

**OPENING ADDRESS BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE MALAYSIAN EDUCATION SUMMIT 2004
AT SUNWAY LAGOON RESORT HOTEL
27 APRIL 2004**

*"REVITALISING EDUCATION: EQUIPPING MALAYSIA FOR THE REALITIES
OF THE 21ST CENTURY"*

ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI WABARAKATUH DAN SALAM SEJAHTERA

YB DATO' HISHAMMUDDIN TUN HUSSEIN
MENTERI PELAJARAN

YB DATO' DR. SHAFIE HJ MOHD SALLEH
MENTERI PENGAJIAN TINGGI

DIF-DIF JEMPUTAN

SAUDARA-SAUDARI YANG SAYA HORMATI SEKELIAN

1. ALHAMDULILLAH, SAYA BERSYUKUR KE HADRAT ALLAH S.W.T KERANA DENGAN LIMPAH DAN KURNIANYA, DAPAT KITA BERHIMPUN DI PERTEMUAN MINDA YANG PENTING INI. TERLEBIH DAHULU SAYA INGIN MERAKAMKAN PENGHARGAAN SAYA KEPADA PIHAK A.S.L.I., SELAKU PENGANJUR MAJLIS, KERANA TELAH BERUSAHA MENGATUR SATU PROGRAM YANG BEGITU MENARIK DAN CUKUP BERMAKNA . SESUNGGUHNYA, ISU PENDIDIKAN AMAT PENTING BAGI KEJAYAAN NEGARA DI MASA HADAPAN, SAMA ADA DARI SEGI PEMBANGUNAN EKONOMI MAHUPUN DARI SEGI PERPADUAN DAN KEHARMONIAN RAKYAT.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

2. WE ARE GATHERED HERE TODAY TO DISCUSS, DEBATE AND PROPOSE IMPROVEMENTS ON A SUBJECT CLOSE TO THE HEARTS OF ALL MALAYSIANS: EDUCATION. FOR THOSE AMONG US WITH CHILDREN, EDUCATION REPRESENTS A MEANS TO BUILD THEIR KNOWLEDGE, THEIR CHARACTER AND THEIR POTENTIAL TO SUCCEED IN LIFE. FOR ALL MALAYSIANS, EDUCATION REPRESENTS THE KEY TO DETERMINING OUR COUNTRY'S STATURE AND WELL-BEING.

3. THEREFORE, WHEN WE ASK OURSELVES ABOUT THE KIND OF EDUCATION SYSTEM WE WANT, WE ARE REALLY ASKING OURSELVES WHAT WE WANT OUR YOUNG TO BE AND WHAT WE WANT OUR COUNTRY TO BE. IN SHORT, WHEN CONSIDERING EDUCATION WE ARE REALLY CASTING OUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE. IN THIS AGE THAT WE LIVE IN, THE 21ST CENTURY, THE FUTURE APPEARS TO BE

FAST-CHANGING AND COMPETITIVE. THE FUTURE SEEMS CLOSE BY, UNFOLDING EVEN AS WE SPEAK. WE KNOW THAT IT IS A TIME OF THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY, A TIME WHEN THE WORLD BECOMES SMALLER AND MORE INTERLINKED, A TIME OF GREAT CHALLENGE AND TRANSFORMATION.

4. AS A DEVELOPING COUNTRY COMPETING IN THE 21ST CENTURY, WE FEEL THE PRESSURES AND DEMANDS OF THIS AGE MORE THAN OTHERS. AS OTHER COUNTRIES CATCH UP TO OR SURPASS US ON THE GLOBAL VALUE CHAIN, WE RECOGNISE THE URGENCY TO MAKE THE LEAP INTO THE NEXT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT. THIS 'LEAP' CANNOT BE ACCOMPLISHED SIMPLY BY IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE OR THROUGH UTILISING CHEAP LABOUR. THIS 'LEAP' CALLS FOR A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN OUR CAPACITY FOR VALUE-ADDING AND INNOVATION. THIS 'LEAP' REQUIRES THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN ABILITY AND INTELLECT.

