

**THE DINNER IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DIVING EQUIPMENT AND  
MARKETING ASSOCIATION (DEMA) EXPO `96**

PUTRA WORLD TRADE CENTRE, KUALA LUMPUR, 17 OCTOBER 1996

I would like to thank the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Malaysian Sports Diving Association (MSDA) and the private sector for inviting me today in conjunction with the opening of the Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) EXPO today. It is significant that Malaysia has been chosen as the venue for its first EXPO outside the USA. An Expo such as this will go a long way towards promoting the growth of the recreational diving industry on a global basis. I understand that currently there are about 10,000 recreational divers in Malaysia.

2. Malaysia is located in the tropical zone and is blessed with beautiful islands fringed with coral reefs. The marine biodiversity in the tropical region is one of the highest in the world. The uniqueness of its biological diversity is an asset to the country. Renewable marine resources, if used wisely on sustainable basis, could give a lot of mileage in terms of economic benefits to various groups.

3. Malaysia is committed towards environmental preservation and this conservation and management of its environment is best reflected in the international conventions, regional agreements and national programmes that have been signed, ratified and implemented.

4. The Malaysian economy has been showing good progress. But this economic progress has not been done at the expense of its environment. In fact it is in tandem with the commitment to environmental protection, conservation and management. The Government has implemented a number of measures to address environmental issues to ensure that productivity and economic growth will not compromise the long term well-being of this country.

5. The Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department has formulated the National Policy for the Management of Coastal Resources. This is because the government has realised that managing the coastal resources on sustainable basis is crucial for the long term well-being of this country. I believe that coastal resources should be protected from those who seek immediate and short term gains which must in the long run cause irreparable damage and loss.

6. Most ministries have an environmental division to oversee all environmental issues related to their roles and functions. The environmental awareness among the policy makers, decision makers and implementors of various projects will help in the development of eco-friendly projects.

7. In this context, I am glad to note that the private sector has been receptive to the needs of environmental conservation and it is common for major developers to have an in-house environmental consulting divisions. The project developers can rest assured that their environmentally friendly project will get all the necessary approval and could start as scheduled. It could also minimise court litigations and payment of compensations.

8. Economic development should always take into consideration the various aspects of human and natural resources development. In Malaysia all major development projects need an Environmental Impact Assessment to be approved before the project can be implemented.

9. The Environmental Impact Assessment considers social as well as physical, biological and chemical impacts on the environment. The implementation of EIA's procedures has managed to reduce risk to the developer and at the same time help preserve the environment.

10. The Malaysia Incorporated approach is our way of promoting cooperation between the public sector, the private sector and the Non-Governmental Organisations involved either directly or indirectly in the implementation of projects. In the case of the marine environment and resources, the government's intention is to protect, develop, and manage without entirely negating the economic and recreational potentials. To be worthwhile, beauty must not just be preserved but it must also be enjoyed by the greatest number of people. Beauty that is totally hidden from view is meaningless. It is worst than an abstraction. It is like music to the deaf or light to the blind.

11. One of the encouragements for the private sector to help conserve the environment is the provision of tax incentives. The private sector has been enjoying this privilege and has been showing good appreciation of the need to protect our natural heritage.

12. Trust Funds, such as the Marine Park and Marine Reserve Trust Fund, are intended by the Government to ensure sustainable financing for the conservation and management of our marine environment. Since marine resource conservation and management are for the benefit of all stakeholders, it is only

fair that the economic gains of the stakeholders be partly channelled back towards the conservation of the resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. With current efforts focussed on developing the rich and beautiful marine life, it is only to be expected that the number of deep sea divers should increase. The Malaysian Sports Diving Association (MSDA) must be commended for it certainly has done its part to encourage diving as an important recreational activity. The EXPO organised by DEMA too will undoubtedly provide a venue for divers from all over the world to see for themselves the latest in the diving equipment, besides enabling visitors and divers to exchange information and experiences on this sporting activity. Industry players too will be exposed to new markets and opportunities. Indeed, DEMA Asia '96 will serve as a positive model to stimulate the diving equipment industry while at the same time create an awareness among the public on the need to protect and conserve the environment. Its mutual benefit to both industry and the Government could not be overemphasised.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 14. The international communities involved in the research, management and conservation of coral reefs have agreed to declare 1997 as the International Year of the Reef. There has been a realisation that awareness of the importance of coral reef resources has to be heightened. Malaysian scientists and resource managers have been conducting various research and monitoring management and conservation efforts. The International Year of the Reef will be a good platform to highlight our efforts and contributions towards conservation and management of coral reefs. Various programmes have also been planned to commemorate the International Year of the Reefs. I bid all visitors welcome to Malaysia and hope you will enjoy your stay.