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UPACARA: MAJLIS PELANCARAN UNIVERSITI TERBUKA MALAYSIA

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MASA:

Terlebih dahulu saya bersyukur kepada Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala kerana dengan limpah kurnianya kita dapat bertemu di Majlis yang mulia ini, iaitu Majlis Pelancaran Universiti Terbuka Malaysia.

2. Saya berasa amat sukacita dapat berucap kepada tuan-tuan dan puan-puan pada majlis yang bermakna, sempena pelancaran Universiti Terbuka Malaysia.

3. Semasa Malaysia mencapai kemerdekaan, rakyat Malaysia mewarisi pesaka ekonomi dan kebudayaan yang berlandaskan sumber asli pertanian, dan industri berintensif buruh. Walaubagaimanapun, dalam tempoh 45 tahun kita merdeka kita telah berjaya mengubah struktur ekonomi Malaysia kepada ekonomi berasaskan industri dan pembuatan. Kemajuan ini tergendala sedikit akibat krisis kewangan 1997. Walaupun kita telah berjaya menangani masalah itu, tetapi kita telah merasai keperitan. Masa depan tidak menjamin keperitan ini tidak akan menimpa kita sekali lagi.

4. Namun, Malaysia akan terus merancang untuk memajukan sosio-ekonominya dengan memberi tumpuan menyediakan ketahanan rakyatnya dengan menguasai segala ilmu melalui didikan formal dan informal.

5. Sejak merdeka kita banyak melabur dalam pendidikan. Dalam kesemua Rancangan 5 tahun Malaysia, pendidikan menelan belanja yang amat besar. Dalam tempoh yang baru berlalu kita telah menstrukturkan semula sektor pendidikan melalui perundangan, meningkatkan dana untuk pinjaman dan biasiswa dan menubuhkan universiti awam dan swasta untuk menambah peluang bagi anak-anak kita memperolehi pendidikan universiti. Ini adalah kerana kita sentiasa dipercayai bahawa penguasaan ilmu melalui pendidikan akan menolong menaikkan taraf hidup dan mengimbangkannya antara kaum. Justeru itu bagi generasi yang akan datang - di dalam era k-ekonomi (knowledge economy) - peranan dan sumbangan institusi pengajian tinggi iaitu universiti amatlah penting.

6. Today we are already in the knowledge based - economy. Industrial production is shifting steadily from labour-intensive to knowledge-intensive. A radically new system for creating wealth has evolved

through the development and application of new knowledge.

7. In a very real sense, nations have to enter a new age - an age of knowledge - in which the key strategic resource necessary for prosperity has become knowledge itself, through educated and knowledgeable people and their ideas. Unlike natural resources, such as tin and rubber, which had driven earlier economic transformations in Malaysia, knowledge is inexhaustible. The more it is used, the more it will multiply and expand. But knowledge is available only to those who are trained to absorb and apply it. Hence the need for institutions to train people to absorb and to apply knowledge meaningfully and productively. There can never be a surfeit of institutions of learning at all levels. Certainly at the higher levels the need would be ever greater. New ways of meeting this need must be found continuously.

8. The development of communication technology has thrown up new ideas on how to spread knowledge to the biggest number of people. It used to be that the student had to sit at the feet of his teacher to learn. Then there were classes and lecture halls and TV sets in order for the teacher to be heard and seen by ever greater number of students. But today the reach of the teacher is truly limitless. Through television broadcasts, through educational software, through DVD, lessons can not only be reached by students thousands of miles away, but video conferencing enables the teacher to interact directly with the students literally anywhere in the world.

9. The compact disc and the computer can actually be owned and operated by students for self-study. It is possible to actually see the teacher, hear him teach, ask him questions and get the answers and go through the lessons as many times as needed. Whole classes can gain access to these lessons and to interact with the teacher, guided by a facilitator, without the teacher being actually present. Pictures, cartoons, video clips could all be used to enable the lessons to be better understood. Tests can be carried out and the score determined. We are indeed living in an age when knowledge, unlimited knowledge, and learning can be acquired by anyone, anywhere at a fraction of the cost charged in the past. All these create greater access to education at the highest levels and in turn this ease of access to education creates greater demands. While before the university educated made up a privileged few, now the majority of the population even in a developing country can be made up of the university educated. A knowledge society can now be created by practically any country, a society able to cope with the knowledge based economy.

10. With the launch of this open university, Malaysia is taking the opportunity offered by the new communication technology to make university education available to the people. It will take time of course for all the people to gain access to this high level of education but it will not take too long.

11. The concept of the open university is not new. Distance learning had been made available in many developed countries several decades now. In Malaysia we had introduced off-campus courses quite successfully. But today we are set to see off-campus distance learning really take off. The interaction between the off-campus students and their teachers at the universities or even at purely non-campus university status teaching institutions is entirely possible. Again this is not new as many people had gained good training and education through correspondence courses by non-university educational enterprises based largely in the United Kingdom even before World War II. The only thing that needs to be done now is to avail ourselves of the excellent multi-media communication system which our country is well-equipped with.

12. The danger lies in the unscrupulous offering education which are of low standards and even merely selling certificates, diplomas and degrees without bothering to conduct courses and to assess the level of knowledge acquired. This unscrupulous people will bring disrepute to distance learning and even to the country. A certain degree of competence must be determined for all educational institutions and obviously there must be adequate supervision.