5. IN OUR 47 YEARS AS AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY, THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL HAS HISTORICALLY CENTRED ON PROVIDING ACCESS TO EDUCATION. ON THIS SCORE, OUR COUNTRY HAS DONE RELATIVELY WELL. EDUCATION CONSISTENTLY RECEIVES THE HIGHEST BUDGET ALLOCATION, AT ABOUT 20-25% OF GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE, AND 10,000 CLASSROOMS ARE BUILT IN EVERY MALAYSIA PLAN. THIS HAS CONTRIBUTED TO FAIRLY HIGH ENROLMENT RATES, WITH CLOSE TO 100% PRIMARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT, OVER 80% SECONDARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT AND ABOUT 24% TERTIARY LEVEL ENROLMENT. THE PROPORTION OF CHILDREN COMPLETING SECONDARY EDUCATION HAS ALSO INCREASED FROM 65% IN 1988 TO 80% IN 2000.

6. THERE IS, OF COURSE, STILL MUCH TO DO IN TERMS OF PROVIDING ACCESS TO EDUCATION. FOR INSTANCE, THERE IS A CONTINUING NEED TO PROVIDE SCHOOLS IN REMOTE AREAS AND TO ENSURE THAT ALL SCHOOLS ARE FURNISHED WITH WATER, ELECTRICITY AND COMPUTER FACILITIES. OUR GREATEST CHALLENGE HOWEVER, LIES NOT IN IMPROVING ACCESS BUT IN DRAMATICALLY ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM.

7. DEVELOPING A WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION SYSTEM IS HIGH ON MY GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA. ONE OF THE SYMPTOMS OF OUR INADEQUACY IN THIS RESPECT IS THE HIGH NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYED GRADUATES. I HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT ABOUT 20% OF ALL GRADUATES ARE WITHOUT SOME MANNER OF EMPLOYMENT. EVERY OTHER WEEK, WE FIND AN INTERVIEW OR ARTICLE IN THE PAPERS TELLING US THE REASONS THE JOB MARKET WILL NOT EMPLOY THEM: POOR COMMUNICATION SKILLS, WEAK THINKING CAPACITY, LACK OF VIGOUR AND INITIATIVE, TO NAME A FEW.

8. THESE PERCEIVED SHORTCOMINGS IN OUR GRADUATES ARE FURTHER REINFORCED BY THE REPUTATION OF OUR TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS. IN AN ASIaweek 2000 BENCHMARKING STUDY OF ASIAN UNIVERSITIES, THE HIGHEST RANGKING MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY IN THE SURVEY WAS ONLY RANKED 47 OUT OF 77 UNIVERSITIES. NOT TOP 10, NOT TOP 20, NOT EVEN IN THE TOP HALF OF THE

LIST. BY COMPARISON, THE TOP 10 COMPRISED OF UNIVERSITIES FROM JAPAN, HONG KONG, AUSTRALIA, KOREA AND SINGAPORE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

9. THE IMPERATIVE FOR CHANGE AND REVITALISATION IS CLEAR. WE KNOW THAT WE NEED TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF THE 21ST CENTURY BY PRODUCING INDIVIDUALS — THE SO-CALLED KNOWLEDGE-WORKERS — WHO CAN RISE TO MEET THIS CENTURY'S CHALLENGES. IN THIS RESPECT, THE MANDATE TO IMPROVE ON OUR CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM SEEMS CLEAR.

10. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE CANNOT MERELY SET OUR SIGHTS ON CHURNING OUT KNOWLEDGE WORKERS. OUR ASPIRATIONS FOR THIS COUNTRY GO BEYOND THE DICTATES OF GLOBALISATION. WE DO NOT WANT TO JUST REACT TO EXTERNAL PRESSURES, BUT ALSO TO SHAPE AND CRAFT A MALAYSIA IN LINE WITH OUR OWN IDEALS. WE WANT A COUNTRY THAT IS COMPETITIVE AND INNOVATIVE, BUT ALSO ONE THAT IS HARMONIOUS AND UNIFIED.

11. THESE TWIN HOPES HAVE A HUGE BEARING ON HOW WE APPROACH OUR COUNTRY'S EDUCATION SYSTEM. IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT BEING COMPETITIVE AND IF WE TRULY WANT A PEACEFUL AND STABLE SOCIETY, WE MUST NOT ONLY STRIVE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION DELIVERED IN OUR SCHOOLS, BUT ALSO TO IMPROVE THE LEVEL OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION ACHIEVED.

