

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PENANG TOWARDS
THE NEW MILLENIUM
AT THE EQUATORIAL HOTEL, PENANG
28 JUNE 1999**

YAB Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon Chief Minister Of Penang

Ybhg. Tan Sri Jeffry Cheah Chairman, Tabung Amanah Asli

Ybhg. Tan Sri-Tan Sri, Dato-Dato

Honoured Guests, Ladies And Gentlemen

A very good morning to all of you. At the outset, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to address this distinguished audience. I also wish to congratulate the penang state government for its foresight in organising the conference. The two day conference will seek to shed light on future trends and directions. I hope to share with you some thoughts of an "anak Pulau Pinang" on issues we see as critical for our future direction.

2. When proclaiming our targets for vision 2020, which has become the guiding framework for our country for the next 21 years, Prime Minister Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said, and I quote:

"A nation that is fully developed along all dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of national unity and social cohesion, in terms of our economy, in terms of social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. Vision 2020 outlines the challenges that we will face as a nation as we aspire to become a fully developed country. It also recapitulates the principle we have to adhere to ensure that our intrinsic foundations are solid as we proceed to the next step in facing the challenges of the new millennium.

4. As a matter of background, allow me to trace the arduous journey Malaysia has taken to reach the stage we are at. As a young nation which gained independence in 1957, our first task was to forge unity amongst the races. We had many hurdles to cross but the blot in our history when racial riots occurred in 1969 shocked us out of our lethargy and it was then that the realisation sank in. To ensure economic justice, the country had to expand the economic cake and make sure that no single race felt left out or discriminated against in the new Malaysia.

5. In this direction, the government introduced the new economic policy in 1970. It was a policy that was controversial and which some analysts described then as sowing the seeds of destruction. On hindsight, we can laugh at the many prophets of

doom. But as someone who was involved at the highest levels of decision making then, let me assure you it was not at all easy to convince people at that time. But we persevered because we believed then, as we do now, that we are masters of our own destiny. If we believed, we could.

6. The NEP succeeded in allowing the ethnic bumiputera community that had been sidelined in commerce and in education to begin laying the foundation for the community's advance in all fields.

7. Today, the NEP is lauded as a great Malaysian success and many nations have come to study our model to be implemented in their own countries. The NEP is the cornerstone in creating solidarity and erasing suspicions amongst the major races. It is the foundation that we have utilized to progress to the next step in nation building.

8. Having laid this foundation, the government began to introduce ideas and policies to build on the unity we had forged as a nation. It was in the early 1980s that under the guidance of Dr. Mahathir, the government introduced a series of policies to ensure Malaysia became a fully developed nation in the true sense of the word.

9. A nation must have values and the most important value, as espoused in the 1982 campaign which still holds true today, is to have an administration which is clean, efficient and trustworthy. Only an administration which is trusted and which is efficient and clean can motivate private sector development.

10. After that, we introduced the concept of leadership by example. Yes, I agree that we have not been orthodox in many of the things we have done. But a recent months have shown, and as our records show, we have done well. Our NEP has done well for the country and for its people. And our measures to overcome the economic crisis that hit Asia, although initially laughed at and ridiculed by many, have proven to be good for us. Even our critics are now acknowledging that. Dr. Mahathir, ladies and gentlemen, has shown the highest levels of leadership, and he has led a government that believes in him to surmount the insurmountable. His leadership has been an example to all Malaysians.

11. In 1983, we introduced the look east policy. The policy did not mean we wanted to be a copy-cat of everything Japanese and South Korean. It meant that we should look at the positive aspects of these countries, the work ethics of their people and their industry, and emulate these to ensure Malaysia, too, became a successful trading manufacturing and industrial nation. It meant that Malaysians, too should strive for excellence and move a further step up the ladder towards developed nation status.

12. After that, the government introduced vision 2020. We are still two decades away from our target. The economic crisis has caused a glitch but we are confident that if we maintain our belief, we can again catch up and reach our target.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. The results are here for all of us to see. There have been vast strides taken in our move towards achieving vision 2020. Yes, I admit that not everything is perfect. There are problems that have to be overcome. There has to be re-structuring, there has to be greater transparency, there has to be changes in attitudes.

