

**SPEECH BY  
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI  
AT THE OPENING OF THE PRIME COLLEGE CAMPUS  
AT PRIME COLLEGE, SUBANG JAYA  
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1. Terlebih dahulu saya ingin mengucapkan terima kasih kepada Datin Kee Ming-Yuet, Presiden Prime College, dan juga pihak Prime College kerana sudi menjemput saya untuk merasmikan kampus baru kolej pada hari ini. Saya amat berbesar hati dengan jemputan tuan-tuan dan puan-puan.

2. Saya masih ingat lagi kepada tahun 1986, hampir lima belas tahun yang lepas. Pada masa itu saya turut diberikan penghormatan sebagai Menteri Pendidikan untuk merasmikan pembukaan Prime College di kampusnya yang pertama, iaitu bangunan yang bertapak di jalan Klang Lama. Kini saya berpeluang lagi untuk melawat Prime College, tetapi pada kali ini di Subang Jaya pula, di kampus yang baru.

3. Saya amat bergembira apabila diberi tahu bahawa Prime College akan membuka kampus baru ini bagi menampung keperluan sebuah institusi pengajian tinggi yang kian maju dan membesar. Datin Kee dan pihak Prime College harus berbangga dengan pencapaian ini. Tahniah diucapkan kepada Datin Kee serta Prime College pada keseluruhannya atas pembukaan kampus baru di Subang Jaya ini. Mudah-mudahan kampus baru ini akan dapat membantu Prime College dalam memainkan peranannya sebagai sebuah institusi pengajian tinggi swasta yang berwibawa, yang boleh memberi peluang-peluang pendidikan yang berkualiti dengan lebih baik lagi.

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. Firstly, allow me to thank Datin Kee Ming-Yuet, founder and President of Prime College, for her kind invitation for me to officiate at the opening of Prime's new campus. I am sure that everyone present here today will agree with me when I say that the new Prime College campus is a testament to the hard work and determination of the people at Prime College. Datin Kee, to you and your staff, congratulations on your success.

5. Prime College stands as an example of how private education, especially at the tertiary level, has developed in Malaysia. The government encouraged the establishment and growth of private colleges and institutions of higher education initially to complement the existing public universities by meeting the demand of a rapidly growing student population intending to pursue tertiary education. These institutions have since become synonymous with delivering quality education and are now seen as an integral part of the education system in Malaysia.

6. When I officiated at Prime College's previous campus at Old Klang Road in 1986, as the then Minister of Education, there were less than 50 private institutions of higher learning. Today there are 591 private colleges and institutions and eight established private universities with a combined student population of more than 210,000.

7. This rapid development of private education has provided local students with the option of obtaining high quality education in Malaysia without having the tremendous

financial burden from pursuing equivalent courses abroad. The government's policy of promoting private institution of higher learning was also welcome relief to students from Malaysia and the region during the Asian economic crisis when many regional currencies were depreciated thus considerably increasing the cost of foreign education.

8. What began as an initiative to cater for an increasing demand for higher education which could not be met by the public universities alone, private education has now become a success story in its own right. Over the past fifteen years, private colleges in Malaysia have been able to develop their courses and programmes to an international standard attracting students from all over the region and producing outstanding graduates with excellent academic attainment. This has been achieved, in part, because of the strategic partnerships that have been forged by local private colleges with some of the top universities from around the world.

9. There are now 60 private colleges in Malaysia that offer "twinning" programmes in which students are able to complete part or all of their university education in Malaysia while obtaining prestigious degrees from outstanding foreign universities. Prime is one such college that has strategic partners in offering a variety of degree programmes. The success of such academic cooperation reflects the high premium that Malaysia puts on the quality of education we expect and also the confidence that many foreign institutions have in our private colleges, especially in terms of the quality of teaching that is required to maintain the high standards demanded of such degrees.

10. In addition to local-foreign collaboration in offering "twinning" programmes, various foreign universities have now established branch campuses in Malaysia. The growing presence of various foreign academic institutions in Malaysia underlines our objective of becoming a regional centre for educational excellence.