12. THE CURRENT LEVEL OF RACIAL INTEGRATION AND UNDERSTANDING IS OF GREAT CONCERN. SCHOOLS ARE BECOMING MORE MONO-RACIAL, WITH NON-MALAY ENROLMENT IN NATIONAL SCHOOLS GROWING SMALLER WITH TIME. EVEN IN MULTI-RACIAL SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES, RACIAL CLIQUES ARE PRACTICALLY THE NORM. SURELY, THIS KIND OF RACIAL EXCLUSIVENESS WILL SOW THE SEEDS OF MISUNDERSTANDING AND MISTRUST FOR LATER IN LIFE. IF THIS TREND CONTINUES, WE MAY WELL DRIFT APART, ONLY TO HAVE FEW SUPERFICIAL COMMONALITIES BETWEEN US, AND FEW GENUINE TIES THAT BIND US TOGETHER IN A COMMON DESTINY.

13. I PASSIONATELY BELIEVE THAT IN ORDER FOR MALAYSIA TO BE TRULY GREAT, WE MUST UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER. WE MUST RECOGNISE OUR SIMILARITIES AND APPRECIATE OUR DIFFERENCES AND OUR STRENGTHS, AND IN THAT WAY BECOME STRONGER TO FACE THE WORLD TOGETHER. 47 YEARS AGO, WHO WOULD EVEN HAVE THOUGHT THAT WE WOULD HAVE COME THIS FAR?. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE COULD GO A LOT FARTHER. IMAGINE WHAT WE CAN ACCOMPLISH IF EVERY CHILD, EVERY YOUNG PERSON, REALISES THEIR FULL POTENTIAL. IMAGINE WHAT THIS COUNTRY COULD ACHIEVE IF WE COME TOGETHER, REGARDLESS OF RACE OR BACKGROUND, TO UPHOLD OUR STAKE IN THIS COUNTRY'S FUTURE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

14. THESE HOPES ARE NOT BEYOND OUR REACH. WITH THE RIGHT EFFORT, WITH DEEP POLITICAL AND PUBLIC WILL, AND WITH APPROPRIATE RESOURCES, WE CAN REALISE OUR ASPIRATION TO BE A DYNAMIC AND DIVERSE COUNTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

15. WE GATHER HERE TODAY TO DISCUSS HOW WE MAY ACHIEVE THESE HOPES. WITH THE PRESENCE OF MANY LEADING THINKERS IN THIS FIELD, I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT WE WILL IDENTIFY SEVERAL SOLUTIONS OR IMPROVEMENTS. I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY, HOWEVER, TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF MY THOUGHTS ON THIS SUBJECT. I HAVE SPOKEN AT LENGTH ABOUT THE NEED TO ENSURE QUALITY AND IMPROVE RACIAL INTEGRATION AS THE TWIN MANDATES FOR OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM. BASED ON THESE OBJECTIVES, I BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE TWO MAIN STRATEGIES THAT WE NEED TO PURSUE.

16. FIRSTLY, WE NEED TO EFFECT THE NECESSARY CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS TO MAKE NATIONAL SCHOOLS THE 'SCHOOL OF CHOICE', WHILE SAFEGUARDING THE POSITION OF NATIONAL-TYPE SCHOOLS TODAY. WE NEED TO ADDRESS THE CONCERNS OF PARENTS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF SEKOLAH KEBANGSAAN AND WORK TO RECTIFY THEM SO THAT PARENTS WILL GLADLY CHOOSE TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO A HIGH-QUALITY, MULTI-RACIAL SCHOOL. NATIONAL SCHOOLS SHOULD BE TOPMOST IN PROVIDING FOUNDATION SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE, AS WELL AS IN CULTIVATING INTER-RACIAL TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING.

17. ONE OF THE BIGGEST AREAS OF CONCERN IS THE QUALITY OF TEACHING IN NATIONAL SCHOOLS. THE TEACHING PROFESSION IS NO LONGER AS HIGHLY REGARDED AS IT WAS BEFORE. THIS IS A GREAT PITY. I WOULD CERTAINLY NOT BE HERE TODAY IF IT WERE NOT FOR SEVERAL TEACHERS WHO GUIDED AND PUSHED ME TO DO MY BEST. THE SUCCESS OF OUR YOUNG DEPENDS GREATLY ON THE QUALITY OF THEIR TEACHERS. THUS WE NEED TO HAVE A SERIOUS, CONCERTED EFFORT TO IMPROVE TEACHING, BY INCREASING THE MOTIVATION AND STATURE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION. SEVERAL ASPECTS NEED TO BE LOOKED INTO, SUCH AS THE RECRUITMENT OF TEACHERS, TRAINING, PROMOTION PROCESSES, BENEFITS AND WORK ENVIRONMENT. IN THIS REGARD, I SUPPORT THE EDUCATION MINISTER'S EMPHASIS ON IMPROVING THE TEACHING PROFESSION AND VIEW THIS AS A PRIORITY AREA FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

