

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE ZAID IBRAHIM AND CO ANNIVERSARY DINNER
AT KUALA LUMPUR
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Terlebih dahulu, saya ingin mengucapkan terima kasih kepada saudara Zaid Ibrahim kerana sudi menjemput saya dan isteri saya ke majlis ulangtahun ZICO, ataupun Zaid Ibrahim & Company, untuk bersama-sama saudara-saudari sekalian.

2. Sebenarnya, apabila saya menerima jemputan ini, saya tersentak seketika sebab setahu saya, ZICO adalah pemain bolasepak Brazil yang terkenal. Saya kenal Zaid Ibrahim tetapi tidak tahu bahawa beliau peminat bolasepak yang meminjam nama pemain antarabangsa itu untuk firma beliau. Nampaknya firma guaman beliau mencapai kejayaan sama seperti ZICO berjaya dalam bidang bolasepak.

3. It is a great pleasure to be given this opportunity to address such an august gathering of members of the judiciary, the bar and corporate leaders both from Malaysia and overseas to celebrate a milestone achievement.

4. Zaid Ibrahim, a son of a Malay farmer from Kelantan, and his partners have successfully transformed a one man legal firm to be the largest in the country in less than 15 years. It gives me special pride to see a local boy made good and I am delighted to be here tonight. Zaid Ibrahim's success, to me, also reflects the success of Malaysia in being able to provide opportunities to its citizens to succeed on the regional as well as international stage.

5. It is my hope that the partners and staff of ZICO will continue to give their best to ensure that the firm continues to grow and contribute to Malaysian society.

6. In Malaysia, we have chosen parliamentary democracy as our system of government because we believe in the will of the majority of our people. This system has, to a large extent, worked very well.

7. We have, throughout our history always had popularly elected governments. We have always had free and fair elections. Except for a brief period when parliament was held in abeyance after May 13, 1969, we have never had to suspend the normal operation of our laws. After almost 44 years of independence, we are a peaceful, prosperous country much admired by others.

8. Despite being a young nation populated by people of different races and religions, we have never forsaken our democratic principles, even in the difficult periods of our history. This is unlike most other nations that achieved independence after the Second World War. Many of these countries have seen authoritarian governments emerge from time to time to ensure public order, maintain territorial integrity or to quell sectarian or communal strife.

9. We have held fast to democratic principles even as the government of this country has been no less responsible for that most basic duty of any government - the maintenance of law and order.

10. While the government has never flinched from its responsibility to guarantee the stability of the country, it has always been careful to exercise its powers justly, responsibly and compassionately. In that regard, the government has always endeavoured to act within the bounds of the rule of law and the constitutional framework. We know that the people of this country will only accept executive powers, which curtail their rights and liberties if these powers are exercised in accordance with the law in exceptional circumstances to protect the public interest.

11. Rest assured that the government will continue to have the interests of the people at heart when exercising the vast powers at its disposal. We look upon these powers as being a heavy and burdensome trust conferred upon us by the people. In fulfilling our responsibilities under that trust, we pay close and constant attention to the feelings and aspirations of our people. We know that people change. Likewise laws and the way they are applied are also subject to the pressures of change. Nothing is cast in stone.

12. The government also pays a great deal of attention to the development and maintenance of the institutions that uphold law and order and the administration of justice. For much of our history, Malaysians have taken great pride in having an independent judiciary and a disciplined police force. It has therefore been disturbing to hear so many observers both from within and outside of the country casting aspersions on the integrity of the Malaysian judiciary and the standards of the police force.

13. It is not easy for these institutions to defend themselves. Even if the vast majority of the members of these institutions uphold their oath of office, the reputation of the entire institution can be so easily tarnished by the acts of a few. It is very harmful and dangerous for the maintenance of law and order and the administration of justice if the people lose confidence in the judiciary and the police.

