

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE OPENING XXIST WORLD ROAD CONGRESS
AT DEWAN MERDEKA, PUTRA WORLD TRADE CENTRE, KUALA LUMPUR
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Firstly, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting the Prime Minister of Malaysia this afternoon to share his thoughts on the road industry and to declare open this congress. Unfortunately, due to his other commitments, the Prime Minister is unable to avail himself here. However, he has sent his good wishes and asked me to deliver his speech.

Ladies and gentlemen

2. I wish to bid a warm welcome or 'selamat datang' to all the distinguished participants, especially to those from overseas.

3. I would like to congratulate piarc for their continued efforts to organise this world road congress scheduled once in 4 years.

4. Although Malaysia had in the past hosted conferences related to infrastructure including road engineering, this congress is beyond any doubt the ultimate forum for those involved in the sector. As in the past, the Kuala Lumpur congress will enable participants to deliberate on issues related to the road sector.

5. This congress represents an important forum where the government sector, private organisations as well as individual persons have the freedom to express and discuss problems concerning roads. I hope the reports and technical discussions during the congress will enhance further the technical progress in the road industry.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. In the past one year, the Malaysian economy is moving through a difficult phase, affecting various sectors. With our prudent policy and support of the people, Malaysia is able to come out of this economic downturn further than the other Asian countries. Our formula for economic recovery was initially being subject to ridicule by many quarters but they had been proved wrong. We are proud to say that Malaysia's ability to overcome the economic problem can be attributed to a strong government committed to be fair especially in a multi racial society. Malaysia has been recognised as a country that achieved economic growth with distribution. We are now preparing ourselves to face the new challenges in the coming millennium.

7. In striving to be a developed nation by the year 2020, the new emphasis has been on capital-intensive industry and the use of sophisticated technology and accelerated industrialisation. Malaysia will continue to improve its economic foundation in terms of quantity and quality of human resources, development of indigenous R&D, and adequate supply of modern infrastructure. This nation is gearing itself towards producing products and services for the global market.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Malaysia today has over 16,000 kms of federal roads and some 50,000 kms of state roads. Over the last decade, our road network has steadily been increasing at a rate of about 10 per cent per annum. Our country's present thrust in road development is towards expanding capacity as well as upgrading the quality of travel. With the implementation of our privatisation policy, we are able to undertake road projects and completed them in a shorter time frame. These projects have been successful in overcoming various infrastructural bottlenecks. At the same time, in consonance with the national development policy, the rural road network is being further expanded and upgraded to ensure a balance between groups in the economy and to support the integration of the various regions. Emphasis is also being placed on employing new technologies in construction, improving road service level and road safety.

9. The successful completion of several large-scale projects recently, including the Petronas Twin Towers, KL International Airport, light rail transit and especially the north-south expressway, has provided invaluable lessons and experiences on project implementation technology, road construction and privatisation. This success has nurtured a pool of Malaysian road professionals from both the public and private sectors who have drawn the attention of many overseas nations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. A transport policy needs to strike a balance between three key issues - the environment, the economy and users preferences. Governments in developed countries generally believe that a change in emphasis is needed to recognise the long-term consequences of high road-traffic growth. For them, the era of constructing and undertaking big highway projects has ended. The new thinking and trend is to manage what they have, instead of building more.

11. On the other hand, for many of us in developing countries, road construction projects and programmes need to be enhanced so as to enable greater participation of rural folks in the socio-economic development. Roads and other modes of transportation represent the key to enhance quality of life. However, it must be recognised that construction of roads on its own must not be taken in isolation. More often than not, the road is not the only investment needed and as such, complementary investments are equally important to bring about the desired impact.

12. The dilemma facing many developing countries is to balance development and environment. Construction of roads, especially new roads, will directly or indirectly create environmental effect. For us in Malaysia, sustainable development with the impending emphasis on the protection of environment has been given priority in our development strategy. We subscribe to the various environmental declarations.

13. The Langkawi declaration 1989 endorsed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government calls on the international community to join them in their endeavour to globally tackle the serious deterioration of the environment. The need to protect the environment should be viewed in a balanced perspective and due emphasis be accorded to promoting economic growth and sustainable development, including eradication of poverty, meeting basic needs, and enhancing the quality of life. The responsibility for ensuring a better environment should be equitably shared and the ability of developing countries to respond be taken into account.

14. At the Rio Summit in 1992, we agreed that the rich must be prepared to pay the poor countries in order that they will not cut down their trees for development. But as we all know, their contribution is not forthcoming. Yet they relentlessly condemn those who have little choice but to exploit their few natural resources.

