

**SPEECH BY TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD AT EXHIBITION “TRADITION AND CONTINUITY: WOVEN AND DECORATED TEXTILES OF THE MALAY PENINSULA” AT MUZIUM KESENIAN ISLAM MALAYSIA 1 MARCH 2013**

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Distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen,

Malaysian cultural icon, allahyarhamah azah aziz, once wrote, “apabila kita memperkatakan tentang busana dan tekstil melayu, kita bercengkerama dengan suatu kisah keindahan yang tidak berkesudahan,” meaning, “when we speak of malay dress and textiles, we communicate a beautiful tale without end\*”

Just as poets and travellers have remarked upon the beauty of malay textiles in prose and literature, azah aziz truly understood the artistry of fine, handmade fabrics\* through her passion and life’s work, we are able to appreciate that woven malay textiles, like limar, songket and tenun, as well as hand-decorated ones like tekak, kelengkapan and telepuk, are the products of outstanding craftsmanship, creativity and skill\*

Today’s exhibition “tradition and continuity: woven and decorated textiles of the malay peninsula” concentrates on showcasing the splendour of malay textiles and tell us of our resplendent past and the enriching cross-cultural exchanges that took place between malay kingdoms and foreign cultures\* through the ages, however, our textile traditions have also had their fair share of ups and downs\* due to the industrial revolution in the west and the influx of imported, machine-made products, handmade textiles began to fall out of favour among the malay elite in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century\* the second world war also left long-lasting detrimental effects on local craftspeople and the textile industry\*

Beginning in the 1950s, however, the government began to actively support the development and growth of traditional textile and cottage industries\* furthermore, the establishment of organisations such as the rural and industry development authority (rida), majlis amanah rakyat (mara) and the malaysian handicraft development corporation (mhdc), has played a crucial role in reviving local handicrafts\*

Throughout my tenure as prime minister, new policies and directions, as well as priorities for rural development were introduced, whereby measures were taken and projects and programmes initiated to boost the economic return for craft makers and artisans\* the aim was to raise their standards of living, as well as the quality of their crafts\* in order to remain relevant and competitive in the 21st century, the craft makers and artisans of today must continue to strive towards meeting ever-changing market demands\*

However, we must be reminded that beyond their utilitarian functions, textiles serve to uphold our long-standing traditions, particularly during ceremonies and rituals\* it is therefore vital for museums to collect, conserve and preserve our textile heritage, as well as continue to research, document and exhibit textile collections\* such efforts are

catalysts toward fostering awareness on the importance of traditional malaysian textiles and crafts, not only for us in the present, but also for future generations\*

Azah aziz's legacy has been to show us how textiles will always hold a special place in our society\* through this exhibition, we are able to recapture that significance and refresh our appreciation of local textile traditions\*

On this note, it gives me great pleasure to declare the "tradition and continuity: woven and decorated textiles of the malay peninsula" exhibition open\*

Terima kasih\*