

**SPEECH BY TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD AT THE OCCASION OF
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Mindset: A Framework to Anticipate the Future

1. Firstly I would like to thank the organizers for this invitation to talk about “A Framework to Anticipate the Future”.
2. I am overawed by being almost on the same platform as the well-known futurist – John Naesbit. Luckily I am not required to predict the future, merely to talk on the mindset needed to anticipate the future.
3. We all anticipate the future all the time. That is why we plan for tomorrow, for next week, next month and next year.
4. Malaysia has five-year plans, ten year plans and even thirty year plans.
5. We have these plans for the future because we anticipate that things would very likely go on in very nearly the same way and therefore our plan would be implementable. And probably it would go that way. But the longer the period the greater is the likelihood that the future may spring surprises and throw our plans awry.
6. Provided we are young and healthy we anticipate to be healthy in the foreseeable future. But we cannot be 100% sure. We may meet an accident. Anticipating this we take insurance. Fortunately we may never need the insurance we have taken. But do we continue paying the insurance premium. I think you would be wise to do so.
7. Your mind is obviously anticipating the future when you plan for the future and you take insurance on your car or on your life.
8. There is one thing that you can anticipate with almost 100% certainty. You know that tomorrow you will be one day older, a year from now you will be one year older, and so on. But you cannot be sure some accident may not happen and you will not be one year older next year. Your anticipation of the future may not be as accurate as you think. But you have to work on the basis of nothing happening which is serious enough to upset your expectations to live into the future.
9. Some people do not care to plan for the future or to take assurance. You live today for today. Tomorrow would be another day. You plan tomorrow when tomorrow comes. Such people can be carefree. They may also be regarded as

fatalist. But not having taken an insurance he will regret the accident happening to him.

10. They say you must save for a rainy day. That is also anticipating the future. You may never need your savings if you meet a fatal accident. But maybe your children will benefit. So it is worth while to save in case you may need the money in the future, or your surviving members may need the money.

11. The Malaysian Government likes to anticipate the future not only for itself but also for workers. That is why we have the Employees Provident Fund. Workers do not like saving or they just need to spend all their income. One day they would have to retire. As the job is not pensionable he will have no money to support himself. So the Government anticipating his old age forces him to save via the EPF.

12. But workers like to spend their forced savings even before they retire. They want the money for buying a house or to go on pilgrimages. Actually the money they are forced to save is not very very much. If they take out this money before they retire, they will have no money when they could no longer work. Workers are notoriously incapable of anticipating the future. Because of this they need to be forced to anticipate the future.

13. Government must always anticipate the future. This is really not too difficult simply because everything grows in the future. Certainly the population will grow. With population growth other things will also have to be increased to cater to the constantly growing population. Certainly Government must plan for increasing power supply, water supply, social amenities, roads and railway lines etc. etc.

14. The mindset of the Government must be such as to anticipate all these. But it is not always a matter of increasing supplies. The mind must consider other factors which make it difficult for Government to provide for the future even if it anticipates what are the needs of the future.

15. A good example is the development of airports. In the early 60's the Government decided that the International Airport at Sungai Besi was not big enough. There were proposals to lengthen the runway by putting the railway line underground. But eventually Tunku Abdul Rahman decided to move the airport to Subang. He anticipated growth in air travel and the land at Subang would be adequate. Unfortunately the officials did not anticipate the rapid and tremendous growth in air travel. They estimated that if they built an airport able to handle 400,000 passengers a year that would be sufficient.

16. But air travel grew by leaps and bounds and by 1990 Subang had to handle 11 million passengers. There was no room for a second runway.

Obviously a bigger airport must be built not just to handle what Subang was handling at that time but for the future.

17. Getting land large enough for an airport close to the principle city it is to serve is very difficult. Cities grow rapidly. Subang was a remote place before the airport was built. But development soon reached the airport.

18. If we want to build a new airport we must anticipate the growth of urban areas and the growth of air travel far into the future. This is because if there is a demand for a bigger airport in the future there would be great difficulty in finding suitable land near enough to the growing built-up area.

19. So when planning for Kuala Lumpur International Airport and its future the plan must take into consideration the air travel demand a hundred years from now. The airport must be as close to Kuala Lumpur as possible. But there was no way we could find a sufficiently big piece of land anywhere close to Kuala Lumpur. We were lucky to find a piece of land fifty kilometers from Kuala Lumpur. It was considered to be very far but anticipating future needs the whole 25,000 acres were taken and an airport with an ultimate capacity for 125 million passengers with two terminals, four satellites and eventually five runways was planned.

20. The way the planners saw it, they must anticipate no more shifting to a new site in a hundred years. Besides there is no more suitable site for a second airport anywhere near Kuala Lumpur to cater for growth in the future.

21. Many felt that we were too ambitious and we would be wasting money. The future will prove whether the planners were right or not. But in 1998 when we moved to Sepang International Airport we were handling 18 million passengers per annum. Now we are handling, I believe, 25 million passengers, and already we need to build the second satellite.

