

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF BIOMALAYSIA 2008
AT KUALA LUMPUR CONVENTION CENTRE, KUALA LUMPUR
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Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Good Morning

YB Dato' Dr. Maximus Ongkili
Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation

YBhg Tan Sri Ahmad Zaharudin Idrus

Chairman, Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation

YBhg Dato' Iskandar Mizal Mahmood
Chief Executive Officer, Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Firstly, let me wish everyone 'Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri' or 'Eid Mubarak'. The festive spirit is still in the air and for our international guests in particular, I hope you have the opportunity to enjoy this very special occasion. Hari Raya represents the best of Malaysian hospitality – where we celebrate the end of fasting in the holy month of Ramadhan with friends new and old, and also where we renew and strengthen cherished ties.

2. In this festive season, I must express my utmost appreciation to the teams at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation as well as the Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation for their hard work in organising this event. This event reflects the development of Malaysia's biotechnology industry and I am truly pleased to see BioMalaysia growing bigger and better every year.

Ladies and Gentlemen

3. It has been three years since the launch of the National Biotechnology Policy, the policy which outlined the Government's commitment to building a sustainable biotechnology industry in Malaysia. Together with I.C.T., biotechnology will be a major technological platform for the country, bringing the nation into the next phase of high-value, knowledge-based economic development.

4. In the last three years, we have put in place several building blocks to facilitate the growth of the biotechnology industry, from the establishment of a dedicated development agency to the provision of significant funding and incentives. So far, the achievements during these three years have been very encouraging.

5. Market capitalisation of biotech and healthcare companies listed on Bursa Malaysia reached 2 billion ringgit in 2008. Total approved investments in biotechnology companies under the BioNexus program stands at 1.3 billion ringgit. To date, there are 71 BioNexus companies with activities ranging from plant genomics to animal breeding; from nutraceuticals to stem cell engineering; from bio-remediation to bio-

fuels. These companies include newly created local biotechnology companies as well as foreign biotechnology companies that have recently located to our shores.

6. Meanwhile, efforts to improve the country's operating environment for biotechnology have gone from strength to strength. Several programs are underway to increase the capacity of biotechnology entrepreneurs, scientists, researchers as well as patent examiners. A few platform technologies have been acquired through the Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation, including one based on nanotechnology, to facilitate the research work undertaken by our universities' scientists and to generate commercial applications. Specialised laboratory facilities are being developed, including an upcoming one in Nilai, to house biotechnology start-ups. Initiatives to enhance public-private collaborations, such as the BioNexus Partner Program, are being undertaken.

7. These are encouraging achievements and solid works-in-progress. Nevertheless, much more needs to be done in order for us to establish Malaysia's niche in the global biotechnology value chain. Malaysia is currently considered as one of the most attractive destinations for contract research and contract manufacturing. These are good starting points. However, we must focus our efforts on generating innovative, high-value biotechnology activities, particularly activities which play to our strengths and make the most of our existing economic sectors.

8. Traditionally strong sectors such as palm oil need to start stepping into the future by investing in biotechnology R&D today. Malaysia's top position as a world producer of palm oil will no longer be defensible as we reach the limits of land expansion. Yield improvements, while important, will also be only a temporary source of competitive advantage. What we must look to is the development of a high-tech palm oil industry which generates innovative and high-value products.

9. Here, I would like to commend the work of the Malaysian Palm Oil Board as well as the Asiatic Centre for Genome Technology in sequencing the oil palm genome. Mapping the oil palm genome presents numerous opportunities for the industry, from yield improvement to generation of new nutritious oils, to production of affordable renewable fuels. It also presents benefits for the environment by improving the efficiency of land use and reducing agricultural waste.

10. The way of the future, not only for the palm oil industry but for many other industries in Malaysia, is the application of modern biotechnology. Malaysian entrepreneurs and corporations must start exploring high-tech, high-value production now or face inevitable pressure from low-cost countries. For many industries, biotechnology can help move them up the value chain and enhance their competitive positions.

Ladies and gentlemen

11. Pressures to our way of life do not only come from global competition. In these last two years we have experienced several challenges, from rising global oil prices to decreasing food production, to evident problems of climate change. Without a doubt, challenges to business and to the people's quality of life have intensified in magnitude. Everyone in the world shares the same grave problems: food, fuel, and climate change.

12. As populations grow the world will be more in need of the solutions that biotechnology can offer. Healthcare biotechnology can deliver better, more effective

medicines. Agriculture biotechnology can improve food production. Industrial biotechnology can help to clean up our environment.

13. The mapping of the human genome is only beginning to reveal the power of modern biotechnology – one that shifts the focus from treatment to prevention. Disease and illness will be with us, especially with the very young and the old, but the future of healthcare biotechnology is such that we will be able to tackle diseases even before they have a chance to manifest themselves.

14. The promise of biotechnology is undeniable. For Malaysia, this means that we must make a long-term commitment towards exploring biotechnology's potential and making the most of its benefits. The aim and spirit of the National Biotechnology Policy, launched three years ago, must continue even if its implementation or approach is altered. That is, we must continue to work towards building not only an economic sector, but a sustainable biotechnology ecosystem – one where scientific discoveries from our research institutions or foreign institutes are developed for the use and betterment of the people, through a vibrant and accommodative business environment.

15. Hence, we must continue putting in place the required building blocks. The pool of Malaysian biotechnology knowledge workers, scientists and researchers must be expanded. Present efforts by public and private institutions to train qualified graduates must make a quantum leap in order to support the quantity and quality demanded by the industry. The legal and regulatory environment must be simplified to reduce delays and uncertainties, whilst maintaining protection of intellectual property as well as safeguarding the environment. The quality of R&D must be improved to increase the chances for commercialisation and value creation.

16. These are long-term issues, requiring consistent and steady effort. If all parties work together, with unity of purpose, there is nothing that cannot be achieved. Policymakers, regulators, scientists and industry participants must engage and understand each other. Complex issues, such as those involving industry development and environmental preservation, should be discussed in a way that leads to accord and solution. We must always be ready to meet each other half-way as we try to build a sustainable and competitive industry, while ensuring ethical conduct and ecological protection.

Ladies and Gentlemen

17. With the commitment and collective effort of the Malaysian Government and the private sector, biotechnology is set to become a significant contributor to the socio-economic well being of all Malaysians. In these early years, we must take stock of our progress and look to achieve even greater results for the biotechnology industry in Malaysia. With hard work and determination, we will realise the objective of not only creating value and enhancing the people's welfare, but also of putting Malaysia firmly on the global biotechnology map.

18. Thank you once again, and my heartiest congratulations go to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and the Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation for the growth and success of BioMalaysia, from year to year. With the recitation of Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim, it is now my pleasure to declare BioMalaysia 2008 officially open.

Thank you.