

25TH TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN LECTURE (MALAYSIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT)

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MALAYSIA

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Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh

Salam sejahtera dan salam 1Malaysia.

1. I am honoured to have been invited to join the illustrious list of speakers who have delivered the Tunku Abdul Rahman Lecture. For this, the 26th instalment, I have been asked to speak to you about 'Leadership in Challenging Times'. The subject is indeed appropriate.
2. Over the last year, we faced a string of tragedies, from the losses of MH370 and MH17, to the worst floods in nearly a century. And not to mention the tragic earthquake in Ranau, Sabah, and also the political and economic challenges that we are currently facing.
3. These tragedies and challenges were unprecedented, but Malaysia in history has faced challenging times in the past.
4. Tunku Abdul Rahman bore the burden of negotiating for an independent Federation of Malaya, emerging from the shackles of empire and recovering from a communist insurgency. Tunku's prime challenge was to forge a new nation out of a society with little sense of unity or overall identity.

5. My father, Tun Razak, led alongside Tunku Abdul Rahman, at a time when Malaysian society was in deep crisis, plagued by ethnic divisions and festering tensions.
6. Yet they were not only able to prevent the almost-certain disintegration of society, but they succeeded in putting Malaysia on its path towards the rapid and widespread socio-economic development that was to follow.
7. That Malaysia was able to survive those early challenges, let alone flourish and prosper, was not a product of chance or luck. Malaysia pulled through because of its leadership. And there were particular leadership traits that one can easily identify.
8. First and foremost, our past leaders had a deep care and concern for the nation, and their service went well beyond the call of duty. Their decisions were instinctive and came from genuine patriotism and a strong sense of purpose.
9. They were even willing to make big personal sacrifices. Both Tun Razak and his deputy prime minister, Tun Dr Ismail, died in office. They worked right to the end, although they both knew the extent of their illnesses.
10. They were willing to assume responsibility for the wellbeing of all Malaysians. They fought for what was right, took difficult decisions and created radical policies - all from the most noble and moral motives.
11. Past leaders were also bold enough to take action regardless of whether it was popular. They focused on what was urgent and necessary. Tun Razak was known for his principle of "firm action and less talk". When matters required immediate attention, winning people over took second place to responding with speed.

12. Those leaders were dynamic, not rigid - I refer again to Tun Razak's introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1970, and its continued implementation by his successors.

13. Here, wisdom and pragmatism were evident. We had leaders who saw beyond the short-term, and created a framework that would build a more equitable and sustainable future, even though they knew it was not one they were likely to live long enough to see themselves.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. People sometimes say that I was groomed for leadership from an early age, that probably is not quite the truth. One person went so far as to say that he supported me out of gratitude to my father. But I never thought I would be a politician. And I certainly have never taken the office of prime minister for granted. Neither did I ever dare assume that one day I would have the honour of leading the nation.

15. As Prime Minister, however, it is my responsibility to make the right decisions for all Malaysians. More than that: it is my duty. It is a sacred trust, and no one should attempt to interfere with or hijack that obligation to lead.

16. For it is the people who elected me, and I am proud and humbled to bear that mandate - which is the people's to give and to take away. It does not belong to any individual, however eminent.

17. If I follow in the footsteps of Tunku Abdul Rahman and my late father, it is with humility, and with their example to inspire me.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. This evening, I would like to talk about what my record since I took over as Prime Minister.
19. That is what my government has been doing since I took office in 2009. Some, however, are so desperate to cast our record in a bad light, that they have even said that Malaysia is on its way to becoming a failed state.
20. This is ludicrous. But let the facts speak for themselves.
21. From 2009 to 2014, Malaysia's Gross National Income grew by 47.7 percent.
22. 1.8 million jobs have been created since we implement of the Economic Transformation Programme in 2010.
23. We have reduced the deficit for six years running, and in each of the last five years, total investments have reached new records.
24. It has always been our priority to make sure that our growth is sustainable and equitable. Since 2009, the income of the bottom 40 percent households has increased by a compound annual growth rate of 12 percent, even higher than the national average of 8 percent.
25. Through the implementation of minimum wage legislation, the government has lifted 2.9 million people immediately out of absolute poverty.
26. Unemployment has declined to under 3 percent - from 3.7 percent in 2009.

27. We have increased women's participation in the workforce, with a higher percentage of management positions in Malaysia being held by women than in Hong Kong and Singapore.

28. And we have maintained the reforms necessary for Malaysia to reach the goal of becoming a high income status nation by 2020. Some of these reforms have not been popular, like the introduction of GST and the removal of subsidies. But I am here not to make popular decision; I am here to make the right decision. But saying we could achieve strong growth without hard choices would be to make empty promises.

29. We had to broaden our tax base and reduce our dependency on oil and gas revenues. Every serious economist around the world agrees that these reforms were necessary and will benefit Malaysia in the long run.

30. The IMF recognised our progress in a report this March, titled: "Favourable Prospects for Malaysia's Diversified Economy". Its key conclusions were:

- Growth likely to remain healthy in 2015, despite lower energy prices - and it has. Growth for the second quarter was a strong 4.9 percent.
- End of fuel subsidies and start of Goods and Services tax is timely, and good for efficiency, equity, and the environment.
- Exchange rate flexibility will help non-energy exports.

