

**SPEECH BY**  
**YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI**  
**AT LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF THE MALAYSIAN NATIONAL**  
**DIGITAL LIBRARY INITIATIVE**  
**AT CYBERVIEW LODGE, CYBERJAYA**  
**27 JUNE 2000**

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Terlebih dahulu saya ingin mengucapkan terima kasih kepada Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC) kerana telah menjemput saya untuk menghadiri majlis ini dan seterusnya melancarkan projek perintis perpustakaan Digital Kebangsaan Malaysia atau yang ingin lebih dikenali sebagai MYLIB. Saya harap pelancaran projek seperti ini akan dapat membantu kita untuk merintis jalan ke arah penubuhan satu masyarakat berilmu pengetahuan yang mengukuhkan lagi ekonomi dan daya saing Malaysia di era globalisasi ini.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by thanking MDC for their kind invitation for me to officiate at this event today. The Malaysian National Digital Library initiative (MYLIB) is a fine example of a proactive project undertaken to equip Malaysia in our endeavour to create a knowledge economy. Most encouraging is the smart partnership that has been forged by MDC, the National Library and Telekom Malaysia in responding to the government's call for all sectors of society to become digitised, efficient and accessible to facilitate our transition into a k-economy.

A knowledge economy is more than just the development of the information technology sector. It is an economy in which all sectors prioritise the utilisation of knowledge, and use knowledge as the principal resource in value creation. A knowledge economy can only be realised if the pursuit of knowledge is ingrained as a salient characteristic of all Malaysians. We must instill a culture of learning, gathering resources and analyzing. In a k-economy, the faculty of thinking will distinguish one individual from another, and innovation will dictate the tenor of competition among firms.

Therefore, one of the most important tasks of shaping and building a k-economy is managing information. If information is managed effectively, it will ensure greater access to the public, thus enabling more broad-based creation and dissemination of knowledge. Although, as I said, a k-economy is not restricted to the development of the I.T. sector, information and communication technologies have become the most important tool in information collation and knowledge creation.

The internet, for example, will be regarded as having as great an impact on human civilisation as the printing press. Both inventions democratised knowledge by making information accessible to a wider audience. Sciences, philosophy, the arts, religion and basic literacy was no longer the preserve of the royal courts after the introduction of the movable type, first in China, then in Europe. The masses which had previously depended on knowledge trickling down from the learned elite and the clergy were given the opportunity to learn and interpret for themselves. Similarly, the internet will allow the entire global population to tap into a rich, deep and diverse treasury of information which hitherto has been accessible to a smaller audience of scholars, researchers governments, and those with considerable financial resources.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The role of the public repository of knowledge has traditionally been undertaken by libraries. These institutions have empowered the public the world over by providing quality and affordable access to all types of information. In this new digital age of I.T., libraries must adapt accordingly by embracing and using new technologies to make information even more accessible and user-friendly.

I believe the successful convergence of library institutions and information and communication technologies can create the backbone of a knowledge economy. As Malaysia increases the provision of computer hardware through the smart school initiative, rural e-community projects and various fiscal incentive measures, what becomes necessary is a national store of knowledge that can collate, categorise and disseminate information to the public. Without such a repository, computers in class rooms, for example, will not be utilised to their full potential. Without a one-stop-shop knowledge bank, Malaysians will be swimming in an ocean of information on the internet. I believe that the MYLIB pilot project is an excellent start to building a national information and data portal that provides up-to-date, in-depth and efficiently sorted resource material for all Malaysians.

The problem that we have faced in Malaysia has been the absence of an effective and regularly updated national data bank. The public still find it difficult to conveniently access government figures and statistics, information on private companies, research papers and academic journals. A national digital library will provide the public with a gateway to all of these resources from their home and offices. Furthermore, unlike traditional brick and mortar libraries, a digital library will permit the sharing of resources - just because someone else is reading a particular journal or book does not mean that the user of the digital library has to wait for the material to be returned.

