

**SPEECH BY  
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI  
AT THE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP FORUM  
AT KUALA LUMPUR CONVENTION CENTRE  
6TH SEPTEMBER 2005**

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ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI WABARAKATUH, PEACE BE UPON YOU, AND GOOD MORNING

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PROF. DR. AZMAN AWANG

EXCELLENCIES

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

1. IT IS A PRIVILEGE FOR ME TO BE HERE THIS MORNING TO ADDRESS SUCH A GATHERING OF ACCOMPLISHED MEN AND WOMEN AS WE HAVE HERE TODAY. THE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP FORUM HAS INDEED BECOME A WIDELY ANTICIPATED EVENT IN MALAYSIA AND BEYOND. I AM PERSONALLY DELIGHTED TO WELCOME THE HIGHLY ESTEEMED GUEST SPEAKERS OF THE FORUM. IT IS AN HONOUR TO HAVE ALL OF YOU HERE, TO SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH US AND TO INSPIRE US WITH YOUR EXPERIENCES.

2. OVER THE NEXT TWO DAYS, THE EIGHT GUEST SPEAKERS OF THE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP FORUM WILL BE TOUCHING ON THE THEMES OF LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION AND BRANDING. THEIR PRESENTATIONS WILL SHOW US HOW THESE CRITICAL ISSUES – OF LEADERSHIP, OF INNOVATION AND OF BRANDING – RUN THROUGH EVERY SECTOR OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN THE WORLD TODAY, FROM RETAIL TRADE TO TECHNOLOGY, FROM HUMANITARIAN WORK TO GLOBAL FINANCE. IT IS VITAL FOR US TO UNDERSTAND THESE IMPERATIVES AS THEY DETERMINE THE SUCCESS OF ANY ENDEAVOUR IN TODAY'S WORLD, BE IT FOR PROFIT OR OTHERWISE.

3. THIS MORNING, I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF MY OWN THINKING ON THESE THEMES, AS THEY APPLY TO ME IN MY CURRENT ROLE AND AS THEY APPLY TO MY COUNTRY AT ITS PRESENT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT.

4. FOR ME, THE THREE THEMES OF INNOVATION, BRANDING AND LEADERSHIP ENCAPSULATE THE DEMANDS ON MALAYSIA AND EVERY DEVELOPING COUNTRY THAT ASPIRES TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THESE CHALLENGING TIMES. THE THREE CONCEPTS TOUCH UPON THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS OF NATIONAL

ADVANTAGE: NAMELY, WHAT WE DO, HOW WE ARE PERCEIVED AND HOW CONSISTENT WE ARE IN REACHING OUR GOALS.

5. ALL THREE ARE VITAL, AND THEY MUST COME TOGETHER, IN ORDER FOR US TO FACE THE COMPETITION. THE IMPORTANCE OF INNOVATION HAS OF COURSE OFTEN BEEN EMPHASISED, ESPECIALLY FOR COUNTRIES THAT ARE MOVING FROM LABOUR-INTENSIVE ACTIVITIES TO KNOWLEDGE-INTENSIVE ACTIVITIES. HOWEVER, WITHOUT INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION AND TRUST – SUMMED UP IN THE FORM OF WELL-KNOWN BRANDS – THE PRODUCTS OF ANY KIND OF INNOVATION WOULD BE LIMITED IN DEMAND. OF COURSE, NEITHER INNOVATION NOR BRANDING WOULD COME ABOUT WITHOUT THE LEADERSHIP TO PROVIDE VISION AS WELL AS MOMENTUM. PEOPLE MUST BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN ACHIEVE THE STATED GOALS AND THUS HAVE THE PASSION TO MAKE IT ALL HAPPEN – THAT IS THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP. LEADERSHIP PUTS A SENSE OF MISSION BEHIND INNOVATION AND SUSTAINS THE INTEGRITY OF ANY BRAND. THIS IS TRUE FOR ANY COMPANY AND FOR ANY COUNTRY.