14. However, the government is confident that these two institutions are on the road towards improving their image. The government is taking active steps to improve the professionalism of the police and to encourage them to be more approachable to the people and more co-operative with lawyers. I also notice that the judiciary has been in the limelight recently, not merely because of recent high profile judgments but also because of a new chief justice who commands great respect and admiration among his peers at the bench and amongst lawyers generally.

15. While many people have interpreted the recent judgments as being adverse to the government, we have always been the first to accept and abide by all rulings of the courts of this country.

16. The government recognises that the judiciary possesses the ultimate authority for interpreting the laws of this country. It is therefore the judiciary's responsibility to ensure that the government does not improperly exercise its powers nor exceed its constitutional mandate. The government is also aware that the courts have the power to declare laws passed by parliament to be unconstitutional.

17. However, the government hopes that the judiciary too realises the enormity of its powers and wields them with great care and circumspection. The judiciary must take cognizance of the fragility of public confidence and be careful never to place their credibility or integrity at stake. In restoring the image of the judiciary, the government hopes that the bench will do what it supposed to: dispense justice fairly

and swiftly.

18. When a judge renders an opinion, he must see more than the words of a statute, hear more than the cloistered quiet of the court. He must see the faces and hear the voices of people he will never meet, yet whose lives he can alter with the stroke of a pen. The dream of justice is not the exclusive property of lawyers, nor is it confined to books or laws. It is a dream of everyone, and that includes government, who believes their future can be better than their past.

19. It is very difficult to draw bright-line rules in areas of complex and personal judgement. And it is not hard to envision cases that are complicated and agonizing. By all means improve your image, but do not go beyond the bounds of your responsibilities to prove a point to the government and to the people. Popularly elected governments are held to account every four or five years. If we have made wrong or unpopular decisions, the electorate can evict us from office. There is no opportunity for the people to hold judges to account.

20. The government is very keen to promote Malaysia as a premier investment destination. Towards this end, we have built highways, bridges, railways and airports to facilitate the conduct of trade and industry. We are also aware that in addition to the existence of physical, "hard" infrastructure, Malaysia requires so-called "soft" infrastructure to promote the flow of investment.

21. One crucial aspect of soft infrastructure is a sophisticated and well-developed legal framework to facilitate certainty and security in the conduct of business. But such a framework cannot exist in isolation. It requires human input. We must have lawyers, judges, mediators and arbitrators of the highest quality for that legal framework to have any meaning in boosting our competitiveness.

22. I would therefore like to call upon all of you present in this room to intensify your efforts in improving the standards of our legal industry. All of you must endeavour to compete with the providers of legal services in the leading financial centers of Asia and beyond. All of you must realise that you all have a role to play in promoting Malaysia's name and reputation on the regional and global stage.

23. In order to facilitate the process of deepening the access of Malaysian lawyers to knowledge and skills developed by foreign lawyers, the government is prepared to look into the possibility of co-operative arrangements between local and foreign lawyers.

24. These steps will only be taken cautiously, with prior consultation and with the interests of Malaysian lawyers and Malaysian consumers of legal services in mind. We must all realise however that the forces of globalisation will sweep us away if we are not courageous enough to learn new skills and new ways of doing things. Malaysia's process of liberalisation will be properly sequenced and gradual, but we cannot forever remain in isolation from competition. Opening up will not only mean a more conducive environment for investments, but also greater exposure for our lawyers to more challenging and sophisticated top tier work. The long term competitiveness of our legal sector will very much depend on our preparedness to face competition as well as to generate synergies with regional and international law practices.

25. I wish to congratulate all the lawyers of Zaid Ibrahim & Co. For their hard work and dedication. It has led to the firm's success, which we are celebrating tonight. Nevertheless you should not be complacent and must remain steadfast in your effort to climb to the top of the profession. This will ensure the continued success of the firm in years to come.

26. I also wish the entire Malaysian legal fraternity great success. We are facing challenging times and we need to prove that Malaysia is capable of offering competitive and competent professional services. Without strong and resilient professional service sectors Malaysia's position in an increasingly integrated economy will be hampered and even jeopardised.

27. I wish you all a pleasant dinner and a very good evening. Thank you.