14. Change in itself means that change is not static. We have been making changes all through our status as an independent nation. Reform is not a new word in our dictionary. A nation will learn from its mistakes just as a human being will not want to repeat blunders. We have always tried to learn and improve. The long walk towards nationhood cannot be achieved by making one giant leap. It is an arduous journey but we in government try our best to make that journey as pleasant as possible.

15. The United States declaration of independence was in 1776. Almost a hundred years later, the country was torn by a civil war and almost 200 years later, in the 1960s, it was still discriminating against blacks as evidenced by the bussing policy and the segregation in schools. The United States, after more than 200 years of independence, still suffered the racial riots following the Rodney King incident. While we are not trying to belittle the progress made in human rights in the United States and the great steps taken to create a more equal society there, we just want to point out that when dealing with human beings, you cannot wipe out prejudices and biases overnight.

16. In Malaysia, we realise the need for good governance and transparency at all levels, especially in the public and private sectors. This aspect of management and monitoring will, I believe, be the basis for these sectors to develop their resources efficiently and effectively. Responsible management of resources will ensure sustainability economically, ecologically as well as socially.

17. As I mentioned earlier, the process of good governance was stressed in the clean, efficient and trustworthy campaign. This was followed up by vigorous emphasis on quality and performance and the streamlining of government structure, procedures and policies. Various measures including adoption of desk files and manual of operating procedures and client charters were instituted to ensure that the public at large have easier access into the government machinery and understand policies and procedures.

18. The leadership by example campaign was aimed at creating leaders, whose value system would be emulated by followers and this would have the "anticipated spread effect". The current drive for ISO 9000 certification within the government reflects this commitment to quality and good governance.

19. In ensuring good governance, the recent steps by the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, the Securities Commission and Bank Negara to monitor activities more closely and emphasise the need for more public disclosure further punctuate the actions of the government.

20. In the private sector, good governance goes beyond the financial aspects. There needs to be continued and greater social responsibility and commitment to a process of continuous improvement which gives the customer value for money. An understanding of the latest developments in information technology, use of environmental friendly materials and substances, respect for human resource and cultural bias all have a role to play in the entire value of a product or service to the global market.

21. Good governance in both the public and private sectors will thus enhance confidence and improve competitiveness in the face of challenges arising out of increased globalisation. The government has shown its commitment to the

development of information technology and to e-government. As we continue to develop in this area, we will ensure greater incorporation of good governance into government and to society at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

22. Allow me to venture a little into what I envisage for my home state, Penang, in the new millennium. Penang is known as the pearl of the orient. Since the Majapahit empire and since its "official" founding in 1786, Penang has been a major trade and commercial centre for the region. It has built on its position and is certainly one of the most progressive states in Malaysia, having enjoyed good growth rates for the last two decades.

23. Penang must continue to build on its strengths, taking into account the requirements of the I.T. age. It has its own multi-media corridor and it should continue to develop this to keep ahead of the challenges and increasing competition in the region. One area which I would like to suggest that the Penang government look into is urban renewal and urban re- development.

24. We have many reminders of those early days of glory. Buildings like the Kapitan Kling Mosque which was donated by an Indian Muslim captain of commerce; the Khoo Kongsi; the quaint, old-time trading houses facing the ferry terminal and the many buildings belonging to charitable organisations which line Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah and the Leith Street and Weld Quay areas.

25. Penang is a beautiful state which has retained a lot of its charm and mystique. Its waterfront, its beaches, its old buildings, its food and its natural beauty continue to be tourist attractions. The government has made it a policy to make tourism one of the biggest revenue earners for the country and Penang is well placed to secure a big chunk of the tourism dollars. Penang is our home. And just like our own house, we have to maintain it to ensure that it is well kept. We must therefore ensure that our natural treasures, which in the case of Penang are its history and its natural beauty, are well maintained.

26. A lot of progress has been made. Economically, Penang has become an industrial powerhouse. Manufacturing has provided jobs and income for the people of Penang and neighbouring states for the last three decades. Tourism has seen beach and town hotels sprouting like mushrooms. However, we cannot rest on our laurels. We have to look forward to meet future challenges.

27. The economic downturn has slowed down many programmes we had for Penang. But the slowdown does not mean we have to sit and do nothing. It has given us the time to plan carefully. Now that we are on the road to recovery, we can return to the good old days of growth with greater insight and experience.

