

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE FORMULA ONE PETRONAS MALAYSIAN
GRAND PRIX 2008
AT ESPLANADE, SURIA K.L.C.C.
18 JANUARY 2008**

BISMILLAHIR RAHMANIR RAHIM

ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI WABARAKATUH AND GOOD EVENING

DATUK SERI TENGKU ADNAN TENGKU MANSOR
MINISTER OF TOURISM

DATUK AZALINA OTHMAN SAID
MINISTER OF YOUTH AND SPORTS

DATO' SERI ZULHASNAN RAFIQUE
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TAN SRI HASSAN MERICAN
PRESIDENT, PETROLIAM NASIONAL BERHAD (PETRONAS)

DATUK MOKHZANI MAHATHIR
CHAIRMAN, SEPANG INTERNATIONAL CIRCUIT

TUNKU MUDZAFFAR TUNKU MUSTAPHA
CHAIRMAN, AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA

DATUK AZMAN YAHYA
CHAIRMAN, MOTORSPORTS COMMISSION OF MALAYSIA

EXCELLENCIES AND DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

1. I WOULD FIRST LIKE TO COMMEND BOTH PETRONAS AND SEPANG INTERNATIONAL CIRCUIT FOR THEIR CONTINUED COMMITMENT TOWARDS THE FORMULA ONE PETRONAS MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX. IT IS PLEASING TO NOTE THAT THE ANNUAL FORMULA ONE EVENT HAS BECOME ONE OF MALAYSIA'S STRONGEST TOOLS IN PROMOTING ITSELF AS A PREMIER DESTINATION FOR SPORTS-RELATED TOURISM, WHICH HAS BROUGHT THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE TO OUR SHORES.

2. INDEED, THIS EVENING'S CEREMONY IS BOTH SIGNIFICANT AND HISTORIC, AS IT MARKS MALAYSIA'S HOSTING OF THE 10TH EDITION OF THE FORMULA ONE PETRONAS MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX. THIS GRAND PRIX WILL BE HELD AT THE SEPANG F-1 CIRCUIT FROM THE 21ST TO 23RD OF MARCH, AS ROUND TWO OF THE 2008 FORMULA ONE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

3. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE WORLD MOTOR SPORTS SCENE, IN PARTICULAR THE PRESTIGIOUS F-1 CHAMPIONSHIP, CONTINUES ITS TRANSFORMATION OF DIVERSIFYING AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL EUROPEAN RACE TRACKS. THIS IS ESPECIALLY APPARENT WITH MORE RACES BEING HELD AT NEW STATE-OF-THE-ART CIRCUITS IN ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST.

4. ABOUT A DECADE AGO, THE F-1 FRATERNITY'S PRESENCE IN THE ASIAN REGION WAS LIMITED TO ONLY JAPAN. DESPITE A VERY LARGE FOLLOWING THROUGHOUT THE ASIAN REGION, THE WORLD OF F-1 ONLY RECOGNISED JAPAN AS THE SOLE ASIAN NATION TO HOST THE WORLD'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS MOTOR RACING CHAMPIONSHIP. HOWEVER, ALL THAT CHANGED ABOUT 10 YEARS AGO.

5. MALAYSIA BECAME THE FIRST ASIAN COUNTRY AFTER JAPAN TO HOST THE PRESTIGIOUS MOTOR SPORTS EVENT WITH THE INCEPTION OF THE PETRONAS MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX IN 1999. HENCE, IT MAY BE SAID THAT THE 1999 PETRONAS MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX WAS THE TRAILBLAZER IN MAKING THE F-1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP A TRULY GLOBAL SPORTING EVENT.

6. OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, MALAYSIA HAS ENJOYED TREMENDOUS SUCCESS IN F-1. APART FROM BEING HONOURED BY THE F.I.A. FOR CAPTURING THE TITLE OF "BEST ORGANISED GRAND PRIX" IN 1999, THE F-1 PETRONAS MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX CONTINUES TO DRAW MASSIVE CROWDS YEAR AFTER YEAR. MOREOVER, SEPANG F-1 CIRCUIT IS NOW HOST TO ANNUAL RACES IN OTHER MOTOR SPORTS EVENTS SUCH AS THE WORLD MOTO G.P., A-1 G.P., JAPAN G.T. AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS.

7. OF COURSE, THIS LEVEL OF SUCCESS DOES NOT GO UNNOTICED FOR LONG. INDEED, MALAYSIA'S ACCOMPLISHMENT HAS INSPIRED OTHER ASIAN NATIONS TO SECURE RIGHTS TO HOST THEIR OWN F-1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RACES. OUR SUCCESS HAS PROVED THAT ASIA IS CAPABLE OF ORGANISING RACES FOR THE WORLD'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS MOTOR RACING CHAMPIONSHIP. MORE IMPORTANTLY, OUR SUCCESS HAS GIVEN CONFIDENCE TO THE WORLDWIDE RIGHTS HOLDER, FORMULA ONE MANAGEMENT (F.O.M.), TO PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR OTHER ASIAN CITIES TO BECOME HOST VENUES.

8. HENCE, F-1 RACES ARE NOW BEING HELD IN BAHRAIN AND CHINA, WHICH WON BIDS TO HOST THEIR RESPECTIVE EVENTS IN 2004. SINGAPORE WILL BECOME ASIA'S LATEST ENTRY AS HOST VENUE FOR THE F-1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP, WITH ITS INAUGURAL RACE TO BE HELD IN SEPTEMBER THIS YEAR. AS OUR CLOSEST NEIGHBOUR AND PARTNER IN ASEAN, MALAYSIA WELCOMES SINGAPORE TO THIS PRIVILEGED GROUP OF HOSTS FOR F-1 RACES.