6. BEING A LEADER IN A COUNTRY LIKE MALAYSIA IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT AND CHALLENGING, BUT IT IS ALSO FASCINATING AND TREMENDOUSLY REWARDING AT THE SAME TIME. MALAYSIA HAS BEEN BLESSED WITH GREAT LEADERS WHO FACED THE CHALLENGES OF THE DAY WITH FORESIGHT, COURAGE AND CONVICTION. LEADERS WHO ARE TRUE TO THEMSELVES, WHO LEAD IN LINE WITH THEIR BELIEFS AND VALUES, WHO ARE GUIDED TO MAKE MALAYSIA AND THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE IN. LEADERS LIKE MALAYSIA'S FOUR PAST PRIME MINISTERS, SHINING EXAMPLES OF DETERMINED AND ENLIGHTENED LEADERSHIP, WHO HAVE IN THEIR OWN UNIQUE WAY STEERED MALAYSIA TO WHERE IT IS TODAY – FROM AN ALMOST FAILED STATE AT THE TIME OF INDEPENDENCE, TO A MODERN, PROGRESSIVE, THRIVING NATION IN LESS THAN FIVE DECADES. IT WAS ONLY LAST WEEK THAT WE CELEBRATED OUR 48TH YEAR OF INDEPENDENCE, AND I AM THANKFUL TO GOD FOR HIS BLESSINGS AND PROTECTION, THAT MALAYSIA HAS BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE SO MUCH, IN SO MANY SPHERES.

7. THIS PROCESS OF MATURING AND DEVELOPING – ECONOMICALLY, SOCIALLY, POLITICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY – CONTINUES TODAY UNDER MY ADMINISTRATION; AND AT NO OTHER TIME HAS INNOVATION, BRANDING AND LEADERSHIP BEEN MORE IMPORTANT TO THE FATE OF MALAYSIA.

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8. WE ALL KNOW THAT THE WORLD HAS BECOME A MUCH MORE CHALLENGING PLACE. WE ALSO KNOW THAT IN TODAY'S WORLD, THE REQUIREMENT FOR SURVIVAL AND PROSPERITY IS INNOVATION. MALAYSIA FACES GREAT COMPETITION FROM OTHER UP-AND-COMING COUNTRIES WITH AN ABUNDANT SUPPLY OF LABOUR. FOR MANY COUNTRIES LIKE MALAYSIA, THE CHALLENGE LIES IN MOVING UP THE VALUE CHAIN AND MAKING THE TRANSITION TO A HIGH VALUE-ADDED ECONOMY, ONE WHICH IS BASED ON THE INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL OF HIGHLY EDUCATED AND CAPABLE PEOPLE.

9. THIS TRANSITION PRESENTS A DIFFERENT SET OF CHALLENGES FROM THAT OF A PURE MANUFACTURING-BASED ECONOMY. THE MAIN QUESTION NOW IS NOT "HOW SHOULD WE STRUCTURE TAX INCENTIVES TO ATTRACT MANUFACTURING INVESTMENT?". THE MAIN QUESTION NOW IS "HOW DO WE CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT ENCOURAGES INNOVATION?"; AND "HOW DO WE PRODUCE INNOVATIVE AND MOTIVATED HUMAN CAPITAL?".

10. AT THE HEART OF INNOVATION IS HUMAN CREATIVITY. HUMAN CAPITAL IS THE ONLY SOURCE OF INNOVATION AND OF A COUNTRY'S LONG-TERM ADVANTAGE. HOWEVER, DEVELOPING AND ENCOURAGING HUMAN CREATIVITY IS A COMPLEX ISSUE. THERE ARE STILL WIDESPREAD DISAGREEMENTS OVER WHAT IS NEEDED TO 'BUILD' AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH ENCOURAGES HUMAN CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION. BIG STRUCTURED ENTITIES, INCLUDING COUNTRIES, ARE GENERALLY NOT VERY GOOD AT CREATING INNOVATION. THERE IS A TENDENCY TO REINFORCE THE PAST AND TO FALL BACK ON THE USUAL BEHAVIOURS AND THE REGULAR WAYS OF DOING THINGS.

11. INDEED, THE QUESTION OF INNOVATION GOES BEYOND EDUCATION, ALTHOUGH EDUCATION IS OF COURSE A CRUCIAL FACTOR. THE QUESTION OF INNOVATION INVOLVES VALUES, ATTITUDES, MINDSETS AND CULTURE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE FEAR OF FAILURE, OF TRYING OUT NEW THINGS, IS A CULTURAL ISSUE. THIS FEAR INHIBITS INNOVATION AT ALL LEVELS, IN THE CLASSROOM, IN THE WORKPLACE, IN UNIVERSITIES AND IN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES.