28. If we maintain our culture of hard work and diligent planning, and subscribe to the ethics which I mentioned earlier, the glory years will return. On Penang Island, we are restricted by availability of space. Therefore, we have to make the best of what we have.

29. As I said earlier, a culture of maintenance is very important. We have to keep our streets clean, our beaches clear of rubbish and at the same time, ensure that we take full advantage of our existing treasures. The environment is a treasure that will

be lost forever if we allow it to be degraded.

30. In many harbour cities around the world, we have seen sea fronts being beautified and turned into major tourist attractions. We can see from the famous examples of fisherman's wharf in San Francisco, the Victoria and Albert Waterfront in Cape Town, Darling Harbour in Sydney, Boat Quay in Singapore. These areas were once full of dilapidated godowns and shady reputations. But today, they are among the most visited places in the world.

31. Penang has a famous history as one of the main ports of call in Asia in the 18th, 19th century & up to the later part of the 20th century. Many tourists arrive in Penang across the channel from Butterworth. The first thing they see is the harbour front as they arrive on the Island.

32. It is one of the most charming sights one can see in the whole country. The smell of salt and diesel, old buildings, the clock tower and the magic of a harbour which has seen seamen from all over the world making it their port of call. But as they get closer, they see that many of the buildings are dilapidated; there is rubbish choking up near Weld Quay; and the smell is not so pleasant.

33. While we pride ourselves on our natural heritage, at the same time, we have to look forward. The people in Weld Quay have been living in squalor for many years. It is understandable that they do not want to move out of where they have lived for years. Yet, is that a legacy they want to leave behind for their children and grand children? Urban renewal and urban re-development is a concept that has been successful all over the world. People often fear change but change can be better. Let us dream. Let us try to imagine a new Penang with its old world charm retained.

34. As the ferry comes in from Butterworth, crammed with local and foreign tourists, they see a splendid harbour waterfront, devoid of rubbish. They see quaint old buildings with rich histories, where the big shipping companies had and still have their offices. They see barter traders from Myanmar and China and Thailand and Indonesia, unloading their goods of salted fish, onions and farm produce. They see the local businessmen haggling with their foreign friends, trying to sell them nutmegs, batik and local Malaysian produce.

35. Further down, the Swettenham and Church Street piers have been converted into a low-rise mall and the godowns have been repainted and re-furbished, housing restaurants selling nasi kandar, char koay teow, mee goreng to sushi, pizza and the finest gourmet food. There are shops selling nutmegs and belacan. There are shops selling spices like the Spice Market of old. There are shops selling batik and cloth like the Piccadilly Bazaar of Penang Road. There are pedestrians milling around with their children, taking a slow walk to Fort Cornwallis and Padang Kota.

36. If we close our eyes for just one moment, we will see the hustle and bustle of the old port city of Georgetown. The people will have new source of tourist dollars and this will fuel further development. Businessmen and petty traders will benefit from the new business environment created out of the new ambience.

37. A new coastal highway would link Weld Quay (already approved many years ago but held up because of financial problems) to Gelugor. The people in Weld Quay will be in new housing estates, living with all the modern amenities to bring up their children and future generations.

38. As the tourists disembark, they will move on towards Chinatown. The famous thieves market of old with its knick-knacks in Chulia street, the Nasi Kandar stalls, the intriguing Kapitan Kling mosque, the goddess of mercy temple in Pitt street, the famous E&O hotel, the narrow side lanes with their ancient treasure troves - all these would be bustling with economic activity.

39. This is a dream we all can share and realise. Of course, sometimes, there is resistance to change. But we have seen over the last 18 years how our beloved Prime Minister has brought changes in attitude, changes in our economy from agro-based towards industrialisation, changes in mind set so much so that now "Malaysia boleh" has become a rallying cry to try and achieve what we never thought we could.

40. I would like the state government and the people of Penang to think about the future, about urban renewal, about information technology, about good work ethics, about transparency and good governance. Let us not resist for the sake of resisting. Let us think of the benefits we will derive rather than the discomfort of adapting to change.

41. We have reached a stage in our independence where we have learnt to live with each other comfortably, in unity and in harmony. Let us build on this for the larger good of society and the larger good of Penang and the nation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

42. The new millennium will bring new challenges and I am sure as you deliberate, new ideas will be thrown up. I wish you a successful conference.

Thank you.