9. GOING FORWARD, ABU DHABI IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES; INDIA; AND SOUTH KOREA ARE ALL EXPECTED TO JOIN THE F-1 CHAMPIONSHIP FRATERNITY. THIS WILL SURELY MAKE ASIA A NEW HUB FOR INTERNATIONAL MOTOR SPORTS. INDEED, IT IS MY HOPE THAT THE ENTRY OF SINGAPORE AND OTHER GRAND PRIX HOST CITIES IN ASIA WILL FURTHER ENHANCE THE INTEREST AND DEVELOPMENT OF MOTOR SPORTS – AND ITS RELATED INDUSTRIES – IN THE REGION.

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10. FOR MANY YEARS, F-1 RACES WERE HELD IN TRADITIONAL RACING CIRCUITS ACROSS EUROPE. THESE CIRCUITS WERE MOSTLY FAMOUS FOR THEIR RACING HERITAGE, RATHER THAN PERHAPS COMPLIANCE WITH MODERN SAFETY STANDARDS. HOWEVER, THIS CHANGED WHEN THE SEPANG F-1 CIRCUIT BECAME OPERATIONAL IN 1999, AS THE WORLD OF MOTOR RACING WAS INTRODUCED TO A NEW SET OF CIRCUIT SAFETY REGULATIONS.

11. THUS, IT SHOULD BE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT MALAYSIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO F-1 IS NOT LIMITED TO A SHIFT IN GEOGRAPHICAL CONCENTRATION, BUT ALSO IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITIES AND SAFETY STANDARDS. WITH THE SEPANG F-1 CIRCUIT SETTING A NEW BENCHMARK FOR MOTOR RACING SAFETY STANDARDS, OFFICIALS FROM SHANGHAI, BAHRAIN AND OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE UTILISED THE MALAYSIAN CIRCUIT TO MAP THE CONSTRUCTION PLANS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE RACE COURSES.

12. IN LIGHT OF MALAYSIA'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN MOTOR SPORTS, I BELIEVE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR PETRONAS AND SEPANG INTERNATIONAL CIRCUIT TO CONTINUE BEING KEY PLAYERS IN THIS FIELD. WHILE WE SHOULD TAKE PRIDE IN SOME OF OUR ACHIEVEMENTS, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE CONTINUE TO PUSH FORWARD. THIS IS ESPECIALLY PERTINENT GIVEN THE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF MOTOR SPORTS IN THE ASIAN REGION, WHICH WILL NOT ONLY EXPAND ITS POPULARITY, BUT ALSO ENHANCE COMPETITION IN THIS VERY LUCRATIVE AND FAST-GROWING SPORTING SPECTACLE.

13. AS SUCH, I WOULD LIKE TO CALL UPON PETRONAS, SEPANG INTERNATIONAL CIRCUIT AND ALL RELEVANT PARTIES TO STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE IN MAKING THE 10TH EDITION OF THE FORMULA ONE PETRONAS MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX A "PERFECT 10" AFFAIR. I AM MADE TO UNDERSTAND THAT DURING THE HOSTING OF LAST YEAR'S EVENT, THERE WERE REMARKS MADE THAT INDICATED THAT SOME OF THE FACILITIES AT THE SEPANG F-1 CIRCUIT WERE IN NEED OF MINOR REPAIR OR MAINTENANCE. I TRUST THAT THIS ISSUE HAS BEEN THOROUGHLY ATTENDED TO PRIOR TO THIS YEAR'S RACE. MOREOVER, IT IS MY WISH THAT THE ORGANISERS MAINTAIN THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF SERVICE, QUALITY AND SAFETY STANDARDS AT ALL TIMES, DURING THE HOSTING OF THE MALAYSIAN LEG OF THE F-1 CHAMPIONSHIP.

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14. MALAYSIA STANDS COMMITTED TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOTOR SPORTS, BOTH LOCALLY AND IN THE REGION. I SINCERELY BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE MANY YOUNG TALENTS HERE IN MALAYSIA, WHICH THE RELEVANT AGENCIES AND ORGANISATIONS SHOULD LOOK INTO, TO DEVELOP THEM INTO FUTURE MOTOR RACING CHAMPIONS. I AM HOPEFUL THAT PETRONAS, SEPANG INTERNATIONAL CIRCUIT AND THE MOTORSPORT COMMISSION WILL CONTINUE TO TAKE THE LEAD IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH TALENT.

15. ALREADY, A FEW MALAYSIANS ARE MAKING THEIR MARK ON THE RACE TRACK, PARTICULARLY IN EVENTS SUCH AS THE A-1 G.P. AND THE FORMULA B.M.W. ASIA SERIES. IF MALAYSIANS ARE CAPABLE OF BECOMING CHAMPIONS IN SPORTS SUCH AS SQUASH, BOWLING AND BADMINTON, I SEE NO REASON WHY WE SHOULD NOT EXCEL IN MOTORSPORTS AS WELL.

16. LET ME AGAIN THANK EVERYONE AT PETRONAS AND SEPANG INTERNATIONAL CIRCUIT FOR THEIR EFFORTS IN HOSTING THE MALAYSIAN LEG OF THE F-1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WISH ALL PARTICIPATING F-1 TEAMS A SUCCESSFUL 2008 CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON AHEAD.

17. WITH THAT, IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO LAUNCH THE FORMULA ONE PETRONAS MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX 2008.

THANK YOU.