

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

EVENT: THE OFFICIAL VISIT TO MIMOS

VENUE: TECHNOLOGY PARK MALAYSIA, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 01 NOV 1999

TIME:

At events like this, I usually begin by saying how honoured I am to have been invited. This morning is going to be a little different.

2. You see, MIMOS and I go back a long, long way. So long in fact that I was actually present at its conception. And given that kind of relationship, I fully expect to be invited to happy occasions such as this one.

3. My involvement with MIMOS began in August 1984 when a young academic came to see me about creating an R&D institute in microelectronics.

4. Back in those days, the Malaysian electronics industry was as Malaysian as Disneyland. Although it was physically located in Malaysia, Malaysians were just the "kaki tangan", the arms and legs required to churn out those foreign products. Much to our irritation, Malaysian employees were not even allowed to create simple software. Everything had to come from overseas.

5. The solution was for Malaysia to conduct her own research into microelectronics. The technology would then belong to us, and no one would be able to tell us what we could or couldn't do. For the very first time, Malaysia would design and manufacture its own microprocessors.

6. The rest, as they say, is history. Although with an organisation like MIMOS, perhaps I should also say that the best was yet to come.

7. Fifteen years later, we are gathered to celebrate MIMOS' third anniversary as a corporate body. And of course this is also a wonderful opportunity to thank the various organisations that have helped to make this early example of "Malaysia Boleh" a success.

8. Without the support of various Government agencies MIMOS would never have survived - let alone thrived. I would like to thank colleagues and officials for

seeing the potential in MIMOS and Malaysia, and working so hard to realise both. The Minister of Finance then agreed to allocate five million ringgit - a princely sum indeed.

9. The private sector too has been immensely helpful - so much so that many of the National IT Council's programmes could not have succeeded without your help. Thank you for your vote of confidence. I sincerely hope you will continue to give MIMOS the financial and moral support it needs to give all Malaysians access to the benefits of Information Communication Technology (ICT).

10. Finally, I must thank a very special group of public and private sector individuals: MIMOS Berhad's Board of Directors. Thank you for introducing the systems and processes that this ex-Government agency lacked. Your contributions will continue to be essential in ensuring MIMOS' credibility and, indeed, efficiency as a corporation.

11. Going back to the future, I would like to spend some time considering MIMOS' value to the nation. We are, after all, fully entitled to do so. Fifteen years ago, I played the role of venture capitalist on behalf of the Malaysian Government. And all of us here are stakeholders in this institution by virtue of the taxes that end up with the Ministry of Finance - MIMOS' shareholder.

12. Right from the beginning, MIMOS demonstrated its prescience by identifying the most significant ICT trends. More importantly, this young organisation had the confidence to act on its foresight. There was, so I've been told, no "sihir" involved, no crystal ball. Nevertheless MIMOS seemed to "get it" and get it right.

13. Take the Internet for example. In the 1980s, the Internet was still a geek's gizmo. However the geeks at MIMOS decided it was going to be big, very big, and immediately set about creating RangKom, an early manifestation of JARING.

14. Of course they were right. But to those of us back in the dark ages of ICT, they must have appeared like Noah of old, building his ark in defiance of so called common sense. Today, the Internet has over 196 million subscribers and the figure is growing exponentially. The flood has arrived and thanks to MIMOS, Malaysia is equipped to navigate these uncharted waters.

15. But MIMOS isn't just about geeks with a gift for fortune telling. It's also about the ability to see beyond the technology to the people who will be

affected by it.

16. In the early 90s, MIMOS was asked to lead IT policy development through the National IT Council or NITC. Before long, your CEO was back in my office asking me to chair the council. I must admit I was most unwilling: I was already chairing more committees than I cared to remember. Actually I was scared to display my ignorance of the subject.

17. But he was not easily deterred. After explaining that ICT was going to transform society as we knew it, he concluded with a challenge no patriot could resist: "If you really want to see this transformation take place in the way we envision our future development, then you are the only person who can chair the NITC."

18. What could I do but agree. With trepidation but instantly. Leading Malaysia into the e-world wasn't something that came naturally to me. I knew little about ICT: even less than I'm supposed to know about economics and finance.

19. However, I have always believed that anyone can learn new tricks. In fact, according to certain quarters, I'm now rather an expert in these matters. If you need proof, just consider this: I have already introduced my own terminology to this dynamic field - the word "de-confuse". It's a very useful term to use when dealing with geeks. You can use it to interrupt lengthy explanations, as in "Please de-confuse me." Or if that doesn't work, you can always try, "I asked you to de-confuse me but I'm still confused."

20. In the mid 90s it became evident that Malaysia would not achieve Vision 2020 by relying on industrialisation. We had to find a different route.

21. The answer to our dilemma was ICT, but ICT in what form? Most people assumed that Malaysia would just follow the leaders. But in this warp-speed environment, the leaders don't have all the answers. They don't even have all the questions.

22. The second option was to bury our heads in the sand and hope that all this bothersome technology would somehow disappear.