22. When you have a mindset that anticipates the future that is what you will do. You will note that the Light Rail Transit System and the Commuter lines were built before there was a demand. So in the early years there were few people using these systems. Today there is standing room only. The demand is for more frequent or longer trains and more lines to serve other satellite towns around. But the lines are already in place in anticipation for more trains.

23. The cost of everything increases with time. The mindset which anticipates the future must always bear this in mind. All the infrastructure that you see now would cost at least 100% more if we were to build them today. And if we build them 10 year later it will cost maybe as much as 200% more.

24. It is far better to build early before the demand has grown. However you have to anticipate that the demand will come and will grow.

25. Malaysia was growing at a high rate ever since independence. But from 1987 to 1996 the rate of growth in GDP and in urban population terms was very high. Extrapolating this growth one can anticipate the increased demands for services. Transportation service would certainly grow.

26. So building the Light Railway Transit and Commuter train early was not a waste of money. To build later would cost more, far more than the interest earned from keeping the money in fixed deposits. Besides when you build early you get to use the facilities early. In any case if you build later when the demand has become obvious, the service would still take time to be accepted and to yield a return.

27. The mindset which does not anticipate the future would want to save the money and build only when the demand has become strident. Money depreciates in value over time or we can call it inflation. If you wait until the demand has become strident the money you save would not be able to pay for the cost of whatever you want to build. You will need to allocate more funds and even to borrow. This is why a forward-looking mindset saves cost. Postponing projects when you can afford to do now is a waste.

28. Anticipating the future is not always easy. But some people are imaginative and looking at what they have at present they can make a guess as to what will be the development in the future, even distant future.

29. One writer, George Orwell wrote a novel entitled "1984" about the kind of Governments that would rule countries. He was not too far wrong but he was not exactly right either. Today Governments do peer into your private lives, keeping data from birth to death, requiring you to carry IC cards all the time etc etc.

30. A cartoonist in the fifties created a character called Dick Tracy. One of the gadgets Dick Tracy used was a wrist-watch telephone. At that time it was regarded as impossible for an instrument the size of a wrist watch to be used as a telephone. In those days the phones were all bulky and not very efficient especially for long distance call.

31. Today of course we all carry cellular phones which are tiny by comparison to the old phones. And our cellular phones can do seemingly impossible things – transmit messages in print, pictures, data, news, TV broadcast etc. apart from the ordinary function as a phone. It is not yet the size of a watch but if there is a market the inventors and producers would make them readily available.

32. The Dick Tracy cartoonist was anticipating the future and he was correct.

33. Malaysia is always looking and anticipating the future. We have had five-year plans for development since independence in 1957. But the mother of all

planning is Vision 2020 in which we targeted becoming a developed country by 2020.

34. In Vision 2020 as in other plans we not only anticipate the future but we ambitiously want a particular future to happen. It is actually a step beyond merely anticipating the future. It is about directing the future in a pre-determined way over a period of 30 years. We cannot possibly predict the course the country would take during those 30 years. Obviously if we want to make things happen in future we must have the right mindset and the policies as well as the ability to direct things the way that will lead us to the Vision. This is not so easy because many people would have to be involved and different people think differently.

35. The leader would play a vital role. The different people behind the leader must seek direction from him.

36. In the thirty years the country and the world itself may experience all sorts of changes. The mindset which anticipates these changes will be able to mitigate their effect and think ahead of how to overcome them so as to keep the objective in view.

37. But through it all one has to remember that Man Proposes, God Disposes. It is good to preface predictions of the future with a modest Insyallah. If God wills.

38. The mindset which anticipates the future can imagine future development of almost all the consumer goods we use. Unfortunately the military mindset foresees all kinds of new weapons in the future. They foresee war with robots killing people and destroying cities, unmanned aircrafts dropping bombs everywhere, laser guns, military bases in outer space etc etc.

39. There is presently a rebellion against war as an instrument of policy. If this rebellion picks up perhaps there will be no war in the future. Then we can consider the human race has finally become civilized.

40. But at the moment the militarists are far too powerful. We can anticipate them fighting tooth and nail to keep their war options. For a long time we are going to witness mass killings using Weapons of Mass Destruction based on fission material, chemicals, germs and viruses and all kinds of horrible things in the wars anticipated by the militarists.

41. When we anticipate something to happen in the future, merely waiting for it to happen may not be the right thing to do. If we anticipate something good to happen then we should strive to make it happen.

42. If we think that war is wrong and killing people, and innocent people in war is wrong, and we have a mindset that anticipate a world without war, than we will have to work for it. God willing we may be able to achieve this universal

dream of a peaceful world, a world devoid of weapons of mass destruction, a world safe for everyone to travel anywhere.

43. The mindset is a powerful instrument. If it is focused on the future, it will not only be able to foretell the future but it can make the future it wants happen.
