

Speech By : DATO SRI NAJIB TUN RAZAK
Title : PAHANG BAR ANNUAL DINNER
Location : MS GARDEN HOTEL, KUANTAN, PAHANG
Date : 28-02-2009

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Yang Amat Berhormat Dato' Hj Adnan bin Yaakob, the Menteri Besar of Pahang,

Yang Arif Dato' VT Singham, Senior High Court Judge of Malaya in Kuantan

Yang Arif Dato' Mariana bt Hj Yahaya, Judge of the High Court, Kuantan,

Tuan Syed Azimal Amir bin Syed Abu Bakar, immediate former Chairman of the Pahang Bar

Mr Lim Chee Wee, the Secretary of Bar Council Malaysia,

Yang Berhormat- Yang Berhormat ahli-ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri,

Members of the Pahang Bar

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh dan Salam sejahtera.

1. I read somewhere that the expression “there’s no such thing as a free lunch” originates from people who often have lunch with lawyers. Tonight I think I’m discovering this to be somewhat true, although this occasion tonight is a dinner and not a luncheon. It’s not a free dinner for me obviously, because I have to ‘pay’ for it by delivering a speech. I’ve also been told that one of the things the Pahang Bar is seeking is a new court complex for the state. If this request is tied to this dinner, than this may be the most expensive dinner I have ever had!

2. Nevertheless, I am delighted to be here tonight in the company of all of you the members of the Pahang Bar, arguably a pool of some of the finest minds in the state of Pahang if not the country. I thank the Pahang Bar for giving me the honor to be a part of this special night, which is, as I understand it, a night when all of you lawyers who are supposed to be very serious and business-like, are allowed to let loose and enjoy yourselves. And so I will try not to dwell too much on matters that are too serious and business like, and I will speak just long enough so that I can be said to have earned my meal.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. These past few months have seen issues relating to the law take center stage in our national affairs. I don't have to tell you that recent events have had everyone talking about matters of constitutional law and the rules that govern the political structure of our society. Without going into details of the whole affair, what the situation underscores is the importance of the law and the role of lawyers in any society. In times of uncertainty, society invariably turn to lawyers who are expected to know and understand the intricacies of these complex body of rules that we know as The Law. Of course every time there is such a 'hot' issue, you will find 'instant lawyers' springing up seemingly from nowhere, peddling their expertise at coffee shops and restaurants, each one with their own set of arguments, which serve no other purpose than to confuse the issues for everyone else.

4. The fact of the matter is that lawyers, -the real, qualified and trained lawyers- are the people that society looks to when trying to find answers and solutions to the problems that emerge in our daily lives. It necessarily follows, therefore, that lawyers are looked-up to by society as knowledgeable people; as people who are trained to expertly analyse, and appraise any situation and then give them advise on the right course of action, which may or may not include forays into the courtroom.

5. Having said that, however, one does wonder why lawyers are so often the subject of derision; so often painted in rather unflattering shades in popular culture? We all know how lawyers are regularly called unpleasant names like "sharks" and "ambulance chasers" and "publicity hounds" in jest as often as in all seriousness. All of us in this room I'm sure are all too aware of the thousands of

lawyer jokes that are so often told and retold to the point that they become cliché. But have we ever stopped to ask why this is now the case? Have we ever pondered the reason why the noble profession of The Lawyer is now more often than not painted in a negative light?

6. It seems to me the legal profession is the victim of its own success. This noble profession became less and less noble, the more lucrative it became. Over the centuries and decades, “lawyering” became less about providing authentic, matter-of-fact legal advice to those needing such services, and more about manipulating the law for those who can pay the most money. As the numbers of lawyers grew, so did competition, and the profession became more of a business than anything else, and like any business, profits and the bottom line became the ultimate concern.

7. Service to the people became secondary and one might say that somewhere along the way the profession was seen to have lost its soul. Over time, escalating fees and other rising costs made it all too easy for people to believe that lawyers took advantage of people unfortunate enough to be caught in law related complications. Hence the name calling, the jokes about lawyers and the all round negative image. Of course the legal profession is still grudgingly respected, and many young people aspire to be lawyers. But it is nevertheless equally true that the profession has some image problems that could and should be rectified.

8. The question lawyers must ask now is what can be done to revive the essence of nobility in the legal profession. To my mind, the answer lies in the return to the culture of service. I believe that it would do the profession a great deal of good if lawyers were to take an introspective look at themselves and make a conscious effort to think less of the bottom line and more of helping the less fortunate. This is of course not to suggest that law firms should behave like charities. And I certainly do not intend to diminish all the pro-bono work that many lawyers

already do in the name of service to the community. What I am merely suggesting is that such good deeds ought to be done more often by more lawyers and certainly by bigger law firms.

9. It would not be easy to change the long standing perception that lawyers are always out to make a quick buck. But I believe it can be done, and it starts with lawyers individually making a conscious decision to devote more time and energy in the selfless service of the community. I am glad to note that the Pahang Bar has taken cognizance of the need to give back to society not only through its Legal Aid Center and Legal Aid Clinics, but also through numerous programs such as talks and seminars meant to better educate the public on their legal rights. I hope members of the Pahang Bar will enthusiastically embrace such initiatives and participate whole heartedly in making those programs a success. I believe it would be a good stepping stone towards enhancing and strengthening the culture of service among the legal fraternity in Pahang.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. The government stands ready to support the continuous development of the legal profession in Malaysia and of course we are continuously working towards improving the judiciary, most recently evidenced by the establishment of the Judicial Appointments Commission. We will continue to look at ways and means to make further reforms to the system so that confidence in the integrity and efficiency of our judicial system never wavers. There is still much to be done, but do it we must and do it we shall.

11. For Pahang in particular we will certainly look seriously into the request for a new court complex. The importance of adequate court facilities in order to

ascertain the timely and efficient disposal of court matters and legal proceedings cannot be overstated, and this will weigh heavily in our consideration of this request. Ultimately what is important is that we work towards providing the best judicial and legal facilities and services for the benefit of all our people.

12. To that end, I am certain that we will have the support and cooperation of not only the Pahang Bar but also the entire legal fraternity. And for that, the government is most appreciative. We look forward to working with the legal community as an important partner in the nation building process, for indeed if all of us work together there is no reason why we cannot bring this country of ours to far greater heights, InshaAllah.

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. I'd like to once again thank the Pahang Bar for inviting me here tonight and for allowing me to say a few words. I hope this annual dinner marks yet another year of achievement for the Pahang Bar and I hope the rest of the year will be full of even greater successes. We all know that we are currently in the midst of what may well be the biggest global economic meltdown in history and this means times could get tough for many people in the months to come. But as they say, the more people drown in financial woes, the more business there is out there for lawyers. So under the circumstances, you may well have a bumper year ahead!

14. But in all seriousness, I know that all of you members of the bar are like the rest of us who are concerned with the well-being of our country and I know that all of you are working hard to perform your duties well and live up to the high expectations that come with your role as defenders of the sanctity of law. I truly and honestly record our appreciation to all of you dedicated lawyers and I wish you

all the very best for the future.

Thank you.

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