

SPEECCH BY: DATO' SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD
(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE MULTIMEDIA UNIVERSITY

VENUE: CYBERJAYA, SELANGOR

DATE: 09 JUL1999

TIME:

Terlebih dahulu, saya mengucapkan terima kasih kepada pihak Universiti Multimedia dan Telekom Malaysia selaku pelabur terbesar dalam projek ini, kerana menjemput saya untuk merasmikan institusi pengajian tinggi yang unik ini. Universiti ini bukan sahaja dibina untuk memenuhi keperluan tenaga mahir Koridor Raya Multimedia, malah ianya juga telah dikenalpasti sebagai sebuah institusi yang akan memainkan peranan utama dalam membentuk masyarakat yang bermaklumat tinggi di negara ini. Dengan itu, `eksperimen' ini adalah begitu bermakna bagi seluruh rakyat Malaysia dan merupakan satu langkah yang besar dalam usaha menjadikan negara pesaing hebat dalam ekonomi abad baru yang akan datang.

2. Today's long-awaited event marks a milestone in Malaysia's journey towards the Information Age. The Multimedia University is no ordinary university since it will become the cultural heart and intellectual nerve centre of the learning society to be created within the Cyberjaya community. Its opening signifies the readiness and capability of the MSC to generate a critical mass of quality knowledge workers for MSC-status companies. It is designed to spawn creative ideas and technopreneurs - very much like the role that Stanford University plays in the success of the Silicon Valley. It will also be the nerve centre of the Cyberjaya intelligent city, networking academia, enterprise and the community into a learning society. It is envisioned as a centre of knowledge creation, capture and dissemination, not only for the MSC but for the entire region. I am encouraged that already some 100 international students from Asia and Africa are studying in the MMU.

3. Evidently, the MMU's mission will extend far beyond the mere provision of specialised IT and multimedia courses. It is designed to venture beyond the concept of traditional institutions of higher learning in order to meet the changing needs of the new Digital Age. A key success indicator will be its ability to become truly world-class in order to attract and produce the best in terms of its faculties and

students. These best and brightest will form synergistic networks with industry and the community. The Multimedia University will function as a regional centre for knowledge creation, capture and technology transfer.

4. To gain knowledge, we must seek out and attract such knowledge from every corner of the world. By such networking, we can build the synergistic links that can expedite the creation of a knowledge-based society for as much of the world's population as possible. It is partly in this context that we have set up the MSC International Advisory Panel comprising industry leaders and leading thinkers in the multimedia industry from around the world. I would like to thank again members of the IAP who are here today, for joining us in this ceremony which represents another critical building block of the MSC. Embracing an open liberal philosophy of learning transcending language and cultural barriers, the Multimedia University will one day become a leading centre for knowledge for the Digital Age. Embracing an open philosophy of learning, it will transcend cultural and national barriers. In fact we would encourage institutions using even foreign languages as medium of instruction to be based in the MMU.

5. To become such an extraordinary institution, the challenges it must overcome will also be equally extraordinary. Indeed, we have to reinvent universities to meet the changing needs of the emerging digital society. Several scholars have studied the transformation of the university to serve the Digital Age. Some key trends identified, which we have to cater for are as follows:

- * As new technologies bring about new demands from the workplace, more and more adults from diverse socio-economic backgrounds who are already in the workplace, are seeking the special education and skills necessary for their careers;

- * New information and communications technologies have enabled the transition from student to learner, from faculty-centred to learner-centred, from student to a lifelong member of a learning community. Indeed the MMU must strive to become the nerve centre of such an interactive and collaborative learning society;

- * the current style of education in which degree programmes are completed long before the knowledge is needed have shifted to "just-in-time" education, and eventually to "just-for-you" educational programmes tailored to meet specific lifelong learning requirements;

* Emerging information and communications technologies have also removed the constraints of space and time. With powerful computers and high-speed networks, educational services can be delivered to anyone at any place and any time - they are no longer confined to the campus or to academic schedules. Competition is increased, as virtual education providers make their entrance into this market place to compete with traditional institutions.

6. The trends I referred to will provide substantial spin-offs to the economy if we are geared to take advantage of the opportunities. In the U.S. alone, higher learning is a USD175 billion-a-year enterprise. As society becomes more dependent upon knowledge workers, the global knowledge business will become one of the most active growth industries of our times. Malaysian institutions of higher learning must exploit this growing market.

