

**SPEECH BY
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AT MALAM WARISAN
AT HOTEL SUNWAY LAGOON
25 SEPTEMBER 2002**

I am privileged and honoured to be invited to speak at Badan Warisan Malaysia's fundraising event, Malam Warisan.

2. I understand that Badan Warisan Malaysia is a non- profit organisation which was established in 1983 to promote the conservation and preservation of Malaysia's built heritage. For now nearly twenty years, Badan Warisan has campaigned vigorously and tirelessly to raise awareness and appreciation of the beauty of our heritage buildings and areas which have great architectural merit as well as unique historical associations.

3. It must be noted that over the years, members of Badan Warisan have played significant roles in the restoration of many important buildings beginning with the Central Market in Kuala Lumpur, the Gedung Raja Abdullah in Kelang, the Istana Tengku Long in Terengganu and the Masjid Merbok Pengkalan Kakap in Kedah. They have also been conscientious in the preservation of our vernacular architecture; the Rumah Bomoh in Changkat Jering and the Rumah Kutai in Kuala Kangsar are two such examples. While right in the heart of Kuala Lumpur in the grounds of Badan Warisan's Heritage Centre at No 2 Jalan Stonor, stands the beautifully restored Rumah Penghulu Abu Seman which was originally located in Bandar Bahrui, Kedah.

4. I am pleased to know that since its inception, Badan Warisan has worked closely with the Government both at federal as well as at the local levels to promote the protection and management of heritage buildings and areas. They have concerned themselves not just with what is happening in our urban centres but also with the heritage in our rural environment.

5. Although they are an NGO, and therefore do not have the statutory authority to advance the cause of heritage conservation, nevertheless, they have taken upon themselves the task to shift the conservation paradigm in our nation. Their work complements our government's efforts and they continue to provide useful and timely advice and guidance with regard especially to the formulation of heritage policies and programmes. Their endeavours make an invaluable contribution towards the building of nationhood as they strive to remind us of our history and of our multi-cultural identities through the conservation of our architectural heritage.

6. There remains a major task ahead if we are to develop a national consciousness and consensus to protect and cherish our heritage buildings. Our history is embedded in our architectural, social and cultural fabrics and of these, our architectural fabric is probably the most enduring. There is therefore a need to ensure that from a very young age, children are imbued with the values which will provide them with a sense of awe when they look at these physical structures. There is a need to develop our formal education system to inculcate a deep understanding and through this, a love, for our history and the values on which our nation was built.

7. But we know there is still a long way to go to safeguard our nation's architectural heritage for our future generations.

In February 2001, I lamented that there is a

"lack of a systematic approach towards preserving or rehabilitating historical buildings and areas of historical significance. It is depressing to see old shop houses that can be conserved torn down and replaced by a generic, modern office block. We must do more in the area of promoting the preservation of heritage sites." (NB: reported in The Star)

I am therefore pleased to report that the Federal Government has been proactive in drafting a national heritage legislation which we expect to be tabled in Parliament in the not too distant future. We hope that this proposed amendment to the Town & Country Planning Act will provide not only the legal framework for the protection of our heritage buildings and areas but also the mechanisms and systems for the proper management of these buildings and sites. The fact that we are moving down this path demonstrates the Government's strong commitment to protecting our built heritage.

8. This proposed law will support the conservation efforts being made throughout the country in small towns and large cities and will enhance the quality of managing our heritage environment. The Government is very aware that one of the main prerequisites for the success of Penang and Malacca in their impending submission for UNESCO World Heritage Listing, is the presence of an effective federal legislation. We believe this will advance our aim to achieve international recognition for these two cities.

9. World Heritage Listing will bring about much benefit to the nation. It will greatly increase tourism which in turn will greatly increase income and of course will greatly increase employment in these areas. And it will also bring international prestige to our beloved nation.

10. But there must be complementary structures to provide financial incentives to ensure economic sustainability and revitalisation of the local communities and traditions. To this end the Government has just announced the creation of a Heritage Fund, with an initial injection of RM20 million which will be used to conserve heritage buildings especially in Penang and Malacca. We hope that this will provide the impetus for others in the private sector to join in with the Government both through extending financial support as well as to undertaking conservation and revitalisation programmes especially of privately owned properties. But these initiatives must be in continuity to internationally recognised standards if we are to progress the cause for heritage.

11. I believe that understanding our heritage will provide our communities with a deeper appreciation of our own history and cultural values and I applaud Badan Warisan Malaysia's efforts in this area. They are not recipients of any grant from the Government and therefore depend heavily on donations from businesses and individuals sympathetic to their cause. I am most happy to see so many people present here this evening who have obviously rallied to the cause of conservation and preservation of Malaysia's built environment.

12. We have now come a long way from the birth of our nation 45 years ago, and are fast becoming a developed nation. It is even more urgent therefore that we take stock of our heritage to ensure that we do not lose all physical reminders for fear that we lose a sense of our own history and to some extent our own identity.

13. I would like to take this opportunity to wish Badan Warisan every success in achieving their goals because it is through this that Malaysia will also benefit and the physical legacies of our historic areas, towns and cities will endure for our future generations.

Thank you.