

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE OFFICIAL DINNER IN HONOUR OF THE HONOURABLE JOHN
HOWARD M P PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA
AT HOTEL MANDARIN ORIENTAL, KUALA LUMPUR
30 NOVEMBER 2006**

The Honourable John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. Prime Minister, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you and members of your delegation to Malaysia. I do hope that you have an enjoyable and pleasant stay in Kuala Lumpur.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. I am very pleased that the Prime Minister of Australia is able to undertake this official visit because it serves to reflect the close and friendly relations that exist between Malaysia and Australia. I am aware that this visit is also intended to reciprocate the visit I made to Australia in April last year. I appreciate the gesture.

Prime Minister Howard,

3. I do believe that your visit will provide further impetus for the enhancement of cooperation between our two countries. Your visit has provided us the opportunity to discuss and exchange views on many bilateral, regional and international issues of common concern. I am very conscious of the benefit it brings towards enhancing our understanding and respect for each other's views and positions on various issues. Such understanding and respect will no doubt contribute to the expansion and consolidation of relations between Malaysia and Australia.

4. Next year, in 2007, Malaysia will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of its independence, which will also mark 50 years of diplomatic relations with a number of countries, including Australia. In fact, the diplomatic exchange between our two countries began earlier when Thomas Critchley was appointed as Australia's Commissioner to Malaya in December 1955. Soon after that, in August 1956, our side sent Dato' Nik Kamil Haji Mahmood to head the Commission of the Federation of Malaya in Australia.

5. It would be accurate to say that the 50 years of mutually beneficial relations have made significant contributions to the progress in our respective countries. I would mention in particular the areas of trade and investment, education and human capital development, security and defence, science and technology as well as tourism.

6. Mr. Prime Minister, during my visit to Australia last year, you and I had discussed a wide range of issues of mutual interest. We had also agreed to broaden the scope of our bilateral cooperation in various areas and to start negotiations on a Free Trade Area Agreement. I am happy that our discussions today will mark progress in various matters.

7. Mr. Prime Minister, as you have yourself said this morning, we have had ups and downs in our bilateral relations. But the solid foundations of our cooperation, particularly in matters of defence, education and trade, have remained strong. We should now focus on new areas for collaboration within a framework of cooperation that is more binding, which would stand the test of time, and which is based on mutual trust and confidence.

8. I am convinced that we can also add value to the collaboration that already exists between our two countries in the well established areas which I have listed earlier. We should pursue a policy of openness in building beneficial relations with each other in these areas. On both sides, we may need to encourage the private sectors of both countries to do more between themselves. I am sure the Governments on both sides are ready to interact more with the private sector to achieve this purpose.

9. For example, there is much more that can be done in the field of education. While Australia will continue to be a popular destination for young Malaysians seeking quality tertiary education, Malaysia has also poised itself as a hub for education and learning. Our two countries can expand cooperation in education by encouraging greater collaboration among and between Malaysian and Australian universities and institutions of higher learning. Some Australian universities have already established their campuses here in Malaysia. We would like to welcome more Australian students to study in this country. We would like them to experience Malaysian life and culture and get to know Malaysia more deeply. We need to enhance the people-to-people relations between our two countries.

10. We can foster more exchanges among parliamentarians. We can increase fellowship programs involving think-tanks, universities, the media and civil society. I am certain that these can serve to build bridges and enhance dialogue and understanding between our peoples and cultures.

Mr. Prime Minister,

11. For now, we can note with satisfaction the increasing volume of bilateral trade as a strong point in our present relations, thanks especially to the efforts undertaken by both sides through the processes of the Joint Trade Committee. In fact, there is increasing interaction and collaboration between the business communities of Malaysia and Australia on a broad front. The dynamic activities of the Malaysia-Australia Business Council have contributed much to this increasing interaction and collaboration. However, we should continue to work for increased trade and investment between our two countries because there is still a lot of room for expansion. For instance, we can increase collaboration in the field of agriculture and agro-business, which is a matter of priority for the Government of Malaysia. Malaysia hopes that Australia would consider allowing more agriculture products from Malaysia to enter Australia. After all, Australia is presently the second largest supplier of food to Malaysia.

Mr. Prime Minister,

12. I am also happy to note that our discussions today have revealed that Malaysia and Australia do share similar aspirations on many regional and international issues. We have displayed friendship and respect for each other when agreeing to disagree on some matters of global importance. The important thing, however, is our complete agreement on the need to work together to establish stability, peace and prosperity not only in our immediate region but also in the world as a whole. Towards this end, we have agreed to continue collaborating in such areas as countering the threat of international terrorism, stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, preventing environmental degradation and managing natural disasters and infectious diseases. Indeed, we must continue to work closely within the bilateral, regional and multilateral framework, not only to advance the collective interests of the international community but also to safeguard our respective national interests.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. Let me conclude by expressing once again the appreciation of the Government and people of Malaysia to the Prime Minister of Australia, The Honourable John Howard, for honouring us with his visit. I feel confident that the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Australia will continue to strengthen and flourish in the years ahead.

Thank you.