

The Myanmar-Malaysia Technology Conference

Yangon, Myanmar, 19 August 2002

"Business Opportunities and Technology Collaboration Between Myanmar and Malaysia"

Firstly I wish to express my sincere thanks for the very warm welcome extended to me and the Malaysian delegation to your beautiful country. It is indeed an honour for me to address this gathering of prominent personalities from both Myanmar and Malaysia. This conference bears testimony to the continued commitment on the part of the Malaysian government to the idea of prospering neighbours through economic and business collaboration.

2. September 11th has changed almost completely our perception of things and with it the way we relate to each other, we the peoples of different nations, of different races and different religions. This is both unfortunate and fortunate. It is unfortunate because some have acquired a deeper suspicion and enmity towards others while some have discovered a new need to understand other people and other cultures. But at the moment the suspicion and enmity seem to dominate the minds of most.

3. Today there is a lot of fear in the world, a fear that is not so easily directed because the enemy is more a perception than an identifiable entity. The enemy now is the terrorists, not the national terrorist bent on overthrowing the national Government but terrorists who are against the injustices and the oppressions that they perceive as happening all over the world. They may be wrong of course for others may perceive the injustice as just and justifiable. But that is academic. The fact is that these people see injustice and oppression largely against their kind of people and they feel a need to fight against these.

4. They belong to no particular nation or race. And therefore they cannot be liquidated or defeated by military might the way conventional wars can put an end to the policies of enemy nations. They really cannot be defeated by force of arms alone though this can contribute. They can only be defeated by eliminating the causes of their anger, frustrations and bitterness. Whether what they claim to be fighting for is real or imagined is irrelevant. If these are not real then we have to convince them that it is not real, that their perception of things is wrong. But it is seldom that their perception is absolutely wrong. There must be some elements of truth in what they claim for how else can we explain the horrible acts that they are willing to commit, to be willing to blast themselves

into oblivion in carrying out the acts which terrorise everyone, the guilty and the innocent alike.

5. We have; we all have to try to resolve this reign of terror. We should not just seek revenge, ten lives for one of our own. The idea of out terrorising the terrorists is insane because it is based on feelings rather than reason. It is based on the desire for vengeance for revenge. And vengeance breeds vengeance in a vicious cycle.

6. And as the avengers resort to their expanded and extended terror, they feed the flames of terror and increase the fear among the people of the world. This fear is affecting everyone, no matter how remote they may be from the scenes of terror. This fear is affecting everyone in every field of human endeavour, in the economic, social and intercultural activities in a world that has become physically palpably smaller.

7. The world has been shrinking throughout its thousands of years of history. As man learn how to move about faster and to better communicate with each other, distances become less and less of an obstacle. Today the distance has been reduced to almost zero because communication, aural and visual, is instantaneous, in real time. We have not yet learnt how to transmit our bodies through space instantaneously as in Star Trek but jet speed has made every part of the world just a day away from any part of the rest.

8. Opportunities for interaction by the human race have never been so great or so easy. They should help foster better and more productive relations between people. But unfortunately some see these opportunities as offering them the expansion of their influence and their might, of hegemony in a world that has become a village. The mentality of the village bully has overcome these people. Invariably in such a world might is right, more so than ever before. And when might is right justice and fairplay invariably go out of the window.

9. This is the world that we live in today. The weak will once again submit to the strong. How much they have to submit and how much of their sovereignty and independence they will retain will depend not on their physical strength for this they do not have, but on the strategy they adopt and the common causes that they make with others who are in the same straits.

10. Way back in the 1950's when colonies were struggling to free themselves from the shackles of colonialism, there were visions of truly independent countries which would be masters of their own destinies. But very soon they were disabused.

Political independence did not mean total freedom. This was because political independence without economic independence subtract much from the freedom that the newly liberated had expected.