11. The government is committed to attracting more foreign partners in working together with both public and private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia to increase the availability of tertiary education not just at the undergraduate level, but also at the post-graduate level. Malaysian students have long traveled to the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and other countries to further their studies. Foreign universities will therefore be aware that there is a critical mass of students from Malaysia who will continue to demand for the education that they provide. It is therefore, in their interests to explore the possibility of locating here in order to directly tap into our pool of students.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. Malaysia is currently in the process of formulating a knowledge economy masterplan that is to serve as a blueprint for our transition from a manufacturing-based production economy to a competitive knowledge-based economy. I believe the success of such a transformation will hinge on our ability to develop and strengthen what has become the most important factor of production - human capital, especially in terms of knowledge.

13. In anticipating the challenges of the future, the Malaysian government has undertaken ambitious projects to develop physical infrastructure conducive for further economic growth. This includes transportation infrastructure in the form of new airports, ports and highways; administrative infrastructure as seen in the

development of the new seat of government, Putrajaya; and technological infrastructure as showcased by the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

14. We are now faced with the task of populating our country with skilled, innovative and creative workers who will be the catalyst in moving the entire Malaysian economy up the value-added chain through the utilisation of the physical infrastructure available. The Prime Minister recently announced strategic objectives to facilitate the creation of a knowledge economy. At the heart of the plan was the need to develop human capital through a first-class education system. The government's target of reducing the number of low-knowledge workers depends on the emergence of a talented pool of young knowledge workers who will lead the sectoral shift from manufacturing to information and communication technology, and other high-tech industries.

15. Such domestic capacity building is increasingly pertinent in the globalised marketplace. Malaysian graduates will have to compete with the best of the best in a fiercely competitive job market. The failure to produce graduates who are able to succeed in such an environment will be to the grave detriment of the entire country.

16. Of particular importance is the urgent need for Malaysia to increase the number of scientists and engineers who will form the catalytic backbone in our transition to a competitive knowledge economy. In order for our high-tech companies and research institutions to flourish we need extraordinary scholars and visionary technopreneurs. Under the 7th Malaysia plan, the target for upper secondary school enrolment into the science stream was set at 60%. In 1995, the figure was just over 21%. Today, we have yet to meet the target.

17. Overcoming this problem will be a main priority of our education system in the medium term. I believe that, firstly, secondary schools must actively encourage enrolment into the science stream. In particular, excellence and aptitude in mathematics, especially, must be fostered and harnessed at a very young age so that these subjects remain appealing at a later stage. Parents and teachers must not merely dispel the fear that maths and science are hard, but they must help students realise the necessity of these skills and knowledge.

18. In addition to the cultivation of scientific minds through the schools system, attractive degree programmes and courses should be made widely available in the Malaysian education system. In this regard Prime has appropriately set its focus by undertaking 3+0 arrangements in all four disciplines of engineering - civil, chemical, mechanical, and electrical and electronic. This will allow Prime students to spend their entire university career in Malaysia without having to complete their courses abroad. Such programmes make engineering and science-based degrees more accessible and affordable for Malaysians and will contribute to our efforts in encouraging more students to choose such options.

19. The creation a thriving scientific community is crucial for our future progress. I believe that a country's competitive edge will increasingly come from its ability to research, innovate and develop new technologies and scientific techniques. If Malaysia is to realise its quantum leap into the digital era, a critical mass of scientists and researchers are a pre- requisite. I urge the education sector to step up their efforts in fulfilling this necessity, without which we will be left in a wake of technological breakthrough that we will be ill-equipped to understand and comprehend.

Ladies and gentlemen,

20. The creation of an education system is never complete if the process of acquiring knowledge is not contextualised for the students in practical terms. Often students are encouraged to pursue degrees because that is what their parents or teachers desire. The knowledge that they, themselves, acquire is not given real-life relevance and thus, the student's perception of his potential is skewed.

21. Many developed countries have a proactive tradition of encouraging students in colleges and universities to take up work placements and internships to provide key work experience which can give them practical relevance with reference to their degree. The job itself will teach students self-confidence and, most importantly, they will be able to understand the application of their knowledge.

22. Prime College has been able to leverage on its business contacts, especially through its parent company Kumpulan Emas, to provide students with a chance to obtain relevant work experience such an initiative is to be lauded and I hope other private colleges and companies, who have yet to develop such programmes, will begin a coordinated work placement scheme where students are able to contextualise their education in an industrial environment that is related to their fields of study.

23. I believe this link between education and work is increasingly important in Malaysia. If we are to succeed in creating a knowledge based economy in which the best ideas can flourish, we must generate an environment of innovation by allowing students to explore their talents fully.

