

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF KOLEJ ANTARABANGSA

VENUE: KOLEJ ANTARABANGSA, PENANG

DATE: 19 JUL 1994

TIME:

I am honoured and delighted to have this opportunity to be with you on this auspicious occasion. The opening of Kolej Antarabangsa is both apt and timely as Malaysia aspires towards becoming a centre of education in the region.

2. Never before has the history of education in Malaysia been as exciting as in this last decade of the 20th century. We are witnessing a phase of educational growth that seeks not only to serve local needs but also to cater to international demand. What is happening to the education scene currently mirrors the direction the country is taking. We have for the past decade or so developed and put into action a strategy to play a more active role in the international scene. Be it politics, economics, commerce or culture, we want not only to share our experiences with others but also to learn from them as well. We believe that a nation can learn a lot from other nations. And in this respect we all have become interdependent.

3. The demand for education is also increasing as countries acknowledge that education and human resources development are the cornerstones of national development. This is in stark contrast with the situation 20 years ago when most parents would have considered that they had fulfilled their responsibility for educating their children if they had reached School Certificate level. Even in those days, the Government-funded institutions of higher learning were not able to meet the demand and many thousands of youngsters had to go abroad for higher education. This was not considered to be very serious then because education overseas in those days was comparatively cheap.

4. All this has changed dramatically over the last decade or so. The countries to which we traditionally send our students have realised that they could capitalise on the overwhelming demand of a highly profit-motivated industry. In fact, we know that many a faculty in foreign universities depend for their survival and development on the number of foreign students that they are able to attract.

5. For our part, to meet with the increasing demand for education, the Government has plans to build more universities, more polytechnics and other training

institutions. However, the Government working on its own will not be able to meet the demand which we anticipate will increase manifold as we march towards the Year 2020. Therefore, the role of the private education sector becomes important. Private education can complement efforts of the public sector in striving to provide education for our youth and others. Given that all sectors are inextricably bound together, the integrated approach perhaps represents the best strategy to meet the challenge. The concept of Malaysia Incorporated can be applied to the education system. Both the public and private sectors must work together to develop an education system which can take the best from both worlds. For this, it is essential that the private sector understands the aims and objectives of the Ministry of Education. Bound by a shared vision and mission both sectors can then not only avoid duplication of efforts and dissipation of energies but can work collaboratively towards a single purpose.

6. It is a truism that the more dynamic the pace of modernisation in a country, the greater will be its need for new technologies. The truth is that the bulk of technology transfers takes place between developed nations and only a small trickle finds its way to developing nations. This may be because we have not prepared our people well for the transfer to be facilitated. One of the objectives of education is to prepare the potential recipients for the transfer of technology.

7. In the last two decades, countries in the region have been busy re-examining their respective education systems in preparation for the dawn of the 21st century. Reforms have been instituted on almost all fronts of the education enterprise and the push for science and technology has inevitably shaped the face of many education systems. Reforms have been drastic particularly in terms of curriculum and content which have affected not only education at the tertiary level but also at the primary and secondary levels of schooling.

8. The proliferation of private education institutions in the country can cater not only to local needs but also to foreign demand. However, a word of caution at this point may be appropriate. We do not advocate the provision of a smorgasboard of courses of study regardless of whether or not they can contribute to the aspirations of the nation. We have to firmly keep in mind that Vision 2020 seeks to create a society based on science and technology. In this respect therefore, there is a need to be selective in the courses that are offered by educational institutions. There is too often a temptation to offer popular courses in order to attract students. Already the Government-funded institutions are able to supply more than the country's needs in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. It would be worthwhile for private education institutions to seek areas that have not been explored. Such areas should include aeronautics, materials and their properties,

production technology, computer-aided design, machining and manufacturing. The provision of such courses will go a long way towards enabling Malaysia to carve a niche in the highly competitive education industry. Besides they are relevant to the Malaysian industrialisation programme.

9. At this moment, we are poised to make Malaysia the region's centre of education. Various strategies are being proposed to make for a smooth passage. For example, proposals touching on amendments with regard to higher education are being studied to allow for the setting up of branch campuses of reputed foreign universities in the country. Regulations regarding entry and visa requirements for foreign students are also being simplified. A National Accreditations Board is also being set up to ensure that the credentials of institutions have international acceptance and recognition in other countries. All in all, what Malaysia should be offering is quality education at reduced cost.

10. In this respect, the setting up of the Kolej Antarabangsa marks a milestone in the history of education in the country. We hope that our push to maintain high standards and ensure quality education will be constantly subscribed to by the centre. We must be rigorous with regard to standards if we are to maintain the reputation of being providers of quality education. Our credibility must not be undermined. We are aware that if we are not sufficiently vigilant, there is the temptation that in the pursuit of quick profits, dubious arrangements will be resorted to and certificate mills will be set up. The behaviour of a few can undermine the credibility of the whole nation. The whole education industry will be brought into disrepute with subsequent loss to everyone. Let me warn everyone that the government will come down hard on those who compromise standards in the pursuit of quick profits.

11. Hitherto, education has been the major preserve of governments. But now in this fast-changing world, the efforts of the government must be complemented by the private sector. The major thrust of educational policy in Malaysia is to prepare our young people for jobs in a modern industrial society. We require skilled workers, artisans, craftsmen, commercial workers, technicians and skilled managers as the working base of our population. We expect schools, vocational institutes and private education establishments to produce them in sufficient numbers. In addition, we still require increasing numbers of engineers, doctors, dentists, economists and accountants.

12. Education must be total. If a qualified person is to be productive he must have the necessary ethics. He must know his responsibility to himself, to the community and to the nation. He must know that his skill can only earn him an income if the society in which he lives and work is stable and prosperous. Since he benefits from society he

must also contribute towards the well-being of that society. It is only when he understands the role he plays and its relevance to society that he can contribute fully to his work -- he can acquire the necessary work ethics and be maximally productive.

13. Presently schools and other educational institutions pay little attention to imparting the right moral and ethical values. As a result our society is less productive. It is time that this aspect of education be made a major target of all institutions.

14. Kolej Antarabangsa faces the challenge of being able to develop programmes and course content that are current to and in line with the direction of industrial development in Malaysia. It is no easy task, but I believe that with the contribution of its personnel and its various partners, Kolej Antarabangsa will be able to achieve the required objectives.

15. On that note, it is with pleasure that I declare open Kolej Antarabangsa and wish the management, staff and students every success in their endeavour.