

**SPEECH BY**  
**YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI**  
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**AT SHERATON IMPERIAL HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR**  
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It is a pleasure for me to be here among such an august gathering from near and far. I would like to congratulate and thank the organisers - MAMPU and ASLI - for organising this important conference, and for giving me the honour and opportunity to speak and to open the Malaysian e-government 2002 conference.

2. The theme "revolutionising service delivery in government" is indeed timely, given the current emphasis on the role of information and communication technology, or I.C.T. for short, as an enabler of social and economic development. I.C.T. is a tool that can not only improve a country's competitive position in the global economy, but can also support a broad range of development objectives.

3. Malaysia has seen a tremendous increase in the adoption of advanced technologies, particularly relating to online service delivery channels, whether business to business ("b to b"), business to consumer ("b to c"), government to business ("g to b"), or government to citizen ("g to c"). In the case of the public sector, it is imperative that we keep pace with the technological advancements in I.C.T. We need to push forward to create and harness technological innovations in order to meet the needs of our citizens for faster, more convenient and more efficient means of interacting with the government.

4. Globally, many governments have adopted high-end technology to implement their own vision for electronic service delivery, with varying degrees of success. Nonetheless, the overall benefits of e-government have become stark and clear in today's digital world. Citizens, as well as businesses, are the main beneficiaries of faster, cheaper, more personalised and more efficient services that can be accessed 24 by 7, or 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The questions in many countries have long gone beyond "why" e-government should be implemented, but rather "how" it can be executed to achieve the best possible results.

5. As the global e-government environment continues to progress, several trends have begun to emerge. I understand that terms such as "citizen-centric", "C.R.M." and "portals" have become part of the vocabulary associated with today's e-government initiatives.

6. "Customer relationship management" or "C.R.M.", a long familiar concept in the business world, has begun to attract increasing interest in government circles. Governments are starting to realise the significant potential of C.R.M. as a tool to help improve their relationship with their online customers, in order to deliver the best possible value to citizens and businesses. This is done through the re-organisation of service delivery around "what the customer wants" rather than how an organisation functions. Government agencies have started to progress towards creating an integrated view of the customer and using that information to coordinate services across multiple service delivery channels.

7. C.R.M. has therefore not only created the opportunity to improve service delivery through the provision of self-service and self-help options to the public, it is also a

strong catalyst for the streamlining of government processes and the enhancement of inter-agency data sharing.

8. There are already some benefits brought about by C.R.M. in many of the e-government initiatives on the internet. Government agencies are beginning to design their online presence from "outside-in"; reflecting the needs and priorities of citizens and businesses as opposed to what the individual organisations want to deliver, based on existing structures.

9. Another important component of the effort to revolutionise service delivery is the development of customer-centric internet portals. These portals are focused on creating citizen- centred or business-centred agencies that work together to consolidate similar overlapping functions based on the needs of the online users. If we look at the numerous examples of current government online presence, internet portals have become the rule, rather than the exception, to the public sector's involvement in cyberspace.

10. A common theme surrounding e-government portals is the creation of a central government internet portal around the requirements of a user throughout his or her lifetime. For example, the provision of a portal for household services, involving such matters as the payment of utility and property bills; financial-type services, including the maintenance of tax accounts and other related matters; and other services, such as education, national registration, and certain licenses. Taking it one step further, I understand that some governments are even aiming to provide each individual citizen with a personalised portal, thereby further tailoring interaction and service delivery for such users.

11. Governments have started to recognise that businesses fall into distinct segments and that online services can be tailored to suit their respective needs. I have been told that one country has already segmented its central government into three groups - citizens, businesses and public sector employees, with services provided accordingly.

12. I hope more e-government initiatives will offer customer- centric portals. Perhaps our citizens can be provided with online access to an integrated portal for them to notify any government agency of a change in address, with such a notification being automatically reflected across multiple agencies. Internet portals may also provide a lower cost and more efficient method for our citizens and businesses to comply with government policies and procedures, such as submission of tax returns and faster refunds, as well as payment of summonses and outstanding bills.

13. We face several challenges in advancing e-government service delivery in Malaysia. These challenges relate to the following:

One, the facilitation and expansion of I.C.T. infrastructure;

Two, the integration of service delivery across multiple tiers of government;

Three, the adherence to the imperatives of security and privacy; and

Four, the development of a skilled and competent workforce to effect e-government service delivery.

14. Malaysia saw the advent of the digital revolution from quite early on. We recognised the enormous potential of I.C.T. For improving our economic and social status. We embarked on the multimedia super corridor (M.S.C.) project in 1996 to help Malaysia leapfrog into the information age. The M.S.C. was envisioned as a global test bed for local and foreign companies to push the limits of multimedia. The M.S.C.'s intent was to create a cutting-edge environment to attract foreign businesses, while nurturing and developing local IT Champions at the same time. The M.S.C. would then act as a catalyst for the adoption of I.C.T. throughout the nation, eventually raising national productivity and making Malaysia an island of excellence in I.C.T.

15. We have invested a significant amount in the M.S.C to create a world-class physical and information infrastructure, which would serve as the backbone for the country's information superhighway. This network is supported by a high-speed link, which connects the M.S.C. to Japan, Asean, the U.S. and Europe.

