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(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL MALAYSIAN STUDENTS

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TIME:

Let me begin by saying that I am here not to talk to you but to talk with you. I am here not only to inform but also to consult, to listen and to learn.

2. I do this with pride and with humility. With pride because I know that among you are men and women of sincerity, talent, discipline and strength, men and women who will lead this nation towards the goal set out for it. As a Malaysian of an older generation, I am proud that we have been able to breed Malaysians of your calibre.

3. And I am here with you in humility because I know that whatever is done by the present generation, we are merely laying the foundation and perhaps the first few floors. It is you of the Wawasan Generation who must be the principal builders, the principal movers and shapers of Malaysia in the first half of the 21st century.

4. In 2020 most of you and of your generation will be in your mid or late 40s, very much in the prime of life. I hope that by that time you and your generation will have already accomplished a great deal. If you have not, then our vision of a modern and advanced Malaysia would have been stalled. I expect that even by 2020, you will still have a long road to traverse ahead of you, for the process of progress has to continue. We do not fix the year 2020 to mark the end of our progress.

5. When I was your age, the Second World War had just ended. The Japanese lost but had destroyed the myth of European invincibility for good. The British came back with a plan to convert their Malay State protectorates into a colony called the Malayan Union. Power was to be exercised directly from Whitehall. We were fortunately able to stop them before much damage was done. The Federation of Malaya quickly succeeded the still-born Malayan Union. But we were still under British rule.

6. On the island of Borneo, a company by the name of the British North Borneo Company gave a huge territory called North Borneo to the British Crown. A family called the Brookes gave an even larger territory to the British Crown. This huge piece of territory was called Sarawak.

7. In no case were we, the people, consulted. If you now go back in time to that period when I was your age, you would not recognise this land that we now call our country. In many senses it was not ours at all. Whatever development there was, was not for the people of this country but for the interests of our colonial masters. The sole purpose of the British North Borneo Company was to make money and to enrich its share-holders in England. As for the Brooke's, they simply enjoyed the role of white royalty ruling primitive natives.

8. I am sure many of you in this room are on scholarships. In fact thousands of students inside and outside the country study under generous scholarships. When we were a colony, there were two "King's Scholarships" given in the whole of the Straits Settlements each year for study in England. In the four states of the FMS -- the Federated Malay States -- there were two or three such scholarships each year. Most of our children did not have places in the 'English' secondary school. Malay schools provided education for urban children up to primary levels only. The greatest expectation on leaving the Malay school was to be a Malay school teacher.

9. No-one dreamt of what was to come. Of course, a few young men and women who were no doubt regarded as impetuous or even deranged spoke of independence and wanted to be free and to live as free citizens in a free country. But Merdeka was not in the air or over the horizon. It was to be many horizons away.

10. Indeed, it was not a time for dreams and visions or even of much hope for a people most of whom lived in abject poverty. Most of what is now Kuala Lumpur was then jungle or rubber estate or tin mine. Admittedly, there were not many squatters. There were no jobs to be had in Kuala Lumpur.

11. Then, in 1948, the Communists launched a guerilla war. The Emergency was declared. The land with a bleak future became the land with a black future.

12. I have gone through this very brief caricature of our country in order to make the point that we have indeed come a long way. We were a domino, ready to fall to the Communist. We are now a dynamo. Still, we are only half-way to where we want to be by 2020. If per capita income is the criterion, we are only a quarter up the road. We need to quadruple our income.

13. You were born free. You have entered your adulthood in a completely different world. You are inheriting a radically different present than did my generation. You will have to build a vastly different future, a future that is in many ways unimaginable today.

14. You are a much luckier generation. But let no-one

mislead you. In the years and decades ahead you will be equally challenged. You will be faced with challenges as daunting as we faced. You will need to respond with the same gumption, the same sincerity, the same dedication. You have to be all these because the challenges of success and sustaining our thrust forward to full modernity are as great as the past challenges of rising from our knees and giving meaning and pride to our freedom.

15. Have no illusions. The challenges of Vision 2020 are awesome by any measure; even by those who faced the generation that entered adulthood after the War.

16. Let me begin with what we have defined as the ninth challenge of Vision 2020: the challenge of establishing a prosperous society, with an economy that is fully competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient.

