beauty of the society and then there'll be some demands from provinces, states. Well, we have to accept that and work and navigate wisely.
16. Can we satisfy all at the same time? No. But we have to agree on one thing, this country, yes most of our societies. Can we just accept the fact that only through positive reform we can not only save society in the nation, but to propel the economy through growth and good governance. Well, the answer is of course, unequivocally. Yes, in the

positive. But how do we then navigate? As I said, one example is a corruption.

17. One person gets a DNAA and the Prime Minister is condemned by one group. Then the next week the other person gets DNAA and the Prime Minister is also condemned. But these guys talk about judicial independence, so there's apparent contradiction. What do you want? You want me to be a dictator by asking the judges to adjudicate based on your personal views? I leave it to the court to decide. Some I agree, some I disagree. Yeah, some I utterly disagree but then, that is what independence of judiciary is about. That the executive has his powers, but also has its limits because of the principle of the separation of powers. Which is not necessarily Western or just Montesquieu. Montesquieu probably articulate and liberate a bit more partly because our shared ignorance of our past, and our 'turath', our legacy.
18. You find lots of stories about the experience of Saidina Ali bin Abu Talib R.A. about the shield and how he had to face the independent court proceedings. So, we'll have to then proceed in this framework to ensure that first, there was a better understanding of Islamic perception.
19. As I said in the beginning, in the introduction, in the days of Islamophobia, what do you, our task is partly just to respond. There was one group against hijab in this country. There's one group that discriminates against Muslims. There's one country who says, "No Muslims should not be allowed to this university." We have huge problems, but do we just respond? Do we just counter or within our

limits, within our societies Malaysia, ASEAN for example promote this. And nothing's stopping us from getting the Muslims together, having in-depth study and understanding because we too, in the internal dynamics among Muslim societies, face problems. There are various ijthihad trends. There are various in our history there are trends towards fanaticism and extremism. There's been violence permitted in the name of Islam. There's been a lot of fitnah in the name of Islam.

20. So, we must also accept the fact that reform within Muslim societies is needed. Then we accept the fact of the complexity and plurality of our societies by engaging. You want this country to proceed ethically and with the right values, and particularly because of Islamic concept and framework but you do nothing to interact with the rest. You do nothing to interact with the Buddhists and the Hindus and the Christians. It's a flaw. So, you have to get that understanding.
21. Now, in order to engage well with the Hindus and the Confucianists and the Christians, you just don't go and lecture to them. You have also to listen to them. That's what engagement and dialogue is all about. When I organised a major international conference, they brought about some great Muslim scholars and two main scholars from Harvard at that time, now he's in Beijing. A very well-known scholar of new Confucianism. Well, I was criticised "Why do you get Muslims to understand Confucianism?". I said, "My dear, how do we then get them to understand Islam?". You refuse to listen to them. You can disagree by all means, but we can also find areas or concepts or values that we share. Let us rejoice, embrace the values that we share, because we cannot have an effective, meaningful society

without understanding and dialogue. How many non-Muslims here Chinese, Hindus have some basic understanding of Islam? Not many.

22. For example, in my public lectures now, we're talking about Ramadan. I tell them and I remember some sheikh from some parties attacked me "How can Anwar equate fasting with other religions?". They take a portion and interpret, I'm referring to "Kutiba 'alaikum-siyam, kama kutiba 'alallazinamin qablikum, la'allakum tattaqun". I said that everybody fasts, that's why "kutiba", Qur'an made reference to "those before you." What is it about those before you, only the Christians and the Jews. Well, I would just say those before you from other religious denominations also fast and then I qualified "But to Muslims, the intention is la'allakum tattaqun." It is better to say that, let us appreciate sawm fasting, Muslims do and early on, the Qur'an recognises that there was this practice before you. So just say that, but for us Muslims, the intention is la'allakum tattaqun it is piety, it is in the service of Allah SWT for discipline, for spiritual upliftment. Yes, but the others will be others but you know, I was condemned. "He's liberal, plural, because he equates fasting with other religions."

23. My word, you know they should then understand how do you get the Chinese, the Indians to appreciate fasting. You say, "You see, we fast but you fast wrongly! You know, you are all stupid fellas." I mean, that's not dialogue. That's anger, that is preaching, hatred and fanaticism. Do we lose? No. I think my task is, of course, to get them to understand and appreciate and so we take up the opportunity to explain. Now, to me, why do I go to extend and expand this also in my argument because I want them to understand that in MADANI

concept, of course, you can read about it but more important is how do you translate this. How do you translate this into practical purposes and action.

24. And may Allah help us and I thank all the foreign participants for joining us. Since we have excellent relations in ASEAN all these Prime Ministers and Kings and Presidents, you know, on call all the time they make use of this to forge understanding, to strengthen our bond. We should not learn from the others, from the hatred in other regions. We should showcase that ASEAN can be unique because we have not lost our sanity. Whilst we take pride in our belief, we want our country to succeed economically but we want to be culturally vibrant and ethnically grounded in proper values and faith.

25. Jadi saya ucap terima kasih sekali lagi, dengar kuliah saya ini. Entah apa dia tulis, semalam saya tengok teks tak jadi baca, tapi kalau nak edar teks boleh. Tapi saya harap rakan-rakan dapat jayakan program ini. Tapi melalui program, tadi Ahmad Azam sebut, mungkin tahun depan kita buat di Manila, di Patani, di Jakarta. Esok saya ke Jakarta, saya akan bincang dengan Pak Prabowo Subianto, Presiden. Sokongan usaha ini supaya kalau boleh Jakarta pula anjur dan kita buka perbincangan yang lebih luas. Ingat, memahami bukan sahaja minta mereka faham, kita juga harus tunjuk kesediaannya untuk mendengar dan menilai supaya kita dapat bangkit kesedaran baru ini seperti mana yang diidamkan oleh Ibnu Khaldun, Umran al-Hadhari.

Wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.

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