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(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE 7TH ASEAN CONGRESS OF ANAESTHESIOLOGISTS

VENUE: HILTON HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR (K.L)

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TIME:

It is a pleasure for me to be here among Anaesthesiologists and I would like to thank the Organisers of 7th ASEAN Congress of Anaesthesiologists for inviting my wife and I tonight. I wish to take this opportunity to welcome all the distinguished members of the delegation and I hope your stay in Malaysia will be fruitful and enjoyable.

2. I understand that the last Congress of Anaesthesiologists was held in the Philippines in 1989. Malaysia is honoured to host it this time around. Gatherings such as these will definitely go a long way towards fostering good relations amongst your colleagues and therefore enhance professionalism among anaesthesiologists from the ASEAN member countries. This will undoubtedly result in making the voice of ASEAN countries heard around the world, not only in the political and economic areas but also in the field of medicine.

3. Malaysia has made substantial improvements in the provision of medical and health care facilities over the past 34 years since achieving independence in 1957. Positive changes in important health status indicators reflect the real situation. The Infant Mortality Rate has declined from 75.5 per 1000 live births in 1957 to 13.2 in 1989. For the same period, while the Maternal Mortality Rate declined from 2.8 per 1000 live births to 0.2, Life Expectancy increased from 55.8 to 69 years for male and 58.2 to 73.5 years for female.

4. Since health services form an important aspect of our social development plans, it is important to ensure that our people have access to the latest modern health care facilities so that they can enjoy a better standard of living. This means among other things, that our planning has to be flexible so as to be able to accommodate changing situation and problems. In order to provide effective patient care programmes we must be innovative and look for new ways to improve medical and health services in our respective countries.

5. In response to greater expectations for accessibility to medical care from the people and the need to increase the

coverage of medical services, the Ministry of Health in Malaysia has been actively pursuing its programme of decentralisation of specialist services. To start with, Surgical, Medical and Obstetric & Gynaecological services are now being provided in District Hospitals. It is the intention of the Ministry of Health to provide sub-speciality services in a planned manner in General Hospitals while continuing to develop the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital as the National Referral Hospital.

6. This expansion and decentralisation of specialist services has resulted in increasing demand for specialists in the various medical specialities including Anaesthesiologists in the Ministry of Health. The establishment of new private hospitals has further aggravated the demand for anaesthesiologists.

7. In order to ensure that the expansion programme of the Ministry of Health is not thwarted by the lack of anaesthesiologists, Malaysia had started local post-graduate training programmes in Anaesthesiology. At the same time, our doctors have also been sent for post-graduate training overseas.

8. Advancements in Anaesthesiology have made possible new developments in patient treatment modalities. The development of modern surgery to its present level of sophistication has been due to a very great extent on these developments in Anaesthesiology. It has also contributed to the development of intensive care traumatology and the treatment of intractable chronic pain as well as of debilitating acute pain.

9. There have been rapid advances in the field of medicine. Increasing sophistication in technology has resulted in new developments and advances in biomedical engineering and the development of sophisticated equipments such as the new generation CT Scan, ultrasounds, laser, lithotripters and magnetic resonance imagers. Malaysia has kept itself in the mainstream of technology by acquiring these new equipments and techniques for its hospitals. Realising that the introduction of these new technologies would result in increased cost of medical care, the Government has been acquiring these new equipments in a judicious manner, always taking into account their cost effectiveness and benefits to patients.

10. As we move towards the year 2020 when Malaysia hope to be a developed country, there is a need for us to continually address changing disease patterns. With rapid industrialisation people's way of life will change. This will require us to reexamine the role of our medical and health services.

11. Since curative medicine is becoming increasingly expensive, the government has been promoting the concept of pri-

mary prevention of diseases by focussing on healthy life styles and habits. By encouraging people to practise healthy life styles, the government hopes that our people will be free from diseases, such as AIDS, cancer and chronic illnesses.

12. An individual is primarily responsible for his own well being and by engaging in healthy life style practices, can acquire positive habits towards achieving a healthy disease-free life. The government on the other hand will assist the individual in his endeavours by providing them with necessary health and medical support facilities.

13. I hope this Congress will be succesful in achieving its objectives of promoting and updating information and enhancing closer relations among Asean countries for the sake of a better future for all member countries.

14. Lastly, I wish you every success in your deliberations during the Congress.