12. PART OF MY MISSION IS TO GRADUALLY NURTURE A CLIMATE WHICH DIMINISHES FEAR OF FAILURE OR FEAR OF CRITICISM, AND WHICH SUPPORTS CREATIVE THINKING. I WANT A CLIMATE WHERE PEOPLE WITH NEW IDEAS CAN BE HEARD AND WHERE GOOD IDEAS CAN RECEIVE THE NECESSARY RESOURCES FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT. PEOPLE WILL ONLY INVEST IN BEING CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE IF THERE IS ROOM AND SAFETY FOR NEW, EVEN DISSENTING, VIEWS. WHEN THERE IS A CLIMATE OF MATURITY AND SUPPORT, PEOPLE WILL WANT TO ENGAGE IN A WAY THAT IS RESPONSIBLE AND CONSTRUCTIVE.

13. ALL ELEMENTS OF THE NATIONAL INNOVATION SYSTEM MUST BE NURTURED AND STRENGTHENED. ULTIMATELY, INNOVATION MUST ALMOST BECOME A WAY OF LIFE, A NORM. ONLY THEN WILL COUNTRIES BE ABLE TO COMPETE AGAINST THE BEST IN THE WORLD. ONLY THEN WILL COUNTRIES BE SEEN, OR BE BRANDED, AS INNOVATIVE.

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14. THIS BRINGS ME TO THE TOPIC OF BRANDING. MANY COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD HAVE EMBARKED ON RE-BRANDING EXERCISES AS PART OF THEIR EFFORTS TO BECOME MORE COMPETITIVE. IN A CHAOTIC AND COMPLEX WORLD, THERE HAS BEEN A GROWING REALISATION ON THE PART OF COUNTRIES THAT

BRANDS CAN BE EXTREMELY USEFUL IN PROVIDING CERTAINTY AND ASSURANCE TO GLOBAL MARKETS. BRANDS CAN ALSO BE EXTREMELY USEFUL IN PROVIDING A LENS THROUGH WHICH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY CAN COMPREHEND A COUNTRY. LIKE INNOVATION, BRANDS ARE A SOURCE OF GROWTH AND VALUE.

15. HOWEVER, THIS IS ONLY TRUE AS LONG AS THE COUNTRY REALLY EMBODIES THE BRAND THAT IS ESPOUSED. IF THE WAY THINGS ARE DONE IS AT ODDS WITH THE BRAND AS IT IS BEING TOUTED, THE BRAND WILL BE SIGNIFICANTLY DEVALUED.

16. TO MY MIND, THIS UNDERSTANDING OF BRANDING HAS NOT PERMEATED RAPIDLY ENOUGH. BRANDING IS OF COURSE ABOUT EXTERNAL FORM TO A CERTAIN EXTENT – THE RIGHT IMAGE AND PRESENTATION AND SO FORTH – BUT AT THE CORE, BRANDING IS ABOUT SUBSTANCE AND REAL VALUES.

17. MALAYSIA NEEDS TO GET BOTH THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL DIMENSIONS OF BRANDING RIGHT. EXTERNALLY, MALAYSIA MUST BE KNOWN FOR THE VALUES THAT IT TRULY UPHOLDS SUCH AS A LOVE FOR PEACE AND STABILITY AS WELL AS MODERATION AND PROGRESS. SURPRISINGLY, MALAYSIA IS STILL NOT WIDELY KNOWN FOR THIS. RECENTLY, I WAS TOLD BY A WELL-TRAVELLED INDIVIDUAL THAT HE WAS REFUSED TRAVEL INSURANCE TO MALAYSIA BY ONE OF THE BIGGEST INSURERS IN THE UNITED STATES, BECAUSE THERE WAS A PERCEIVED SAFETY RISK ATTRIBUTED TO ISLAMIC TERRORIST ACTIVITY HERE. IF YOU SAY THIS TO AN ORDINARY MALAYSIAN, YOU WOULD BE MET WITH DISBELIEF. OUR KNOWLEDGE OF OURSELVES IS CLEARLY NOT SHARED BY THE WORLD OUTSIDE OF MALAYSIA, AT LEAST NOT THE EXTENT THAT WE WOULD LIKE. THIS NEEDS TO CHANGE AND WE MUST RE-EXAMINE OUR EFFORTS IN THIS AREA.

