

SPEECH BY: Y.A.B. Dato Seri Dr. **Mahathir** Bin Mohamad
The Prime Minister

EVENT: The XI Asian Pacific Federation Congress Of International College Of Surgeons

VENUE: Shangri-LA Hotel, Kuala Lumpur On Wednesday

DATE: 10 Jan 1996

TIME: 5.00 p.m.

Firstly, I would like to thank the organising committee of the XI Asian Pacific Federation Congress of International College of Surgeons (ICS) for inviting me to officially open the congress today. It is indeed an honour and a privilege for Malaysia to be chosen to host this congress, which is convened not only for the surgery meeting, but also for the World Council Meeting of the ICS.

2. I am please to note that eminent personalities and experts in the various branches of surgery are meeting in Kuala Lumpur to give their news and critical appraisal on surgical techniques and management to prepare for the next country. The congress has been aptly themed 'Surgery Towards the 21st Century'.
3. Tracing the history of medicine over the past 200 years, the progress that society has made can be closely linked to the advances in science. Looking back at this century, medical progress has been phenomenal compared to the days of the 'Medicine Man' and the 'Barber Surgeon'.
4. Indeed, the understanding of bacterial infections and their conquest by anti-biotics; the concept of immunology and its far reaching applications to blood transfusion, immunisation, the prevention of viral infections; the success of transplant surgery and the delaying of the ageing process; the progress in endocrinology and its application to human reproduction, contraception, the treatment of disease and menopause; and many other advances highlight the remarkable achievements made by society.
5. In addition, nuclear physics and pharmacology have given us new tools to treat cancer, although cancer itself remains unconquered. The advent of x-rays, thermography, ultra-sound and magnetic resonance has made physical imaging, fetal monitoring and therapeutic procedures not only possible but also successful. In fact, it has made surgical intervention more precise and less disfiguring.
6. Notwithstanding all these new discoveries, the universally accepted principle in the practice of medicine is that investigation and treatment should be as minimally invasive as possible; that there should be very little pain; and recovery should be rapid. With advances in endoscopic technique, fibre optics and laser, all these have been made possible.
7. The advent of In-vitro-Fertilisation (IVF) in humans and its success with the birth of Louise Brown in 1977 also brought new hopes to the management of infertility. The techniques are widely reproduceable although they are neither simple, nor inexpensive, nor highly reliable to produce a baby. IVF however does hold wider application in medicine,

the possibility of pre-implant, genetic diagnosis, gene therapy and delayed conception. The results from experiments with embryonic cells appear promising as they may hold the key to tissue repair and in replacing diseased or ageing organs.

8. Today, by far the most important development is the advent of molecular biology. It has contributed towards major advances in the understanding and treatment of inherited disease and disease disposition. The discovery of the variation of genes and mutations in the process of carcinogenesis appears not only exciting but also a promising development in the battle against disease. Further research in this direction may even help to conquer the deadly HIV virus.

9. As for today, looking at the audience, I am happy to see that surgeons from all over the world are gathered here to share their knowledge. Dr. Max Thorek conceived an idea 60 years ago and founded the International College of Surgeons, an institution that would provide medical knowledge to all parts of the world, knowing no boundaries or prejudices. His dream has indeed become a reality, probably far greater and more promising than he had imagined.

10. It is a pleasure to note that in the ICS concept, leadership positions are open to all persons regardless of colour, creed, ethnicity or politics. Looking at the list of office bearers, one can truly appreciate how international the International College of Surgeons is. I am glad that Malaysia is also ably represented.

11. In achieving the goal of this congress, the participants in their deliberations should take into consideration the escalating costs of new techniques and its effects on developing countries. They have to examine the ethical and medico-legal implications of the new methods and also to be sensitive to cultural and religious feelings.

12. Malaysia is striving to become a fully developed nation. We therefore look forward to the next millennium, in particular the year 2020 to achieve this aim. Our progress shall be balanced; be it in education, industry or new technology and shall be guided by our beliefs, moral values and traditions. We welcome the free flow of information and knowledge which can contribute towards our progress. We also support research and development. The International College of Surgeons is most welcome to participate in our ever expanding sphere of medical education, especially in the training of young surgical scientists.

13. Up to now Malaysia has been quite free of the kind of litigation mania found in many developed countries. We appreciate the need to protect patients from incompetent and careless treatment by the practitioners of medicine and surgery. But excessive awards made by courts have resulted in doctors either avoiding to help in accident cases, or carrying out unnecessary and costly investigations or charging very high fees in order to cover high insurance premium. The result is that the poor are deprived of medical treatment and even members of the middle income group can be bankrupted by medical bills. Medical insurances have become unaffordable and even Governments are not in a position to provide basic medical care for the people. We hope that we will remain free of this craze. We must sympathise with the victims of irresponsible practices, but the cost of this misguided sympathy, in terms of deprivation of medical treatment, is

infinitely higher. Awarding ridiculously high compensations does no one any good.

14. It is my hope that the delegates, especially those from overseas, will have the opportunity to get a glimpse of our country and a chance to experience the warm hospitality of our people.

15. On this note, I have great pleasure to officially declare open the XI Asian Pacific Federation Congress of International College Of Surgeons.

KUALA LUMPUR
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