13. The Government has set up a board of accreditation, Lembaga Akreditasi Nasional, to oversee the private education industry and to ensure that they achieve a standard that is consistent and proper for the level of qualification that they offer. The LAN is necessary even though some of the genuine and competent institutions may be irked by its interfering in the running of their institutions, the qualifications offered and the quality of teachers and amenities that they have. In the end it is for the good of the genuine institutions that LAN ensures standards are maintained for they will be freed of the bad reputation brought about by the fly-by-night operators and their competition for students. The Government cannot and will not allow private educational institution to be absolutely free of Government supervision. It may be necessary at a later stage to charge for the certificates accorded the genuine institutions.

14. The education industry in Malaysia is booming. Where before the Government monopolised tertiary education, today the private sector is allowed to own and operate educational institutions up to university

level. There are now more than 600 private educational institutions giving courses and training at all levels. Some are very small while others are full-fledged universities.

15. Malaysia aspires to be a centre of excellence for education. We want to be able to provide for all the educational needs of our people. In addition we want to be able to offer good education to foreign students. While Malaysia is not the cheapest place, we are more competitive than many of the countries we send our students to for further education. We should exploit this competitiveness in order to grow our education industry, an industry that is regarded as a service industry which can contribute towards the growth of our economy. Merely by reducing the number of our students going abroad, we can already reduce the outflow of foreign exchange and bolster our reserves. The Government is therefore encouraging the education industry not merely to provide education at the highest level for Malaysians but also to contribute to the nation's economic well being.

16. The stress in education has also shifted in keeping with the direction of the country's economic and industrial policy. This shift is also seen in most other countries. We are therefore focusing on science, technology and mathematics, the basis of today's industry and economic development.

17. In order to extend the teaching of these subjects to off-campus students, a field that requires attention is the development of educational software. In the past and even now books and journals help to make knowledge available to a bigger number of students. Today computer educational software will do the job even better and more effectively. It is imperative that universities contribute to the teaching and development of software programming skills. There is no doubt that the country with the greatest number of software writers and engineers will help in the spread of knowledge. Today software engineers are among the most employable and highly paid people. In distance learning, software will play a crucial and ever more effective role. Universities cannot neglect this discipline if they want to be recognised as premier universities.

18. With the need for more people to acquire knowledge, part time education becomes very important. People will have to study and work at the same time in order to support themselves. The conventional universities will not be able to cater for this category of people. But open universities can easily accommodate the irregular time that part time students need. Courses can be tailored so that students can work with flexi time. Any combination of full-time studies with part time courses can be arranged. This way workers need not be without

the opportunity to get better education and qualification while they work.

19. Clearly there is a big role for off-campus distant learning institutions. It will probably become bigger than on-campus university education. It will help produce the knowledge workers so essential for our IT and knowledge-based industries. It will make our country proficient and capable of competing in a world that is being propelled by knowledge through the new communication technologies.

20. I have been following the developments of the Open University Malaysia (OUM) since its registration last year. I am indeed pleased to note that O.U.M. is responding to our society's needs. The university's philosophy of using Open and Distance learning any place, any time, provides opportunities for a large cross section of the Malaysian society especially for the working populace. The use of blended pedagogy; printed modules, multimedia in the form of CD ROMs, audio, video makes it not only interesting and attractive but effective for the learner. Although Distant and Open, O.U.M., I understand, has not compromised on the quality of education. The best subject matter experts have been sourced from local varsities, industry and professionals and learning materials have been thoroughly vetted by external experts.

21. It is heartening to note that Malaysians have responded enthusiastically to O.U.M. and its product offerings, so much so that in less than a year the university has a student enrolment of over 7,000 in more than 15 different study programmes. This must be a record of sorts for a university in Malaysia. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the staff for doing a good job.

22. Clearly, higher education will flourish in the decades ahead. In a knowledge-intensive society, the need for advanced education will become ever more pressing, both for individuals and society. Yet, it also is likely that the university, as it stands today will change in profound ways to serve a changing world. The real question is not whether higher education will be transformed, but rather how and by whom. If the university is capable of transforming itself to respond to the needs of a culture of learning, then what is currently perceived as the challenge of change may become the opportunity for a renaissance in higher education in the years ahead.

23. Universiti Terbuka Malaysia adalah sebuah universiti yang agak unik. Walaupun sebuah universiti swasta tetapi pemiliknya ialah 11 IPTA. Dengan kata lain 'Open University Malaysia' akan beroperasi sebagai satu

`private enterprise' tetapi dengan tanggungjawab sosial yang tinggi. Justeru itu saya juga berharap 11 IPTA yang terlibat akan memberi sokongan penuh kepada `Open University Malaysia' demi menjayakan program pembelajaran sepanjang hayat yang sangat penting terutama untuk Malaysia membentuk satu masyarakat yang belajar sepanjang hayat. Di masa-masa yang akan datang daya persaingan negara akan bergantung kepada ilmu dan kemahiran yang ada pada rakyatnya. Oleh yang demikian `Open University Malaysia' mempunyai satu tanggungjawab yang penting. Saya sungguh berharap `Open University Malaysia' akan sentiasa peka kepada keperluan ilmu pengetahuan dan kemahiran yang harus disampaikan kepada pelajar-pelajarnya.

24. Dengan itu, saya dengan sukacita merasmikan Universiti Terbuka Malaysia atau `Open University Malaysia'.