In the absence of a national data bank, Malaysia has often had to rely on foreign sources for data about our own country. Our failure to adequately store and disseminate information has resulted in many instances in which Malaysians have had to buy information about Malaysia from foreign analysts, research institutions, publishers and newspapers. In addition, we find that local content development in the form of research papers and other such scholastic contributions are being printed, published and distributed overseas. Malaysians end up having to pay a hefty premium to buy these works.

If we want to encourage local content development in all fields we must prepare a excellent medium through which these materials will be disseminated to a wide audience and properly archived. As more and more information is being produced in multimedia format, we want to ensure that intellectual contributions by Malaysians are properly stored in an integrated national library network.

For example, to enhance the knowledge and information contained in their local collections, our libraries can embark on joint initiatives with universities and public and private archives to develop interactive multimedia resources on our local history, culture and traditions. There is a wealth of knowledge and information on our local history, culture and traditions that have not been documented in any printed form, let alone in digital multimedia. By producing such works in an interactive format and making them accessible to the world via the national digital library system, we will

be able to enhance the global community's understanding of our country. Therefore, the national digital library will serve, not only as a resource centre for Malaysians to tap into global information, but also as a reference point for the rest of the world to access all information and knowledge that is Malaysian.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the world tightens international legal standards for intellectual property rights, we will find that knowledge will become more and more expensive to obtain. If Malaysians have to buy information that we could ourselves have generated, we will be at a terrible disadvantage. Developing countries like Malaysia, find ourselves in a bind - while there is no question that we must implement intellectual property and copyright laws, we find that the exorbitant cost of information and knowledge tools that are produced in the west creates a formidable barrier to the creation of a k-economy.

My fear is that when resources, materials and multimedia tools are priced highly, this will lead to an exacerbation of the current global digital divide. The richer countries will continue to gain access to more, and the poorer countries will continue to access less. A first step in reversing such a situation would be through increasing local content development. Without generating our own research materials, software, electronic books and electronic periodicals we will continue to have to rely on costly foreign sources of information. I see the national digital library initiative as the first step in creating a knowledge infrastructure that can provide support to increased local content creation and dissemination.

In addition, we see that in developed societies, there exists an extensive system of libraries that have been set-up, many of them through generous contributions of individual philanthropists and organizations. Libraries in developed countries are well endowed with funds and resources because the public understand the importance of libraries in developing an informed, knowledge-based society. If Malaysia is serious about creating a k-economy we must all provide support to our library system - both in its traditional brick and mortar form or in the new virtual version.

I hope that such support will be forthcoming by both the public and private sectors especially in our efforts to develop the national digital library system. Indeed, both sectors should view their contribution to the community as one that would ultimately help in producing progressive thinking, creative and innovative individuals.

From the government's point of view, we regard this initiative as a facilitative project in creating a more transparent and responsive administration. The availability of a wider range of national data to the public can enhance public feedback and thus result in more informed and consultative policy decision making. I believe that for the national digital library initiative to be successful all government departments, private sector companies and community organisations should have knowledge managers with competencies in I.T. skills to collate information to be stored in our national digital network. Without contributions from these sectors, the initiative will fail to fulfill its objective of becoming a national digital repository of information.

The government will also continue its efforts to promote programmes to increase I.T. literacy and make available computer hard ware in rural areas. If the national digital library is to benefit and empower all Malaysians, each and every one of us must be provided with the facility to conveniently access this gateway. If I.T. infrastructure is

not rolled out to rural areas, for example, access to the reservoir of knowledge that will be made available will remain as exclusive and as elitist as before.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The MYLIB project, as a precursor to the national digital library system, is an important step towards transforming our society into a knowledge-based society. Therefore, each and every one of us - the public and private sector, companies and entrepreneurs, schools and universities, parents, teachers and students - have a role to play in ensuring the success of the project. By coming together and collaborating, we will help to enrich the minds of our people, enhance our skills and expertise, and contribute towards our transition into knowledge based society.

On that note, I would like to congratulate MDC for initiating this project and at the same time thank everyone especially Telekom Malaysia, the national library, the various content providers for their efforts and contribution in making this project a reality. Finally, I would like to wish this project great success. With this, it gives me great pleasure to launch the Malaysian national digital library initiative. Thank you.