15. The Langkawi declaration is especially significant to Malaysia as it provides government support for activities related to the conservation of significant areas of virgin forest and other protected natural habitats. In Malaysia, adequate measures are taken to minimise environmental damage in major development projects, including road construction. In the construction of the on-going second east-west highway, for instance, about 5 percent of the total cost of the project has been dedicated to environmental protection work. However, despite the various measures taken during the massive clearing of land for the project, some level of environmental degradation did occur. This would be as expected, as otherwise there would not be any development.

16. We must all be positive and willing to play our role in seeking the way forward for a sustainable solution to our development needs. I am glad to know that this congress will deliberate on these environmental issues related to road development and propose an environment policy for the world road association.

Ladies and gentlemen,

17. Road accidents resulting in deaths and injuries has become a major issue as a result of improvements in the road system. The situation is especially bad in developing countries where it has been estimated that 350,000 people die in road accidents every year. It represents 70 per cent of those killed on the roads throughout the world.

18. Road accidents have now become a major concern in Malaysia. Our statistics have revealed an increase in the number of deaths due to road accidents from 4,048 deaths in 1990 to 6,302 deaths in 1997. Such a depressing trend has motivated the Malaysian government to set a target of 30 percent reduction in deaths due to road accidents by the year 2000. We believe that road accidents not only cause economic loss to the country, but also immeasurable sufferings and loss of life.

19. Thus in Malaysia, a serious concerted effort by both governmental as well as non-governmental organisations has been launched to address road safety issues by adopting the 3e's approach, that is education, engineering and enforcement. A newly accepted concept of road safety auditing has been made mandatory by the Malaysian government for all new road projects implemented since 1996. It is my sincere hope that road safety auditing will contribute towards enhancing requirements and awareness among road professionals on road safety.

20. It was estimated that more than RM 6 billion is lost each year in Malaysia due to road accidents alone. This figure includes each victim's projected future income, productivity and other related services given by the authorities for every road mishap. We need to reduce this loss further. I am happy to note that there was a slight reduction in the total number of accident cases last year. It has been achieved through the various road safety campaigns organised by the government together with non-governmental organisations and improvement to accident prone stretches of road. However, responsibility for road safety should not be shouldered by the authorities alone. The public should inculcate road safety values as a way of life.

21. In view of the emphasis given by the government of Malaysia on road safety, I am glad that this congress continues to work on ways to curb the rising death toll due to road accidents. Everyone will undoubtedly benefit from the road safety manual that will be produced at the end of this congress.

Ladies and gentlemen,

22. Roads represent a huge accumulated investment of the nation which must be preserved and maintained carefully for future generations. The philosophy of good maintenance must be revisited and the notion that prevention is to take priority over repair must be given due consideration. With limited financial resources allocated for road maintenance, road engineers should concentrate on identifying technology that can extend the service life of road infrastructure. It should be emphasised that money spent on maintenance should be treated as an investment. Hence, there is a need to introduce the concept of life-cycle costing before making decisions about maintenance expenditure. For this, maintenance management systems will be required to enable a rational formulation of standards and intervention levels. I am pleased to note that a new software for investigating road investment choices named hdm-4, which is a product of research coordinated by piarc, will be launched during this congress.

Ladies and gentlemen,

23. The world road association plays an important role to improve international technical cooperation and fostering progress in road engineering. I has a noble objective which can ultimately contribute to the welfare of societies all over the world by collaborating technical research in the field of road and transport engineering and disseminating them through this congresses. I am pleased to note that participants from 93 piarc member countries are present here in Kuala Lumpur. Having such an international representation will enable the dissemination of road technologies and innovations for the enrichment of member countries be more meaningful.

24. As such, it is not surprising the Malaysia has chosen to be an active member of piarc. This congress is extremely useful to all of us. The exchange of experience will give us the opportunity to solve important problems more efficiently. We are living in an age where international cooperation is becoming increasingly important for the progress of mankind and communications must be organised on a international scale.

25. I therefore share the pleasure of the Malaysian government in staging such a prestigious congress here in Kuala Lumpur.

26. The staging of the xx1st world road congress represents another significant landmark for Kuala Lumpur in the international community. Malaysia's excellent convention facilities, support services and competitive rates make it an ideal location to host international events.

27. It is both an honour and a challenge as we Malaysians prepare and look forward to host other world class events.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

28. In line with world road congress tradition, Pos Malaysia Berhad will launch a set of stamps to commemorate this historical occasion. For this, I would like to thank Y.Bhg. Tan Sri Dato' Zainol Mahmood, the Executive Chairman of Pos Malaysia Berhad, for producing the stamps and giving me the opportunity to launch it.

29. In conclusion, I would like to thank all those who have contributed towards the organisation of this congress. To all participants who have come from near and far, I wish you all a fruitful and enjoyable congress.

30. With that note, I have great pleasure in declaring the xx1st world road congress officially opened.

Thank you.