

18/08/2016 - YAB Prime Minister Speech And Keynote Address During CAPAM Biennial Conference 2016

“INNOVATION: A PUBLIC SERVICE IMPERATIVE”

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. It gives me great pleasure to be with you this morning at the Biennial Conference of the Commonwealth Association of Public Administration and Management 2016.
2. To the heads of public service, leaders in government agencies and ministries, delegates and speakers who have travelled from across the Commonwealth to be here, I welcome you all to Putrajaya, the seat of administration in Malaysia.
3. We are honoured that Malaysia has been selected to host this Conference twice in a row. I remember the 2014 conference, which had as its theme “Public Service Transformation”. Malaysia was indeed an appropriate location, as we were then – and still are – in a process of ongoing and comprehensive transformation throughout the public sector.
4. This year’s theme is “Innovation: a Public Service Imperative”, and that too is a subject familiar to us in Malaysia. Indeed, we are taking a systematic approach to creating an infrastructure of innovation in government.
5. Innovation is an imperative, as the public sector is charged with delivering a wide range of services that meet the needs of sometimes very diverse populations.
6. It must do so within the confines of fiscal constraints and finite budgets, and in an age when the expectations of our citizens are growing. There is an obvious demand for speed and user-friendliness, and an insistence on a clear public service ethos that places the people first, regardless of whether that means abandoning old habits and practices.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. Some of you may have seen the classic British television series “Yes Minister”. I have to admit that it is one of my favourites! In that show the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Humphrey Appleby, represents a civil service that fears change and being held responsible for anything.

8. Let me give you an example of that attitude by quoting from the show. In one episode, the new Minister, Jim Hacker, asked Bernard Woolley, one of Sir Humphrey’s civil servants, what is going to be done with all the letters he had received. Bernard told him that they can draft official replies saying **“The matter is under consideration”**, or that it is **“Under ACTIVE consideration”**. The Minister asked what the difference is.

9. Bernard replied: **“‘Under consideration’ means we’ve lost the file; ‘Under ACTIVE consideration’ means we’re trying to find it”**.

10. Well, the time for the Sir Humphreys of the civil service is long past, I’m sure we all agree!

11. Unlike Sir Humphrey, the Malaysian civil service deserves recognition. And in particular, I must commend Tan Sri Dr Ali Hamsa, the Chief Secretary to our Government, who is also the President of CAPAM, for humanising the public service, and for the people-centric outlook he has so fervently championed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. Just this week we held the International Conference on Blue Ocean Strategy. It was all about innovation. Some of you may have been there when I outlined how we have rolled out programmes with high impact that can be felt immediately by the people, and at the lowest cost possible.

13. By encouraging public servants to break free of conventional thinking, we have broken down silos, we have thought out-of-the box in order to come up with creative new solutions – and we have made huge savings as well.

14. Notable examples include the new one-stop centres for all frontline services that operate seven days a week, and are located in convenient urban as well as rural areas.

15. Consider this – the first Urban Transformation Centre opened only six weeks after the idea was presented, and we have managed to save RM 100 million on each of the 15 UTCs established so far by using existing underutilised buildings rather than constructing anew.

16. We have also pooled resources among the police and armed forces, not just to tackle crime, but also to make efficiencies in the use of training facilities.

17. The police and other departments have collaborated to put thousands of more officers on the streets, while their desk jobs are being filled by personnel from departments that were being streamlined.

18. We have produced new services, better services, and put the people's money to better use. And all this stems from our emphasis on a culture of innovation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. This is a conference of the Commonwealth, an association of 53 countries spanning Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific – and representing 2.2 billion citizens. That's around 30 percent of the world's population.

20. So it is appropriate when we talk about innovation in public service that we also consider that aspect of national public service that governs how countries get along with each other – our foreign relations.

21. Here too, the approach of my government has been driven by innovation. For while Malaysians are warm, approachable and collaboration-orientated people, for decades we had a leader who adopted intentionally confrontational foreign policy positions, perhaps for personal popularity.

22. But when I became Prime Minister, I chose to be different, and make a clear break with past approaches. Because I believe Malaysia's foreign policy should be about building partnerships that benefit the country and the people.