7. Malaysia's continued emphasis on education is based on our belief that the greatest long-term challenge to our competitiveness may not lie in the current financial regulations or exchange rate management. It may lie in our ability to develop social software such as quality of education and enhancement of science and technology. In both these endeavours, the MSC will play a pivotal role. We need to harness the full power of technology and intellectual capital in order to have sustained growth. To achieve this, we must radically change our educational outlook. We have started this process at the grass roots level by starting our Smart Schools MSC Flagships Application. We must now extend this upwards into tertiary education with the MMU as the vanguard of our initiative.

8. Thus our investment in this Multimedia University is necessary both because of the need to catalyse change in our educational system and also to create economic benefits. However, if we are to succeed, the MMU must become truly world-class in the wake of increasing competition. In order to stay ahead, it has to maximise its output to its stakeholders, in particular students themselves, members of the academia, the industries and the community.

9. Being in the heart of the MSC, the Multimedia University can also leverage its position by forging meaningful linkages with industries, especially leading multinationals and web-shapers with cutting-edge technologies. It will be in a unique position to jump-start the networking effort among players in the MSC.

Apart from that, it also opens up a spectrum of possible collaborative initiatives - faculty members, for instance, will be able to partner with high-calibre peers; resources may be shared in the form of joint subscription to on-line journals and so on. Sponsorship of Chairs, too, should be evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in order to maximise the learning and benefit from cutting-edge developments on the technological front.

10. Intellectual capital and knowledge creation capability is a major source of competitive edge for institutions of higher learning, and as such, the Multimedia University must be able to attract high-calibre academic staff who are truly motivated and driven by intellectual curiosity -- not by short-term gains or monetary considerations. These are empowered individuals who are driven by nothing but a commitment to excellence and a desire to contribute the best that one can. Such a culture would create a positive influence on the quality of students that the university will be able to produce. It is well known that talented and knowledge faculty will attract the best and brightest students who will in turn attract others in the same league. One of the ways in which to attract high-calibre staff is to offer them an opportunity to learn from peers and above, and through mentoring systems with leading-edge thinkers in various disciplines.

11. Becoming a learning society means that we have to make a conscious effort to eliminate cultural or societal barriers that have, in the past, served as stumbling blocks for innovative thinking and pursuits. Only then will we be able to develop the intellectual capital and achieve the competitive edge needed to compete in the next millennium. Although we do not expect an overnight transformation of our society, we must expedite this process of change. As our society develops and evolves, mindsets will change to become more open and conducive to innovation. Innovation alone, however, would not be enough to develop competitive edge. We must be able to produce individuals who are able to leverage on intellectual capital in order to move from concept to explicit knowledge and thereafter, the production of next generation products and services.

12. Equally important is the commitment to continuous innovation, the art of which the Japanese have mastered -- by looking outside and into the future, anticipating changes in the market, technology, competition, or product. Often enough, it is the willingness to challenge or abandon what has long been successful that will lead to the design and production of more

successful products and services.

13. I am confident that the Multimedia University is built on a strong foundation that will allow it to be at the forefront of our effort in developing a knowledge society. I am also confident that the university will be able to carve a leading role for itself among institutions of higher learning in the new millennium. Like the MSC, it is a greenfield project with no rigid and entrenched policies, traditions and practices to hold it back. Thus there is no issue of 'reinvention' that is faced by long-established universities. As it is one of the first of its kind, its path will be a short cut to the development of a world-class institution that is able to meet the changing needs of the new Digital Age. If the multimedia industry is to evolve successfully, it must work with private enterprise as one. I am glad to note that the Multimedia University is already involved in collaborative efforts with more than 60 companies with cutting-edge technologies, including NTT, Alcatel and Lucent Technologies. This represents a good start in networking within the MSC and I hope that this marks the beginning of a long and mutually beneficial relationship between the parties involved. We will see today a showcase of the results of some of the ongoing collaboration.

14. In conclusion, may I thank all who have worked so hard to make this University a reality in so short a time. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank once again, Telekom Malaysia, for taking a lead in this pioneering initiative and to all the partners of the Multimedia University who I believe have contributed invaluable resources to this project.

15. Dengan ini, saya dengan sukacitanya merasmikan pembukaan Universiti Multimedia.