

MAJLIS MAKAN MALAM TAHUNAN ANJURAN PERTUBUHAN ARKITEK
MALAYSIA (PAM)
HOTEL HILTON, PETALING JAYA

7 AUGUST 1985

Yang Berbahagia Dr. Kenneth Yeang, Presiden Pertubuhan Arkitek Malaysia; Dif-Dif Kehormat; Tuan-tuan dan Puan-puan sekalian.

Saya mengucapkan terima kasih kepada Pertubuhan Arkitek Malaysia atau PAM kerana menjemput saya dan isteri saya ke majlis jamuan makan malam tahunan PAM. Saya juga berterima kasih kepada PAM kerana menganugerahkan kepada saya Keahlian Kehormat Pertubuhan ini. Saya ingin merakamkan penghargaan kepada semua ahli PAM di atas penganugerahan ini.

2. Saya juga difahamkan bahawa tempoh hari PAM telah mengadakan satu persidangan antarabangsa yang telah dihadiri oleh para arkitek dari dalam dan luar negeri. To those of you who have come from abroad I would like to extend our welcome. I do hope you will take time off to visit some of the interesting places in Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere. As architects I am sure you will be looking at our buildings, old and new. I am proud to say that some buildings have been accorded international recognition. The hotel in Tanjung Jara in Trengganu has won the Aga Khan prize.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. When I was invited by your Association to attend this function, I accepted it with little hesitation as I have not had the opportunity to be with you before. And when I was told that PAM would like to confer me an award, I could not say no as it is an honour that no one can refuse. I am sure that it is not because I am a Prime Minister but rather because I am at least partially responsible for the mess that Kuala Lumpur is in today. However, it was when I was asked to say a few words that I hesitated most. It is not that I am unaccustomed to public speaking but it is simply that when I speak I get sort of carried away and say quite a lot of impolite things. But after you have treated me to a sumptuous meal I am, to some extent, constrained from speaking forthrightly. This speech is as polite and indirect as I can get.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. PAM as a professional organisation has played an important and significant role in the development of this country. PAM and its members, either individually or collectively, has from time to time contributed to and assisted the Government by way of suggestions, ideas as well as constructive criticisms of the various plans initiated by the Government. The close rapport established by PAM with the various Government departments and agencies has resulted in a good and harmonious relationship. I am confident that PAM will continue to contribute and work closely with the Government for our mutual benefit.

5. I would like to commend PAM on its progressive efforts and its contribution to our national development. PAM as a professional institution is perceived as being committed to taking an active role in advancing Malaysian architecture and this is good for the country. Of course PAM must jealously guard the interest of its members. Self-interest is still the best interest, modified no doubt by the larger interest of the society and nation.

6. I have also been told that the current emphasis by PAM is in the pursuit of excellence in design with a Malaysian theme. This pursuit is an on-going developmental process heritage of the country. This process is, therefore, an essential component of nation building because architecture is more than just mere building construction. It is an expression of our national personality and character. It wouldn't do to have Kuala Lumpur so like other modern cities that a visitor cannot realise that he is in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and not Houston, Texas or Los Angeles, California. We cannot rely on the rain and the humidity to be Kuala Lumpur's signature. breadth of the country one sees development and construction going on at a frenetic phase. No one particular state in the country is left out of this progress. We are not a country with everything concentrated exclusively in the capital. Our development is spread out. Towns especially the major towns, are changing both in size and character. Despite the policy to spread development, Kuala Lumpur as the capital has grown faster than the other urban centres. Still, next to Bandar Sri Begawan, Kuala Lumpur remains the smallest capital in South East Asia.

8. A lot of people feel that this is not good. They would like to retain the quaint and slow-moving town that Kuala Lumpur once was. Life was much more gracious then; no rush, no traffic, no noise, and of course with rickshaws and tricycles as the main transport, there was no pollution. It is difficult to think that 15 years ago when the city fathers were against high rise buildings, Kuala Lumpur was just like that -a provincial capital of pseudo-Moorish architecture, quaintly mixed with Chinese shop-houses fronted by five-foot ways.

9. Those who are opposed to the growth of the city are not being realistic. We cannot preserve everything in the interest of nostalgia and the satisfaction and the comfort of a few. It is just too costly. Secondly it is not necessary that growth and development of a city should be hideous and polluting. Thus in the development of Kuala Lumpur, we have tried to preserve the landmarks and the City Hall has tried to beautify the surroundings with trees and flower beds and landscaping. There is much yet to be done but I believe we have just managed to save Kuala Lumpur from being a collection of giant match boxes standing upright which is what most cities are today.