17. Our prospective plan calls for seven per cent annual growth over the span of 30 years. We grew by an average of 6.7 per cent in the 20 years between 1970 and 1990. We have been growing by more than eight and a half per cent in the last five years. So you might think that an additional 0.3 per cent yearly growth is no big deal.

18. But believe me, it is. It is because for some reasons or other economies with a big base tend to grow more slowly than those with a small base. Developed economies do not grow at the rate of developing economies. And so early growth must be high in order to achieve a good average. But if growth in the early years is not high enough while those in the later years is too low the average of seven per cent will not be achieved. Remember that one per cent in the second decade of the 21st century will represent a much bigger sum in GDP terms than one per cent now.

19. We must also ensure that we consistently improve our competitiveness and our ability to roll with the punches, to take the economic thump on the chin and to bounce back, in better fighting shape. This will not be easy because success and greater affluence will corrupt us, soften us and make us flabby. Success and greater comfort will cause us to lower our guard and increase our girth.

20. The eighth challenge of Vision 2020 is the challenge of ensuring an economically just society, which we have defined in terms of four objectives. One, eradicate absolute poverty absolutely. Two, ensure the non-identification of race with economic function. Three, reduce the ethnic income gap so that after 2020 no-one will ever again be able to say that this ethnic group is poor and that ethnic group is rich. Four, ensure a full partnership in economic progress.

21. We do not want prosperity for the few but for all Malaysians. We cannot be proud of our country even if many of our people are at the cutting edge of world civilisation,

if others are left in the backwaters of progress. We must try our level best to move the entire nation forward.

22. Vision 2020, as you know, is not only an economic vision but also a social, psychological, and cultural vision. We believe in establishing a fully caring and sharing society, one that is ferociously dynamic but not rapacious. We want a society with a human face and a big human heart.

23. Vision 2020 also calls for a society that is innovative and forward looking, one that is not only a consumer of technology but also a contributor to the scientific and technological civilisation of the future.

24. We also want to build a matured, liberal and tolerant society in which Malaysians of all colours and creeds are free to practise and profess their customs, cultures and religious beliefs and yet feeling that they belong to one nation.

25. Let me say a little more about our fourth challenge as set out in Vision 2020: the challenge of establishing a fully moral and ethical society, whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest of ethical standards.

26. In the years ahead, the attack on our moral fibre and fabric will escalate. We know this will happen because it has happened to most of the developed societies, indeed to most civilisations in the past. In the end the great nations undergo decay and decline and they fall from their preeminent position. This is due to their disregard for the ethical and moral values which built their society in the first instance. We cannot allow this to happen to us. Our achievements would be empty if we do. We must therefore consciously guard and nurture high moral values in order to sustain our achievements.

27. There is one other social/psychological/cultural challenge of Vision 2020 that you must not forget and which I must stress. This is the challenge of creating a psychologically liberated, secure, and developed nation with faith and confidence in itself. Such a society must be distinguished by the pursuit of excellence, fully aware of all its potentials, psychologically subservient to none, and respected by the peoples of other nations.

28. Let me end this quick outline of Vision 2020 by saying that it sets out two political challenges: fostering and developing a mature democratic society, which practises a form of mature consensual, community-oriented Malaysian democracy that can be a model for many developing countries; and the establishment of a fully united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny, a nation that is at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and in full and fair

partnership, made up of one Bangsa Malaysia (one Malaysian nation) with political loyalty and dedication to the nation.

29. Of all the central objectives that are set out in Vision 2020, we would be foolish to forget that national unity is the most fundamental, the sine qua non, the most basic of our objective.

30. I have been informed that the hundred students who are in this room have been chosen through the most rigorous process of selection, based on a wide array of criteria. You are amongst the best and the brightest of the Wawasan Generation.

31. Over the coming 26 years, those of your generation will no doubt need to adjust the priorities, refine and renovate the Vision that our nation has taken to its heart at the end of its first generation as an independent people. But I have every confidence that the dreams that we hold dear today will remain your dreams and will withstand the test of time.

32. There is much to be done and accomplished in the 312 months to 2020. To achieve what must be achieved will require the mobilisation of the entire Malaysian people. All have a role to play, a contribution to make. But there will also be the need for an especial contribution from enlightened and dedicated leaders, from leaders who share the dream and the ambition of those who preceded them.

33. I hope that you will respond to the challenge. I hope that you will be such leaders, leading and sharing the burden and the achievements.