18. ANOTHER AREA TO ADDRESS IS THE PROVISION OF SUBJECTS WHICH ARE HIGHLY VALUED FOR CULTURAL OR RELIGIOUS REASONS. SOME OF THE PREFERENCE FOR VERNACULAR SCHOOLS AND SEKOLAH AGAMA IS DERIVED FROM THE PERCEPTION THAT CERTAIN SUBJECTS ARE NOT TAUGHT WELL NOR GIVEN ENOUGH EMPHASIS IN NATIONAL SCHOOLS. THIS PERCEPTION SHOULD BE REMEDIED. FOR A START, I WOULD LIKE TO SEE HIGH-QUALITY LANGUAGE LESSONS IN MANDARIN, TAMIL OR ARABIC TAUGHT IN ALL OUR NATIONAL SCHOOLS, AND TO MAKE THESE AVAILABLE ON AN OPTIONAL BASIS TO ALL STUDENTS REGARDLESS OF RACE. FURTHERMORE, WHILE I BELIEVE THAT

LEARNING OUR MOTHER TONGUES IS IMPORTANT, WE SHOULD ALL START VALUING LANGUAGES AS A WORTHWHILE KNOWLEDGE IN AND OF ITSELF AND AS INVESTMENTS IN AN INCREASINGLY GLOBALISED WORLD. WE ALSO NEED TO STRENGTHEN ISLAMIC AND ETHICS EDUCATION IN NATIONAL SCHOOLS IN ORDER TO INSTIL THE RIGHT VALUES IN OUR YOUNG. THE RECENT LAUNCH OF THE PILOT PROJECT 'J-QAF' IS A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. WITH THIS PROGRAM, THE TEACHING AND CURRICULUM OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IS ENHANCED TOWARDS ENCOURAGING LITERACY IN ARABIC AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE QURAN. IN THIS WAY, ISLAMIC EDUCATION WILL BE LESS CENTRED ON MEMORISATION AND MORE ON UNDERSTANDING THE INHERENT TEACHINGS OF THE QURAN.

19. CO-CURRICULUM IS ANOTHER AREA THAT NEEDS ATTENTION. AN OVERWHELMING EMPHASIS ON ACADEMIC LEARNING NOT ONLY LEADS TO AN EXAM-CENTRIC SOCIETY, IT ALSO PRODUCES ONE-DIMENSIONAL INDIVIDUALS. WE NEED TO REVIVE INTERESTING AND CHALLENGING CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS, SO THAT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE MAY BECOME MORE WELL-ROUNDED AND DEVELOP A MORE BALANCED OUTLOOK TOWARDS LIFE.

20. I BELIEVE THAT IT IS VITAL THAT WE IMPROVE RACIAL INTEGRATION IN SCHOOLS. THERE HAS BEEN SOME CONCERN THAT SCHOOLS DO NOT WHOLLY REFLECT THE CHARACTER AND SPIRIT OF MULTI-RACIAL MALAYSIA. WE NEED TO INCREASE THE NUMBERS OF NON-MALAY TEACHERS AND HEADMASTERS OR HEADMISTRESSES, NOT TO MENTION GETTING TEACHERS TO BE MORE AWARE AND RESPONSIVE TO MULTI-RACIAL NEEDS AND SENSITIVITIES. WE ALSO NEED TO INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DIFFERENT RACES TO MIX, SUCH AS HAVING SCHOOL TWINNING PROGRAMS WHERE NATIONAL SCHOOLS AND VERNACULAR SCHOOLS COME TOGETHER AND INTERACT FOR SPORTS OR OTHER CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.