23. With the help of MIMOS and other consultants, Malaysia did it her way. To almost universal acclaim, we created this huge experiment called the Multimedia Super Corridor or MSC. Today the MSC is on track to become the best incubator in the planet for high-tech businesses; a special greenfield environment where

companies from all over the world will be able to collaborate in new ways and reap the rich rewards of the Information Age.

24. Of course the recent economic crisis gave our critics the opportunity to wet blanket our enthusiasm. But I have always welcomed criticism from unfriendly quarters: I take it as a sign that I must be doing something right. Indeed, if you think through the issues, the MSC is the only way forward for a country such as ours. Countries that drag their feet in developing the new information highways will also tend to become backwaters of economic activity.

25. I mention MIMOS' involvement with the MSC for a reason. As the Government's highest-level ICT think-tank, MIMOS often works behind the scenes, accomplishing its mandate quietly but effectively. Publicity per se is not on MIMOS' agenda. Helping Malaysia be the best she can through ICT, is.

26. Many people think that MIMOS isn't interested in profit. That is nonsense. MIMOS is vitally interested in profit - but not for itself. As a mission-driven R&D institution, MIMOS' mandate embraces nothing less than the "profitability" of an entire nation: the achievement of Vision 2020 through the social and economic opportunities of ICT.

27. The question then is "Is MIMOS succeeding?" I believe the answer is "Yes". Today, experts tell me that the MSC has put Malaysia on course for a tripling of our GDP by 2020. I won't be around to see this happen. But I sincerely hope that MIMOS will.

28. In Malaysia, we believe in ensuring access and equity for all. We also believe that technology makes a wretched master but an excellent tool. It is important that we use ICT wisely, according to our values and culture. And the only way to ensure both access and appropriateness is to take charge of technology development ourselves.

29. Take the continued Western domination of the media for example. We could have resigned ourselves to the fact that "kancils" don't stand a ghost of a chance against the "gajahs" of this world. We could have just ignored them and gone our own way.

30. The other option, of course, would have been to fight it out. I don't believe in running away from fights - but I am a little choosy when it comes to picking my opponents. There is wisdom in avoiding wrestling with pigs: the pig enjoys it and you both get

filthy.

31. However with the advent of JARING, Malaysians are now explaining Malaysia to the world. By enabling access and equity, we have also given Malaysia her voice - the voice of her citizens.

32. In today's knowledge economy, R&D is crucial. Organisations like MIMOS, which exist to develop technologies that benefit all Malaysians, must be supported.

33. This kind of state intervention is anathema to many. But as the progress of ICT has shown, the state, not the innovative entrepreneur in his garage, was the initiator of the Information Technology Revolution. How else but by state intervention, can we expect to accelerate technological modernisation and change the fate of our economy in just a few years?

34. Right now, the culmination of Vision 2020 is less than 20 years away. Through organisations like MIMOS, the Multimedia Development Corporation, and the support of all Malaysians, we will transform ourselves into an informed society, totally equipped to enjoy a quality of life our grandparents could never even have imagined.

35. The Government will therefore continue to support MIMOS. Not because MIMOS needs help, but because Malaysia does.

36. In return for that support, I would like to see MIMOS and the MDC working together to help a brave new breed of entrepreneurs: the cyberpreneurs or netpreneurs. Think of MIMOS as our Starship Enterprise, the flagship of a fleet of cyber businesses. The flag it carries is nothing less than the national consciousness for the knowledge society and knowledge-based industries.

37. But more than that, this mother ship will actively encourage these fragile cybercraft. It will share its expertise, thereby giving cyberpreneurs the confidence to go where no businessman or woman has gone. And it will always be on standby to help its fleet establish new colonies in cyberspace.

38. In the 1400s Leonardo da Vinci imagined - as sketches in his notebook - aeroplanes, helicopters and parachutes. But as we all know, it took centuries for these conceptions to become products. In da Vinci's time the gulf between the probable and the possible was just too vast.

39. Now all that has changed. Today's 21st century cyberpreneur is limited only by his imagination. Until quite recently, human beings could only hope to control physical space, the everyday world of atoms. At the dawn of the new millennium, our span of control is almost limitless. Using cyberspace - which literally means the virtual space of control - we can track and influence events on the other side of the globe.

40. In the new knowledge economy or K-economy, a person who relies only on the physical space of control will be as handicapped as a man with only one leg. To run with the best, you need to use both dimensions.

41. MIMOS is here to encourage Malaysian Leonardos who want to make their mark in cyberspace. It is here to help you realise your ambitions. It is here to help make things happen for you.

42. As with Starship Enterprise, the idea is to create a self-supporting system that promotes everyone's existence. As a Government - funded institution, MIMOS is not in the business of competition but of cooperation. It is here to develop a web of interdependent, mutually- supportive cyberbusinesses working on the frontiers of the K-economy.

43. I look to MIMOS to act as the catalyst for this kind of large-scale cooperation. To do this, you will have to convince others to dream with you so that your vision of "a better tomorrow" becomes a Malaysian reality.

44. Congratulations MIMOS on your third anniversary as a corporate entity. May you use your powers wisely to help Malaysia enter the e-world. You already have a good track record. All we ask is that you continue to amaze us.