

Keynote Address at The National Maritime Conference – LIMA '19

THEME : MALAYSIA A MARITIME NATION: CHARTING THE PASSAGE

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1. I would like to thank the Royal Malaysian Navy for organising this National Maritime Conference 2019 and inviting me to officiate it. It is indeed a pleasure to witness the reintroduction of this conference into the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA).

2. I believe holding this maritime conference during LIMA is a wise decision as senior government officials, policy makers and academics, who are the key players in Malaysia's maritime sphere, are gathered here during this period.

3. The theme of the conference 'Malaysia a Maritime Nation: Charting the Passage' offers us the opportunity to assess our progress, and subsequently, deliberate on the way forward and strategies to realise our aspirations to be a true maritime nation.

4. Malaysia is indeed blessed with all the attributes of a maritime nation. Our strategic location positions us at the focal point on the map of maritime trade where 90% of trade is via shipping. We have beautiful coastlines and islands and they bring millions of tourists to our shores. Our seas is home to bountiful natural resources that provide livelihood to

fishermen while big players in the fishing and aquaculture industries have been making handsome economic gains. Our ocean is also host to thriving oil and gas explorations and industries. And there are still numerous natural resources, seabed minerals which have yet to be explored. They too promise our nation wealthy returns.

5. Malaysia's dependency on the ocean can never be understated and it is naturally so, given that it is surrounded by seas and its maritime space is virtually 2 times bigger than our land area.

6. This dependency extends to almost all sectors particularly in food, trade, energy, transportation, tourism and security. With such a vast sea area, which offers a diverse range of living and non-living resources, and being strategically located at the centre of important shipping lanes, the waters surrounding us carry tremendous environmental, socio-economic and strategic value to the nation.

7. Furthermore, the maritime sector is a crucial contributor to the country's socio-economic wealth and security. The contribution of the maritime sector towards the growth of the Malaysian economy will become even more significant as Malaysia aspires to become a fully developed nation. While all the sectors are significant for our economic development – a balanced, strategic and proper exploitation of the relevant maritime resources must be conducted and managed in a sustainable manner. It is therefore incumbent upon all of us that as we exploit our oceans, we are at the same time responsible for the safeguarding of these resources for the well-being of the present and future generations.

8. In our race to become a developed nation, our readily available natural resources must be consolidated and optimised. As demanded by the principle of Sustainable Development which we subscribe to, there

shouldn't be any unscrupulous exploitation of the country's marine natural resources for the sake of economic growth per se.

9. The guiding principle of sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Thus, when it comes to exploiting and optimising the use of our seas and marine resources, we must always pay very serious consideration on the conservation aspects of our marine environment.

10. Unfortunately, apart from having to balance economic development and conservation of our marine environment, our marine ecosystem and biodiversity are also being threatened by other factors like climate change and global warming, apart from food, water and energy security issues.

11. Therefore, in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals the Government is keen on the principles of the Blue Economy, where sustainable economic growth should always be in line with maintaining the ocean's health.

12. In striking a balance between achieving economic growth and maintaining ocean health, the Blue Economy warrants for proper planning and management of the maritime space. Major prioritised sectors like fisheries, aquaculture, ports and shipping, oil and mineral exploration and extraction, as well as ocean energy development should be properly planned and managed. Central issues like pollution control, marine ecosystem health and sustainable fisheries should always be the basis if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

13. Optimising our country's wealth through maritime-based economic activities is interlinked with our ability to alleviate maritime security issues.

Despite being bestowed with bountiful marine natural resources, enhancing revenue generation may not be possible if maritime security issues are not promptly and strategically addressed.

14. Apart from the usual threats like maritime boundary disputes, our maritime security is also greatly challenged by non-traditional threats such as illegal trafficking of both goods and human, Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported Fishing (IUU fishing), piracy, terrorism, threats to the marine ecosystem like climate change and global warming, and pollution from shipping activities and land-based pollution.

15. These activities have greatly impeded our economic activities and inadvertently impacted on our total national revenues. Encroachment by foreign fishing vessels, for instance, has led to massive income loss apart from irreversible damage to our marine ecosystem. It was reported last year that we lost approximately RM6 billion annually from illegal fishing activity, or IUU fishing, in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia alone.

16. There is a need for us to revisit our approach in managing our vast sea areas and marine resources. Over the years, as Malaysia mature as a nation, there have been no less than 15 Acts and Orders passed to manage our maritime space.

17. Enforcement of these laws is entrusted in various government agencies – cutting across more than 10 ministries and 31 maritime-related agencies. There are bound to be overlapping jurisdictions and eventually lead to inefficient utilisation of resources.

18. In addition to that, while the government continues to allocate huge amounts from its annual budget to empower management and enforcement in our waters, illegal maritime-related activities remain a major challenge.

19. A well-coordinated effort cutting across all the government sectors is needed to overcome these challenges. Enforcement activities can only be effective when there is sound Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capability. Several agencies have in fact been equipped with a range of ISR capabilities, which should be shared through proper coordination with other enforcement agencies to further strengthen enforcement at sea.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. Since the present Government took office in May last year, it has been our priority to enhance integrity, and minimise leakage and wastage. The Government coffers had been drained excessively, leaving the country in huge debts. The global economic downturn has only made it worse, making wise and prudent spending the only option. Government expenses must be cut down in order to survive and reduce our debts. We will, without doubt, be prudent in spending, especially on new assets and capabilities.

21. It is high time for all maritime-related agencies to collaborate and consolidate necessary work processes. This effort can be achieved through greater understanding, trust and open communication. Overlapping jurisdictions must be immediately addressed to overcome wastage of government resources. Coordinated and integrated approach should be the answer to strengthen maritime enforcement.

22. The Government recognises the need for an ocean governance regime for Malaysia. There should be an overarching policy, encompassing all maritime aspects – from security, to safety, to economy, and the environment.

23. If we continue to manage our seas in fragments, as it is now, the overlapping of jurisdictions and conflicts of interests between the sectors

will never be resolved. Going back to the notion of Blue Economy and Maritime Domain Awareness, the management of Malaysia's seas must be based on balancing the need as in continuing to use the sea for economic activities without sacrificing the needs to maintain security, safety and the marine environment.

24. We have a lot to do and more challenges to overcome in order for Malaysia to become a true Maritime Nation. It cannot be done overnight but we have also undergone much as a nation to be able to identify and find solution for most of our maritime related issues.

25. Our vision to become a Maritime Nation is progressively becoming a reality, provided that we are willing to join hands and march forward together. This forum can be the launching pad for Malaysia to chart its way as a Maritime Nation.

26. I would like to commend the Royal Malaysian Navy for organising this National Maritime Conference 2019 which I believe will assist the Government in identifying critical issues requiring our attention. I look forward to hearing the outcome of this conference with the hope that it will assist the Government in charting better policies which will in turn be the narrative in realising Malaysia's Maritime Nation agenda.

27. On that note, it gives me much pleasure to declare the 'National Maritime Conference 2019' officially open.

Thank you.

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