21. WE MUST MOTIVATE OUR YOUTH TO TAKE PART IN THESE INTEGRATION EFFORTS BY MAKING THEM EXCITING, ENJOYABLE AND APPEALING TO THE YOUNGER GENERATION OF TODAY. IN THAT SENSE, WE NEED TO IDENTIFY ACTIVITIES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ALREADY ENJOY DOING AND ADAPT THEM TO PROMOTE MORE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE RACES. ONE SUCH EXAMPLE IS THE "E-INTEGRATION PROGRAM", A PILOT PROJECT THAT ENCOURAGES STUDENTS FROM NATIONAL SCHOOLS AND NATIONAL-TYPE SCHOOLS TO INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER BY PLAYING COMPUTER GAMES, WHICH ARE SPECIALLY DESIGNED WITH UNITY THEMES. THE BASIC IDEA IS TO GET STUDENTS TO START INTERACTING WITH EACH OTHER VIRTUALLY, AND THEN TO MEET UP PHYSICALLY TO REINFORCE THE TEAMWORK THAT THEY HAVE FOSTERED THROUGH PLAYING THE GAMES. THE PILOT PROJECT, WHICH INVOLVES 60 SCHOOLS IN PENANG, IS SCHEDULED TO START THIS YEAR WITH FUNDING FROM THE DEMONSTRATOR APPLICATION GRANT SCHEME (D.A.G.S). THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN BE APPLIED INNOVATIVELY TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL OBJECTIVES. SUCH EFFORTS SHOULD BE FURTHER ENCOURAGED AND REPLICATED.

22. THERE ARE VARIOUS OTHER AREAS TO LOOK INTO, BUT ON THE WHOLE, IT IS CRITICAL TO GET NATIONAL SCHOOLS RIGHT. THIS IS IMPORTANT FOR DELIVERING A GOOD FOUNDATION EDUCATION, AND IS ALSO INSTRUMENTAL IN

PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY. MAKING NATIONAL SCHOOLS A SCHOOL OF CHOICE WILL REQUIRE A SHIFT IN MINDSET AND A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE, BUT I BELIEVE THAT IT WILL BENEFIT ALL OF US IN THE LONG RUN. I HOPE ALL PARENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS WILL HELP TO MAKE THIS A REALITY.

23. MY SECOND PROPOSED STRATEGY IS TO START CULTIVATING WORLD-CLASS TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ORDER TO PRODUCE WORLD-CLASS GRADUATES. WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITIES OR COLLEGES WILL BE IMPORTANT NOT ONLY IN PRODUCING COMPETITIVE WORKERS, BUT ALSO IN PRODUCING CITIZENS WHO WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR NATION IN MEANINGFUL WAYS.

24. TO START WITH, WE NEED TO CONSISTENTLY MEASURE AND BENCHMARK THE QUALITY OF OUR TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS, STARTING WITH PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES. I BELIEVE THAT A LEAGUE TABLE THAT RANKS PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES BASED ON CRITERIA SUCH AS QUALITY OF TEACHING, RESEARCH, INFRASTRUCTURE, STUDENT SATISFACTION AND EMPLOYABILITY, IS LONG OVERDUE. BESIDES BEING MORE TRANSPARENT, THE HEALTHY COMPETITION FOSTERED BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES CAN HELP MOTIVATE THE PURSUIT OF BETTER TEACHING, BETTER COURSES, AND BETTER RESEARCH. EVENTUALLY, THE RANKINGS COULD FORM THE BASIS FOR THE AMOUNT OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING RECEIVED BY THESE UNIVERISITES, THUS ADDING A FURTHER INCENTIVE FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS.

25. WE ALSO NEED TO INCREASE THE LINKS BETWEEN ACADEMIA AND INDUSTRY TO ENSURE THAT OUR GRADUATES ARE WORKFORCE-READY AND THAT ANY RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN IS GEARED TOWARDS MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE MARKET. INSTITUTIONS MUST TAKE THE INITIATIVE TO UPDATE THEIR COURSES AND TO INCREASE INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS BY HOLDING DIALOGUES WITH THE RIGHT PARTIES. MECHANISMS SHOULD ALSO BE PUT IN PLACE TO FACILITATE GREATER PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT OR INVESTMENT IN UNIVERSITY RESEARCH WORK, SUCH AS THROUGH COMPANY-SPONSORED RESEARCH CHAIRS OR RESEARCH CENTRES.

26. TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS ALSO NEED TO PUT IN PLACE SUFFICIENT SUPPORT FACILITIES TO HELP MARKET THEIR GRADUATES. CAREER GUIDANCE AND INDUSTRY-NETWORKING ARE STILL AT LOW LEVELS IN MALAYSIA. THIS SHOULD NOT BE THE CASE, AS A UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS ITS STUDENTS DOES NOT END WITH THE HANDING OVER OF A DEGREE. TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ALSO PRIDE THEMSELVES ON HOW WELL THEIR GRADUATES PERFORM AFTER GRADUATION; FOR THIS PURPOSE, CLOSE INDUSTRY AND ALUMNI TIES ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.