10. Opposed to the conservationists and the environmentalists are the land-owners and developers. These people want to squeeze as many square foot of floor space into their projects as they can. That the city is already congested and ugly is of no interest to them. They want to maximise their earnings. And so buildings rise to ever greater heights rubbing shoulders with each other. There is no space for trees and for landscaping. That the road and streets cannot handle the traffic entering and leaving the buildings deter no one. If an owner of a piece of land between two tall buildings is not allowed to put up his own multi-storey building, that, to him, is an injustice. And so the city becomes the hideous place that environmentalists love to condemn.

11. The problem for the city fathers is to balance the objections of the environmentalists and conservationists with the need to be fair to the property owners and developers. And that problem will not lend itself to easy solutions. City Hall must resign itself to being condemned by both all the time.

12. The Government is not as callous and arbitrary as some people make it out to be. We are concerned. We are concerned with the environment and conservation as much as we are concerned to see that everyone gets the wealth that is due to him. Even though we may be preoccupied with rural development and the eradication of relative poverty there, we are not neglecting urban development.

13. Lately the Government has been looking at the effects of rapid development in the cities in Malaysia. More and more glass towers are being built, designed, I am told, to keep out the heat thus lowering the cost of cooling the interiors. If the heat is kept out, where does it go to? It cannot just disappear. The chances are it is heating up the streets and the open spaces, making walking about or even driving less comfortable. We suspect heat islands are being formed in certain locations.

14. The short answer to this problem is to ban the use of reflecting glass as exteriors of buildings. But perhaps there are other ways. Certainly the planting of more trees and greens will help provide cool shades. There may be other ways. Some research is obviously desirable. The Government is now looking into the right agency to do this kind of research. In the meantime we are going to plant more trees. I would urge all owners of buildings, architects and landscape artists to give their attention and support to the tree-planting and landscaping effort. I am sure it will pay in the end. In any case we will be able to live in a more congenial environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. A foreigner once remarked to me that Kuala Lumpur is different. Our new construction is completely different from our colonial architecture. Then we built rows and rows of shop-houses fronted by five-foot ways. One could walk for miles along the five-foot paths completely protected from the sun or rain. It was no problem to go from shop to shop without being exposed to the elements. And of course the shop houses and the five-foot ways gave character to our towns.

16. Today we no longer build shop-houses. We build free-standing buildings composed of a podium and a tower. The podium normally has the shops while the tower is used for office space. Whithout doubt these free-standing composite buildings are beautifully designed. Indeed they have character as well. But there are no more covered ways for people to walk from building to building. If you want to do that you will have to get on the street and walk or drive.

17. I am not suggesting that we should rebuild the old types of shop-houses. But the problem of getting from building to building without being too exposed to the elements must be tackled. Some foreign cities have tunnels and subways linking the buildings. In the tropics that may not be very comfortable. Perhaps covered walks or shady avenues could serve the purpose. Already we have some of the most colourful and functional bus-stops. Surely some brilliant architect from among you could think up some brilliant idea, or perhaps ideas. We must preserve some of the old shop-houses to remind us of our old character. But there is nothing to prevent us from creating a new character for Malaysian cities. We are already different. Accentuate this difference and it will give us character.

18. Finally let me say something about over-building. Over-supply is a dangerous thing. We all borrow in order to invest in buildings o r whatever.

Our expectation is to repay the loans through the income derived from our buildings. In an over-supply situation the return may not be enough to repay the loans. Indeed we may have to provide more collaterals or have our loans recalled if the value of our property falls below the borrowed amount. To counter this you may have to lower rents or prices drastically. But others will do the same. You will still be unable to get the money to repay the loan. Then you will be in trouble.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. The Government does not like to see anyone lose money. It hurts the economy and it hurts the revenues of the Government. It is because of this that we try to limit loans for building construction. It is in your interest and you should support it. It is important that the rate of construction relates to demands.

20. This will mean that architects will have less work. Some have invested a great deal of money in their firms. They have become used to prosperity. Some have left the Government service for the more lucrative private sector. Now they are going to feel the pinch. The nearest scapegoat is the Government of course. They would never think that it is their own avarice that has contributed to their difficulties. Had they stayed with the Government they could have a steady though smaller income.

21. The fact is that in business there must be ups and downs whatever we may do. We cannot be in control of everything. There will always be outside influences which will affect our performance and income.

22. The thing to do is to always provide for a rainy day and to tighten our belts when things are not as they should be. Disregarding recession or expecting it to be over soon is not the way to handle bad times.

23. We are experiencing relatively bad times in Malaysia. It is really not too bad. Others are going through worse. The test of a country's resilience lies in the ability of the private and public sectors to manage bad times. Anyone can manage in good times.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

24. Once again I thank PAM for inviting me to this dinner and for enabling me to share some of my thoughts with you. I am confident that PAM will continue to work together with the Government in achieving our common objectives. And last, but not least, I would like to thank you again for the

honour you have done me in conferring on me the 'Keahlian Kehormat PAM'.

Thank you.