18. INTERNALLY, MALAYSIA MUST UNDERTAKE THE HARD WORK REQUIRED TO TRULY LIVE UP TO THE ASPIRATION OF BEING BRANDED AS A DEVELOPED NATION. VALUES SUCH AS EXCELLENCE, PERFORMANCE AND COMPETITIVENESS MUST BE INGRAINED INTO OUR WAY OF LIFE BEFORE IT CAN BECOME PART OF OUR BRAND. BRANDING IS NOT JUST A LABEL, NOR IS IT JUST SOMETHING WE CAN DICTATE TO A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE. WE ARE ASSESSED EVERYDAY BY PEOPLE WHO CHOOSE TO BELIEVE OR TO NOT BELIEVE IN OUR BRAND. I AM DETERMINED TO MAKE MALAYSIA WELL KNOWN FOR ITS STRONG VALUES AND FOR ITS EFFICACY AND EFFICIENCY. THIS WILL ONLY COME ABOUT THROUGH SUSTAINED AND FOCUSED EFFORTS AT DEVELOPING A “MALAYSIAN” BRAND THAT WE CAN ALL CONTRIBUTE TO AND BE PROUD OF.

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19. EVERYTHING MAKES UP A BRAND: OUR PRODUCTS, OUR SERVICES, OUR BEHAVIOUR, OUR CULTURE, OUR INSTITUTIONS. AND IT TAKES LEADERSHIP TO PULL THESE STRANDS TOGETHER INTO A COHESIVE AND WORKABLE CONDITION FOR THE COUNTRY.

20. I EMPHASISE THE WORD 'WORKABLE' HERE BECAUSE MUCH OF WHAT IS POSSIBLE FOR A COUNTRY DEPENDS ON HOW ITS LEADERS NEGOTIATE THE COUNTRY'S HISTORICAL AND CURRENT CONTEXT TO ACHIEVE THE COUNTRY'S VISION. A LEADER MUST INSPIRE HIS OR HER PEOPLE TO WORK WITH THEM BUT A LEADER MUST ALSO UNDERSTAND THE HUMAN CONDITION, THE INHERENT FRAILTIES AND THE PRECONCEPTIONS IN HIS OR HER PEOPLE.

21. IN THE FACE OF THIS, DEVELOPING DESIRED BEHAVIOURS WHICH ARE ALIGNED TO THE ASPIRED BRAND, BECOMES A MONUMENTAL ENDEAVOUR. BUT IT CAN, AND IT MUST, BE DONE. LEADERS ARE ULTIMATELY BOTH STEWARD AND SERVANT OF THEIR ORGANISATION, BE IT A COMPANY OR A COUNTRY, AND THIS MEANS THAT IT IS THEIR FUNDAMENTAL DUTY TO DEVELOP THE PEOPLE, THE CULTURE AND THE REPUTATION OF THEIR INSTITUTION. AS STEWARD AND SERVANT, THEY MUST PERFORM AND BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR RESULTS. AS STEWARD AND SERVANT, THEY MUST EXHIBIT AND ENCOURAGE THE HIGHEST STORE OF VALUES – OF HONESTY, INTEGRITY, JUSTICE, FAIRNESS AND EQUITY. AS STEWARD AND SERVANT, THEY MUST LEAVE THEIR INSTITUTION A BETTER PLACE AS A RESULT OF THEIR LEADERSHIP.

22. THIS IS MY PLEDGE TO THE MALAYSIAN PEOPLE AND I HOPE THAT THEY CONTINUE TO JOIN ME IN THIS ENDEAVOUR. OUR VISION CANNOT BE ACHIEVED ALONE. THERE NEEDS TO BE LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY, SETTING THE PACE AND KEEPING UP MOMENTUM WHEN TIMES GET ROUGH. EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY, EVERYONE HAS A STAKE IN THE MALAYSIAN VISION AND EVERYONE REPRESENTS THE MALAYSIAN BRAND.

23. THESE ARE, BRIEFLY, MY THOUGHTS ON THE THEMES OF THE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP FORUM. I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK THE ORGANISERS FOR GIVING ME THE CHANCE TO REFLECT AND TO SHARE WITH YOU SOMETHING THAT IS CLOSE TO MY HEART. IT IS AGAIN, A PLEASURE AND HONOUR FOR ME TO SET THE STAGE FOR THE SUPERB INDIVIDUALS TO COME. I LOOK FORWARD TO A PRODUCTIVE AND EXCITING FORUM.

THANK YOU.