11. Some of us believed that we can isolate ourselves, build a wall around our economy and reduce our involvement with the outside world to the minimum. But with the passage of time isolationism could no longer deliver the good life for our people that we expect. And not only that, the outside world still loomed large and ominous over our horizon, threatening to crush the isolationists. In any case the domestic economy could not sustain the needs of a growing population whose expectations were ever higher with the passage of time.

12. The only hope for the weak nations is to come together to combine their little assets in order to protect themselves. Their hope lies in ever stronger cooperation between countries of a given region, between the regions as well, cooperation which does not diminish their national identities yet endows us with greater strength through the weight of their size and their combined economic and political strengths. They should note that even the strong are coming together to bolster themselves even more. It is not easy for them and it would certainly not be easy for us. But we have no choice but to try and try.

13. In Southeast Asia we have come together to form ASEAN. For all its weaknesses and even failures, ASEAN is still one of the strongest associations of developing countries. Through ASEAN we have reduced the kind of fruitless confrontations which normally happen between neighbours. We have through the institution of ASEAN also learnt from each other the art and science of developing our countries. We have strengthened our economies through promoting intra- ASEAN trade and investments and through regional collaboration to protect our industries. And we have helped our common industries through common policies and strategies. In Malaysia we believe in helping neighbours to develop partly to save us from the spill- over effect of poor and unstable Governments, partly because prosperous neighbours make good markets for our products and also because we do honestly want to see our region prosperous and strong in order to help us fend off the predators from outside. We do not subscribe to the Zero Sum Game in which our country can only gain if another country loses. Malaysia believes in a Win-Win philosophy in which both parties, all parties must gain and no one should lose. This is, believe it or not, entirely possible.

14. It is with this belief in mind that Malaysia has worked closely with all its neighbours and in particular those new

members of ASEAN who because of their past costly struggles have been lagging behind. We believe that our experience in growing through foreign participation in our economy can also be the experience of all countries wishing to grow economically. We know that foreign investments will not affect our independence. Malaysia has always remained independent in words and in deeds.

15. We know that foreigners will not come to our country to do charity. We think they are entitled to their profits from their capital and technological investments. For our part initially we only wanted jobs for our people. We were not interested in deriving revenue for our Government coffers. And we succeeded, succeeded so much that today we are short of workers.

16. But despite our limited objective of creating jobs there is no doubt that we gained more. Our workers have now become highly skilled, our managers more competent and our wealth have so increased that we have huge savings and sufficient capital for our own entrepreneurs. Today Malaysians are able to invest on their own in the very sophisticated industries which were once the preserve of foreign corporations. Today we have moved into hi-tech including ICT in order to give our people higher incomes and the country greater wealth.

17. It has taken us four decades to reach this level of development. But it has been a very satisfying four decades. Now to a limited extent we can reverse the process, to become investors in other countries and to contribute to their development.

18. While we hope to be welcome the way foreign investors were welcome to Malaysia, we also know that host countries expect us as foreign investors to respect the sensitivities, the laws and religions and the policies; domestic and foreign of the country. Malaysian businessmen, traders and investors will be expected to do all these and the Malaysian Government will ensure that they do so. There will be black sheep from among the Malaysian businessmen coming to Myanmar and we will not claim any privilege for them and will support the laws as applied to them. But as a matter of routine we will of course provide all Malaysians with the services they are entitled to by our diplomatic representatives.

19. I don't foresee much problem here. The Malaysian Government, the Malaysian businessmen and the scientists will collaborate fully with their counterparts in Myanmar. This conference is specifically focused on technology and there will be much that we can do together for mutual benefit. I would like to stress cooperation in biotechnology as both

Malaysia and Myanmar are endowed with extremely rich resources in flora and fauna, the basis for genomics, the science of the future.

20. The foundation has been laid. The challenge is now to turn our vision into a reality that we can all be proud of. I hope that this Myanmar - Malaysia Technology Conference will be a start of a series of collaboration that will take both nations to a higher level of socio-economic well-being. I wish to thank all parties that have made this conference possible. I hereby declare the Myanmar - Malaysia Technology Conference officially open.