23. No more insisting on awakening old quarrels or harping on old slights that everyone else had forgotten.

24. Instead, I decided that the national interest should always come before personal political interest. That developing relations and economic partnerships with other nations is what promotes peace, security and prosperity for our peoples.

25. That has been our approach – and we have seen the benefits. I have worked to deal with legacy issues with Singapore, for example, and our resolution of the Points of Agreement in 2010 after a 20 year deadlock is a good case in point.

26. This is just one example of how we chose to move forward in a spirit of friendship and mutual benefit and put a long-standing stumbling block behind us.

27. We are now going to build a high speed railway between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore to enhance connectivity, economic opportunities and people-to-people contact.

28. Just last month, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and I witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, and a bilateral agreement should be ready before the end of the year.

29. Once the railway is finished, the journey will only take 90 minutes. You will be able to have breakfast in Kuala Lumpur, lunch in Singapore and be back in time for dinner in Kuala Lumpur. Imagine the impact this will have on our economies. It will be a game changer for both our peoples, and is an instance of the concrete rewards that come from improving relations.

30. In the Philippines, Malaysia facilitated the negotiations to resolve Asia's longest running insurgency.

31. I was delighted that representatives from the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front met here in Kuala Lumpur last weekend to formally re-launch the Implementing Phase of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

32. Peace is an end in itself, and if we can help bring to a close a dispute that has cost tens of thousands of lives and displaced over one hundred thousand people, we would be honoured to do so.

33. But stability will also allow the region to prosper, and make the seas safer. To that end, we have also decided to set up joint patrols with neighbours to tackle piracy and kidnapping groups.

Ladies and gentlemen,

34. Last year, Malaysia worked with Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar and Bangladesh to address the issue of migrants at sea. Over the years, we have taken in hundreds of thousands seeking refuge from war and persecution.

35. Now, we have agreed to accept 3,000 Syrian migrants whom we will welcome over the next two years, and we remain committed to playing a responsible role in assisting in the alleviation of humanitarian crises near and far.

36. Also last year, Malaysia chaired ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. All ten member states came together for the Declaration of the ASEAN Community, which was a milestone in our nearly 50 year history. We were proud that so momentous a step took place here in Kuala Lumpur.

Ladies and gentlemen,

37. Our desire to build bridges is not confined just to Southeast Asia. We believe in open regionalism and expanding free trade. We have signed 13 free trade agreements with other countries, and we have built stronger ties around the world: with China, India, Russia, the US, Japan and the EU, among many others.

38. Indeed, Malaysian relations with our friends across the continents have never been so warm. And these relationships have borne tangible results.

39. Since 2009, for instance, trade between Malaysia and China has been growing at over ten percent a year, and our many joint ventures – both those that are already underway and those we have planned – will play a huge part in Malaysia's continued development.

40. Malaysia is also a signatory to the Trans-Pacific Partnership. We joined on our terms, without sacrificing the national interest. Indeed, the Bumiputera policy is now enshrined in an international treaty. This is a significant achievement in itself. It will safeguard the interests of generations to come, and would not have been possible with the old foreign policy based on confrontation.

41. And if the TPP goes ahead as planned, PricewaterhouseCoopers has predicted it would lead Malaysia's GDP to increase by up to USD211 billion between 2018 and 2027, and would bring additional investment of up to USD239 billion.

42. These are not just figures. Trade and investment bring jobs. Foreign Direct Investment in Malaysia's manufacturing sector in 2015 is expected to lead to the creation of 66,000 new employment opportunities, while FDI in services will create a further 112,000 jobs.

43. So that is why we believe that transforming our economies, and making sure that our foreign policy is based on increasing trade and ties with each other, is a path to peace, security and growth for all. It will lead to a future that is based on cooperation, and not dispute.

Ladies and gentlemen,

44. As I said earlier, we decided that our foreign relations would no more be characterised by caustic words and barbed comments. Instead, the approach we have taken is one of moderation.

45. This will allow us to reclaim the centre and promote mutual understanding. It is a priority at the national, regional and international levels.

46. I am pleased that ASEAN adopted this concept last year in the Langkawi Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates, and we call for its adoption at the wider global level.

47. For us, a country of diverse faiths and ethnicities, moderation is essential – and the success of this approach is shown by the fact that Malaysia continues to post levels of growth far higher than the global average.