31. The IMF does not hand out compliments lightly. Nor do the ratings agencies. Yet in January, Moody's maintained Malaysia's A3 rating with a positive outlook. In February Standard and Poor's maintained Malaysia's A- rating with a stable

outlook. And more recently Fitch maintained Malaysia's A- rating - and actually upgraded its outlook from negative to stable.

32. Despite the volatility of the world economy, other organisations, including the World Bank and the World Economic Forum have placed us high in their rankings for ease of doing business and competitiveness. Bloomberg rated Malaysia as the world's 5th most promising emerging market in 2015.

33. And an independent study, which has nothing to do with us, recently declared Malaysia to be the top country for the Global Islamic Economy Indicator 2014-2015. Malaysia led by a large margin. Does that sound like a failed state to you?

Ladies and gentlemen,

34. Economic reforms have been matched by those in other areas. As well as the ISA and the Emergency Ordinances, we repealed the Banishment Act and the Restricted Residences Act. We passed the Peaceful Assembly Act, changed the law to allow students to participate in politics, and amended the Printing Presses and Publications Act.

35. This was the greatest expansion of civil liberties in Malaysia's history. Yet some outsiders have attacked us for not taking care of the people's rights. And Tun Mahathir has said, somewhat outrageously that "democracy is dead" in Malaysia.

36. If anyone doubts that Malaysians are at liberty to find fault with the government, they should spend a few moments looking online. We are acutely aware of the criticisms levelled at the government - and we are listening. Unlike in many other countries in the developing world, however, no one will ever be arrested or prosecuted for the legitimate expression of their opinions.

37. But with freedom comes responsibility. People who are open-minded and well informed are in a position to make enlightened judgments. People who are ill-informed, on the other hand, will turn to half-truths and lies, and depend on unreliable sources who distort and sensationalise information. This is extremely dangerous.
38. This is why my government intends to implement international standards to regulate the Internet - and I specifically say regulate, not restrict - so that none should have to suffer being criminally defamed, and so that the internet does not become an ungoverned space dominated by insults and untruths.
39. We take the safety and security of all Malaysians very seriously. This is why we introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act. And if everyone was aware of the threats they have averted and the plots they have foiled, they would praise our security and police forces for their outstanding bravery and devotion - and they would never doubt that we need this new act. And that is my job to make sure all Malaysians are safe and sound.
40. Internationally, we believe that Malaysia's place in the world is best secured by forging bonds with other nations. The days of having public quarrels and throwing insults are over. It is not weakness to work together for the benefit of all - in a globalised world it is a sign of strength, and of the respect that other countries have for us.
41. That is why I am proud that my administration has elevated Malaysia's relationship with both China and the US to levels of friendship and strategic cooperation never seen before.
42. As chair of ASEAN, we are driving our ten-nation grouping towards becoming a Community by the end of the year. After the disappearance of flight MH 370, we led 26 nations in the largest aviation search in history.

43. In the southern Philippines, we facilitated the Bangsamoro Peace negotiations, which may bring to an end a tragic conflict that has claimed the lives of over 100,000 people. And this year and next, we will take an active role on the United Nations Security Council as a responsible and recognised member of the international community.
44. In all these areas, Malaysia, and the government, has shown leadership. But it is time for others to consider what kind of leadership they are providing for their communities here in Malaysia. There are those who constantly oppose, purely for the sake of opposition, rather than supporting policies that benefit and unite Malaysians. Instead, they seek to divide and to cause confusion.
45. There are others who put personal gain over that of the country.
46. That is not honouring the legacy of the leaders who made this country great. As Prime Minister, I have always worked and will always work for the good of all Malaysians, regardless of their faith or ethnicity. The joy of my fellow Malaysians is my joy, which is why I visit the celebrations of others, whether it be Raya, Deepavali, Chinese New Year, Christmas or any other holiday.
47. The success of our fellow Malaysians is that of us all, which is why my government will continue to help those who struggle and those who have been left behind. This is why we will not forget members of marginalised communities and those affected by natural disasters; and why we will continue to develop Malaysia's greatest resource - our people, our human capital, in all its richness and diversity.
48. This is the spirit of 1Malaysia, the programme I initiated early in my time as Prime Minister to emphasise harmony and national unity. True patriots will work with us in this spirit to secure our common future. They will celebrate Malaysia's successes, not scaremonger and talk the country down. True patriots will not try to

score cheap points, but will join us to discuss bringing greater transparency and accountability to our democracy and public institutions.

49. True patriots know that responsible leadership is about doing what is right for our long-term future, rather than airing sensational and baseless claims for short-term gains that do nothing for the rakyat.

50. I am confident that this is the kind of leadership the vast majority of Malaysians want, and will support going forward. In this way we will honour the memory of Tunku Abdul Rahman, our Bapa Kemerdekaan - a man whose generosity of spirit, combined with a determination to fight for all Malaysians, makes him an enduring example for all who have followed him.

51. Let no one doubt: I will continue to serve and lead this nation in that spirit, and we will overcome whatever challenges we face today, for I want to secure, as your Prime Minister, a better Malaysia for all.

Thank you.

Wabillahi taufik walhidayah.

Wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.

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