24. Silicon valley, for example, grew organically in large part due to the conducive atmosphere created by the presence of Stanford University. Similarly, the Silicon Valley that has sprung up in Manhattan is propelled by the students and researchers of N.Y.U. and Columbia. There are also comparable clusters mushrooming around Harvard and M.I.T. as well as in Cambridge, England. The success of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) as the central vehicle that can propel Malaysia into the new economy will largely depend on the local varsity community and its ability to produce dynamic and analytical minds. I would like to therefore see a synergy where the two can feed off each other; where the start-ups of Cyberjaya offer students of our institutes of higher education work experience, thereby creating a pool of experienced knowledge workers from which to recruit in the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

25. The continued development of private institutions of higher learning must take into account the need to make private education accessible to students who have hitherto not seen it as a viable option. Although many of our private colleges have been established by private sector concerns, the modus operandi in this sector must be the provision of high quality and accessible education, and not profit.

26. Companies who are behind our private institutions of higher learning have undertaken their commitments - first and foremost - as a social responsibility, by complementing the government's provision of secondary and tertiary education.

27. Private education should, therefore, not be seen as the domain of the the rich

and privileged. In this regard, I would like to encourage efforts by certain private colleges in awarding merit-based and need-based scholarships and hope that this will be a sectoral norm rather than a few exceptions. I would also like to urge more private sector companies to formulate scholarship schemes to local universities and colleges, thus further linking education with the development of human resources for relevant industries.

28. Private educational institutions in Malaysia will also have to synergise with one another to develop a cohesive and coordinated higher education structure. Collaboration among private colleges must be encouraged. Again private sector concerns that have established private colleges must not view their involvement as business ventures. To do so will result in unhealthy competition among colleges for students who may be seen as mere consumers. Private institutions of higher education and their corporate parents must work together to chart the strategic direction of private colleges in Malaysia. Common concerns such as developing core curriculums, cross-registration programmes and training a pool of dedicated private college lecturers should be looked into together for mutual benefit.

Ladies and gentlemen,

29. The American writer Mark Twain once said "don't let your schooling get in the way of your education". What he was referring to, I believe, is the need for young people to expose themselves to all manners of education. This includes both classroom curriculum and extra-curricular pursuits. A creative mind is not born out of rigid, regimented scholastic tuition rather it is the combination of an education system emphasising critical thinking and independent thought, and an environment in which students are encouraged to explore other interests, both physical and mental, in the process of creating broad-minded and innovative graduates.

30. The unfair stereotype of the diligent Asian student who excels scholastically, but does so at the expense of developing other interests must be dispelled. Private colleges will therefore have to provide not merely the curriculum and the teaching, but an overall educational experience. I am told that at the new Prime campus for instance, students are encouraged to participate in courses and activities offered by the college's on-site sister institutes, MSC International College and Summit International College, including speech, drama, photography and dance.

31. We want to promote Malaysia as a centre for academic excellence which offers varied cultural, sporting and life experiences in an international environment. Our institutions of learning should strive to attract students from all over the world and create a rich and diverse atmosphere which will encourage cultural understanding and tolerance in addition to academic excellence.

32. Malaysia's potential to be an educational melting pot where the best minds of the region pursue academic excellence is reflected in 22,849 foreign students that are currently studying at local educational establishments, of which 10,283 are attending private institutions of higher learning.

33. While encouraging the participation of foreign universities and students in the local education sector, we believe that it is important to root our private colleges and universities in values distinct to Malaysia. Our policy of making the study of Bahasa Melayu and Malay studies core courses in private colleges serves to emphasise on subjects which are taught at public institutions so as to not create a cultural divide

between the private college graduates and public university graduates. In addition we make it compulsory that Muslim students take Islamic studies while non- Muslims have to attend moral education. We believe that these courses are necessary in the dissemination of values which can complement scholastic success in strictly academic fields.

Ladies and gentlemen,

34. Once again I would like to congratulate Prime College for the opening of their new campus which serves as a milestone in their history of providing excellent education.

35. I hope that Prime, along with the other private institutions of higher learning, will continue to work with the government to realise our common objectives of developing a dynamic and talented pool of graduates to strengthen our human capital, and of promoting Malaysia as the premier destination for quality education in the region.

36. I hereby declare the new Prime College campus open.

Thank you.