16. However, beyond the M.S.C., the setting up of a superior national I.C.T. infrastructure is critical to encouraging citizens and businesses to adopt online service delivery. There are two important factors to consider in this regard. Firstly, the ability of the IT infrastructure to meet the needs of online service delivery. Secondly, the availability and affordability of basic IT services to ensure a viable service delivery.

17. There are many areas that lack good I.C.T. infrastructure - whether broadband services for sophisticated users; or basic services for early users. I.C.T. service providers must cater to both needs, particularly the roll out of basic services across the country to address the question of the digital divide. Costs may also be seen by many individual and business users as being a hindrance to accessibility. Therefore internet charges, broadband fees, hardware and software pricing should always be structured to be affordable and competitive.

18. In taking a citizen-centric approach to online service delivery, e-government initiatives must build bridges between agencies in the same tier as well as those on different tiers. The concept of the citizen being at the core will require the organisation of services around the citizen's needs. Users need to be able to access all e-government information and services wherever and whenever they may want it.

19. Currently, e-government initiatives have started to articulate key priorities for cross-agency teamwork rather than leaving agencies to determine their own online presence. I.C.T. provides a relatively simple and easy platform to link and join up government agencies. Some governments have begun to recognise the opportunity cost of separate systems and processes that duplicate information gathering, as well as the high costs involved in providing multiple entry-points for online services. In view of this, I think it is high time that our public sector agencies realise and appreciate that delivering connected government online services requires multiple agency cooperation and collaboration.

20. Public confidence in online service delivery will be a key factor in the success of e-government. Data security and protection of individual privacy are becoming increasingly important considerations for many citizens and businesses using the internet. Globally, e-government programmes typically incorporate uniform privacy properties, digital signatures, and encryption standards for sensitive information.

21. In Malaysia, we have built up a base of identification numbers that an individual requires to interact with the government - passport, driver's license and identity card to name a few. We must be able to guarantee the security of such personal information. The technology to enable this security has now become commonplace, and our challenge will be to get the right processes in place to ensure user confidence in our information management.

22. By continuing to address issues such as security and privacy, we assure businesses and citizens that any information provided is safe, confidential, and protected from unauthorised use.

23. Apart from the physical and legal infrastructure already in place, we must focus on the "soft" side of our nation's resources. The development of a skilled and competent I.C.T. workforce will certainly contribute to sustaining the development of our online service delivery. Our success will very much depend on our capacity and capability to utilise new technology and to exploit the latest innovations. The introduction of I.C.T. enabled processes requires our manpower to adopt and learn new knowledge and skills.

24. The setting up of focused educational institutions such as the multimedia university will contribute to the development of our younger manpower for future I.C.T. challenges. At the same time, training institutions such as INTAN, the national institute of public administration, must play their part to instill deeper IT awareness, as well as upgrade IT literacy for a wide section of government personnel.

25. There is little doubt that the foundations for a competent IT society in Malaysia must be built around future generations. IT education must begin at an early age - it should no longer be considered as an elective subject on our school curriculum, but rather should be introduced as an essential subject. This will provide a head-start for our younger generations to cultivate their interest in the digital economy.

26. Up to this point in time, the government has remained focused on bringing government services and implementing pilot projects as part of the e-government flagship. In addition, we have established a shared services outfit in Putrajaya to focus on establishing a common and integrated IT infrastructure, with consistent quality. We are now in a position to look ahead to the future to determine our direction as an e-government.

27. There has been a growing recognition that the private sector has the capacity and resources to invest and to innovate in e-governments globally. Many countries are now actively seeking participation from private sector organisations to move their e-governments forward.

28. Such collaboration is becoming more sophisticated, with governments entering into new business arrangements with private sector providers, where risk and rewards are shared and the focus is on service delivery. Locally, we have partnered with world-class companies, to develop and implement leading- edge applications. An example of this are the e-services and e- procurement projects, which are based on a build-operate-own and build-operate-transfer arrangements, where the private sector is responsible for developing and managing the applications.

29. Relationships with the private sector should continue to be fostered, both with the established providers as well as with the fast-growing small local companies. In

particular, I hope that we will be ready to provide opportunities to the smaller, innovative companies, many of which are presently led by young, capable professionals.

30. Government personnel will also need to capture and institutionalise the knowledge and practices gained from the public sector-private sector collaboration. This will ensure that the government has the capacity to maintain the online service delivery processes, and in the long run continue to embark on improvement initiatives.

31. Finally, the implementation of any e-government initiative requires a focus on continuous improvement efforts. The usage and adherence to global benchmark practices are on the rise, but will need to become further embedded in many e-government projects.

32. As a start, governments are now including benchmarking initiatives for continuous improvements as part of their service delivery efforts. Surveys can be conducted to elicit valuable feedback which will assist governments to enhance their online service delivery. All agencies within the country can take part, and be measured against key objectives of the e- government online strategy. From here, citizens and businesses will be able to share in the progress and be involved in the future direction of online service delivery.

33. Malaysia has achieved some success in the delivery of identified key pilot projects, specifically in the e-government initiatives. However, as I have just highlighted, the future of service delivery is still expanding at an exponential rate, with I.C.T. further pushing the capabilities now available to us.

To achieve our vision for superior online services, we will need to overcome the existing challenges. However, more importantly, I urge you - government agencies, businesses and individuals - to cooperate and collaborate towards improving government online service delivery for all quarters in Malaysia.

On that note, I wish you a stimulating and fruitful conference. It is now my pleasure and privilege to declare open the Malaysian e-government 2002 conference.

Thank you.