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(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE WORLD 15TH HAKKA CONVENTION

VENUE: THE SUNWAY LAGOON RESORT HOTEL, PETALING JAYA, SELANGOR

DATE: 05 NOV 1999

TIME:

I would like to first of all thank Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah for having invited me to address you this morning and to declare open this 15th World Hakka Convention.

2. I would also like to congratulate the Federation of Hakka Associations of Malaysia for having won the confidence of the world body to grant it the privilege of convening the convention here in Kuala Lumpur. I am told that you have representatives from 50 different parts of the world which alone is indicative of the influence of the Hakka community world-wide.

3. The Hakka presence in this part of the world according to records available goes back to the 17th century in Western Kalimantan. There was a mere handful of them then. By 1770, before the Dutch presence, their numbers had grown to 20,000 and by then they had established what was known as "Kongsis" (or fraternities) to protect their interests. By the end of the 18th century, Hakkas who had come from Kwangtung were so strong and powerful that they were able to establish a Republic in Western Kalimantan. This Republic lasted 107 years and had 10 Hakka presidents. History tells us that it was customary in those days for Hakka men travelling overseas not to take their wives with them. I believe that practice has since ceased and I am glad to see many ladies in the audience.

4. In Malaysia, the history of Kuala Lumpur would be incomplete if we do not take into consideration, the contributions of the Hakka leaders who became "Kapitan China" or Chinese Captains of the tin industry. Even before the arrival of Yap Ah Loy in Kuala Lumpur from Sungai Ujong in Negeri Sembilan in 1862, the village was already an active tin mining centre. At that time Kuala Lumpur was governed by Yap Ah Loy's old friend - another Hakka - named Liu Ngim Kong, from the Huichou Prefecture in China's Guangdong Province. Yap Ah Loy's rise to wealth and fame was always assisted by his Hakka clansmen. Yap Ah Loy's kinsman and business partner was Yap Ah Shak. While Yap Ah Shak was said to

be an introvert, interested in business, Yap Ah Loy was an extrovert. He had great charisma and enjoyed public and political duties.

5. Turbulent indeed were those days with vicious fights - mostly over rich tin deposits. Outbreaks of diseases, fires and secret society battles were common. With Mohamad Tahir, the then leader of the Malay community in Kuala Lumpur, the two Yaps laid the groundwork for the development of modern Kuala Lumpur. So you can see, ladies and gentlemen, that co-operation between the Malays and Chinese - or to be more exact - the Hakkas, had its beginnings one and a half centuries ago.

6. In modern day Malaysia, I must say that among other things, it is the basic economic strength of the Chinese community that has helped the country face the recent attacks by currency speculators. More importantly, the Chinese have clearly shown their willingness to share the bounty that Malaysia offers with the Malays and other races in the overall interest of the nation's stability. I hope this close cooperation and mutual understanding among the different races will continue.

7. Your convention in this capital city of ours is one more indicator that Malaysia has securely established itself as an international convention centre attracting leaders from a variety of fields. To our visitors, I am pleased to say that you will be meeting people in this hall whom I would like to describe as the cream of the Malaysian Hakka Community. This community has grown into a cohesive force displaying not only vibrancy and entrepreneurship but also has within its ranks people who have distinguished themselves in the different professions - and in politics.

8. I cannot resume my seat without commenting that the Federation of Hakka Associations of Malaysia has done well in electing Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah as its President. For, like Yap Ah Loy, he has a strong tin mining background. Truly a modern Kapitan China.

9. I now have great pleasure in declaring open this 15th World Hakka Convention and wish you the utmost success in your deliberations. I trust that all our foreign visitors will take home with them the most pleasant memories of their visit to Malaysia.