27. OF COURSE, FORMAL LEARNING DOES NOT END WHEN WE COMPLETE SCHOOL OR TERTIARY EDUCATION. NEW KNOWLEDGE IS CONSTANTLY BEING PRODUCED. MALAYSIANS MUST THEREFORE CONSTANTLY UPGRADE THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS, IN FORMAL INSTITUTIONS AS WELL AS IN THE WORKPLACE. A CULTURE OF LIFELONG-LEARNING AND A PASSION FOR KNOWLEDGE MUST BE FOSTERED.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

28. WE RECOGNISE THE NEED TO IMPROVE OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM, AND TO A LARGE EXTENT, WE MAY EVEN AGREE ON THE DIRECTION TO TAKE. AT THE SAME TIME, I THINK WE ALSO REALISE WHAT A MAMMOTH AND COMPLEX UNDERTAKING THIS IS. EVERYONE HAS HIS OR HER VIEW ON EDUCATION; BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO LOOK AT THE BIGGER PICTURE IN ORDER TO MOVE FORWARD. WE CANNOT ALLOW MERE 'ACADEMIC' DIFFERENCES TO SLOW DOWN OUR IMPLEMENTATION. AT THE END OF THE DAY, I AM VERY SERIOUS ABOUT IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM.

29. FOR THIS REASON, AND AS A FIRST STEP, I HAVE SPLIT THE EDUCATION PORTFOLIO INTO TWO MINISTRIES, NAMELY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION. THE GAPS IN QUALITY AND NATIONAL UNITY ARE URGENT ISSUES AND THUS, I WANTED THE TWO MINISTERS TO DEVOTE MORE OF THEMSELVES AND CONCENTRATE ON SMALLER, BUT EQUALLY CRUCIAL, AREAS OF FOCUS. OF COURSE, THE TWO MINISTRIES MUST UNDERSTAND EACH OTHERS' OBJECTIVES AND MUST NECESSARILY HAVE A CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP TO ENSURE CONSISTENCY.

30. ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS THAT I ASKED OF MALAYSIANS AFTER BECOMING PRIME MINISTER WAS FOR YOU TO WORK WITH ME. NOWHERE IS THIS MORE RELEVANT THAN IN THE AREA OF EDUCATION. THE GOVERNMENT ALONE CANNOT IMPROVE OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM. DO NOT MAKE THE WRONG ASSUMPTION THAT WHAT WE CALL OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM IS CONTAINED WITHIN THE GATES OF OUR SCHOOLS OR IN THE BUREAUCRACY OF THE EDUCATION MINISTRY. OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM ALSO INCLUDES THE ROLE OF PARENTS, THE SUPPORT THAT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY PROVIDES, THE SYNERGIES THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS WILLING TO FORGE, THE AWARENESS THE MEDIA IS WILLING TO CREATE AND HOW MUCH SUCCESSFUL MALAYSIANS ARE WILLING TO GIVE BACK TO THEIR SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES. STRENGTHENING OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM IS A NATIONAL EFFORT THAT REQUIRES PARTICIPATION FROM ALL MALAYSIANS.

31. I WOULD LIKE BOTH THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO START THE PROCESS OF REVITALISATION BY SPEARHEADING AND COORDINATING THIS NATIONAL EFFORT TO STRENGTHEN OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM. GIVE MALAYSIANS A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP OVER THEIR SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES. MAKE THEM CARE ABOUT THEIR LOCAL SCHOOLS AND NOT JUST LOOK TO THE GOVERNMENT FOR ASSISTANCE. LET EDUCATION BE THE OBSESSION OF N.G.O.'S, CORPORATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS. LET EVERY MALAYSIAN BE A PARTICIPANT IN THE PROCESS.

32. I LEAVE IT TO DATO' HISHAMMUDDIN AND DATO' SHAFIE HOW THEY WANT TO COORDINATE THIS NATIONAL EFFORT. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT WE WORK TOGETHER TOWARDS THE SAME HOPE, THE SAME ASPIRATION, AND THE SAME VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR YOUNG AND OUR COUNTRY. BY MAKING NATIONAL SCHOOLS THE SCHOOL OF CHOICE, BY CULTIVATING LOCAL UNIVERSITIES INTO WORLD-CLASS INSTITUTIONS, I BELIEVE THAT WE WILL GO

SOME WAY TOWARDS ACHIEVING OUR DREAM OF A COMPETITIVE AND COHESIVE MALAYSIA. I HOPE ALL OF US WILL COME TOGETHER TO BE A PART OF THIS GREAT EFFORT.

THANK YOU.