48. This has not happened by chance. I was aware when I took office that maybe my biggest challenges was how Malaysia could overcome the middle income trap. We didn't want linear growth, but an advanced economy; one that was socially just, and which emphasised not just high income but also public happiness.

49. Our low cost, high impact, rapid execution strategy has brought results.

50. In the last few years 1.8 million jobs have been created, our Gross National Income has increased by nearly 50 percent, and absolute poverty has been virtually eradicated.

51. We in Malaysia also safeguard our vision and practice of moderation by playing a leading role in combating extremism and radicalism, both at home and abroad.

52. We recently launched the Regional Digital Centre for Counter-Messaging Communication in Kuala Lumpur, which will fight the propaganda of Daesh and other terrorists by exposing falsehoods and misinformation, and spearhead this important work in the region and beyond.

53. Malaysia will be a partner to anyone that needs help in the fight against the scourge of terrorism. A scourge that has brought death and destruction to so many countries – amongst them, Commonwealth states – and which has cast the shadow of its blight here as well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

54. Some innovative ideas are actually timeless concepts that have been forgotten or cast aside. Moderation, for instance, is mandated by the Holy Quran, and is a virtue celebrated by philosophers and theologians through the centuries.

55. So sometimes innovation in public service means remembering precepts we once knew so well. In the introduction to the Commonwealth Charter, for instance, it states that it is “a voluntary association of independent and equal sovereign states, each responsible for its own policies” and “bound together by respect for all states and peoples.”

56. It continues: “the Commonwealth way is to seek consensus through consultation and the sharing of experience, especially through practical cooperation.”

57. This is a good model, and one that all our countries agree upon. But it would be an innovation – a welcome innovation – in some countries that do not act as though they share our belief that sovereign states are each responsible for themselves.

58. We in Malaysia believe in reaching out to other states, regardless of political ideology and system, while maintaining an independent, non-aligned and principled stance in regional and international affairs.

59. But we do not believe in foreign intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries. We are firm that the days when imperial powers could tell others how to behave, whether politically, economically or culturally, are over.

60. It is for nations to govern themselves, and for peoples to give governments their democratic mandate. We in the Commonwealth – many of us from states that were once colonies – should recognise that while larger powers may seek to push us to act as they wish, it is our peoples' right to choose our own path. So I make no apology for defending the sovereignty of Malaysia and the interests of our people.

61. There are some who did not want me to go to Gaza in 2013, for instance. But what right did anyone have to tell a democratically-elected Muslim leader not to pay a humanitarian visit to his Palestinian brothers and sisters?

62. Again, if I had not forged an independent, neutral path, I would not have been able to reach out to the rebels in Ukraine, secure the wreckage and black boxes of flight MH17 that was shot down in 2014, and retrieve the bodies of those who tragically were lost.

63. And when we faced the tragic disappearance of Flight MH370, we would not have been able to bring 28 countries together in an unprecedented coalition, with huge help from some of our partners, unless we had pursued a policy of being open and friendly to all.

So, ladies and gentlemen,

64. Innovation is, yes, truly the path. It is the path that has brought resilience, growth and an inclusive and sustainable model for our economy in Malaysia.

65. It is the path that has enabled us to come up with creative, new solutions that will drive us towards our goal of becoming a high income status nation by 2020, and one where we continue to prize and protect our diversity and harmony.

66. But it is also the path that has led us to reset our foreign relations in a way that has led to tremendous gains for Malaysians in terms of jobs, diplomatic leverage and future prospects – and also great gains for our friends.

67. We do not wish for hostility with anyone. But neither will we sacrifice our self-respect and our democratic process to satisfy countries that seem to have forgotten that we now live in a multipolar world.

68. We live in an age of a new equality between nations. And innovation, both in the public service and across our societies, is the key to unlocking the potential that countries across the Commonwealth possess in abundance.

69. I am confident that this gathering of public administrators and experts will, once again, in the spirit of CAPAM, bring fresh and inventive solutions for the reinvention of the public sectors of our nations – making them better for citizens, businesses, and society as a whole.

70. Your deliberations will be invaluable, and I do hope you enjoy your time here in Malaysia.

71. On that note, I have great pleasure in declaring the CAPAM Biennial Conference formally open.

Thank you.

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