

**“ASLI’s 16TH MALAYSIAN EDUCATION SUMMIT - TRANSFORMATION IN
MOTION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR MALAYSIAN
EDUCATION”
23/04/2012**

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim.

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh, salam 1Malaysia and a very good afternoon.

YBhg. Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah
Chairman, Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI)

YBhg. Dato Dr Micheal Yeoh
Chief Executive Officer, ASLI

YBhg. Dato’ Sri Abd. Ghafar bin Mahmud
Director-General, Ministry of Education, Malaysia

Your Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corp

Distinguished Speakers and Moderators,

Invited Guests, Members of the Media, Ladies & Gentlemen

1. First, allow me to convey my sincerest appreciation to the Asian Strategy & Leadership Foundation for organizing the 16th Malaysian Education Summit 2012 with the theme “Transformation in Motion: Opportunities and Challenges for Malaysian Education”. This summit is very timely as the government is now in the process of reviewing the education system with a view to improve its quality and raise its standard to meet the demands of globalization.

Ladies and gentlemen,

2. Malaysia is currently undergoing a transitional stage that will determine the future of our nation. As we move toward developed nation status, we need to urgently transform our economy and society so as to be more competitive globally. It goes without saying that maintaining our competitive edge at this transitional stage demands new strategies and approaches to democratic governance, economic management and human capital development.

3. Indeed, a consistent and focused effort must be put in place in developing a world-class talent pool that is absolutely essential in moving the country forward in a knowledge and innovation-driven global economy. Precisely, the success of our national transformation is largely incumbent upon the ability of our country to produce the kind of human capital needed to confront the challenges of the whole new global world. And this boils down to the role of our education system.

4. It is no denial that the Malaysian education system has assumed a crucial role in transforming our nation in the past. Had it not because of our education system, we would not

have eradicated poverty, experienced rapid industrialization, generated robust economic growth, expanded our middle class and emerged as one of the most advanced developing countries in the world. It must be because we have put in place a good education system that we have managed to improve the economic and social well-being of our people.

5. It is not surprising therefore that Malaysians in general have high regard for our education system. A recent survey by Introspek Asia as reported in the press yesterday revealed that 55 per cent of Malaysian adults believe that our education system is comparable to other countries, while 35 per cent said it is "better than that of developed countries". This finding is interesting as it reflects a positive attitude among a majority of Malaysians toward our education system. I believe our teachers and educators who have done so much to uplift the standard of our education deserve a pat on the back for their good work.

6. But this finding alone, which is based on an opinion survey, must not lull us into complacency. We have to come to grips with the stark reality that current challenges confronting our nation today require us to reassess the priorities of our education system and realign them with the present national goals. In our quest to move from efficiency-driven middle-income economy to knowledge and innovation-driven high income economy, we need to dive deep into the fabrics of our education system. We need to ask the most crucial question of whether immediate improvements are needed in order to meet the pressing challenge of moving our nation forward in a highly competitive global world.

7. Indeed, we have to ensure that our education system will produce world-class human capital that is equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to the changes unfolding in the increasingly more dynamic global economy. As such, we need to constantly re-evaluate our curriculum, our teacher training, school quality, school leadership and the whole education delivery system right from top managers at the Ministry of Education down to the teachers in the classrooms. We are determined that our education system must be best placed to prepare our young generation to meet future challenges. And this entails a serious effort at reviewing our education system and find effective ways to transform it into a world-class standard.

8. In recent years, the government has been persistently identifying latent steps to improve the quality of our education system at the primary, secondary and tertiary level. The Government through its Government Transformation program (GTP) and Economic Transformation Program (ETP) has made strides in addressing the educational gaps and inequities currently present in the system with a view to improve student outcomes. Five major initiatives have been implemented and these have brought about encouraging improvements within a fairly short period of time.

9. The first one is to ensure that every child has access to quality pre-school education. We have taken necessary steps to increase pre-school enrolment rate, especially in the rural areas and among the urban poor. As a result of collaborative efforts across ministries and with the private sector, we managed to increase pre-school enrolment rate from 67 percent in 2010 to 77.2 percent in 2011. Our target is to increase it further to 87 percent by end of this year. To ensure the target is duly achieved, a National Committee on Pre-School Education has been established. A National Pre-School Curriculum Standard (NPCS) was also developed in collaboration with the private sector to standardize industry requirements. Meanwhile, to improve the quality of pre-school education, the Ministry has provided training for over 20,000 pre-school teachers and teacher assistants nationwide.

10. The next big result that the government is set to deliver is to ensure that all children acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills after three years of primary education. A new programme called Literacy and Numeracy Programme (LINUS) was developed in which screenings are conducted three times a year to assess students' literacy and numeracy skills and identify those who require remedial programme. With approximately 17,000 teachers trained to implement the new LINUS modules, we managed to significantly improve students' literacy and numeracy skills at the end of the program. It is glad to note that the literacy and numeracy rate among our students who participated in the LINUS Program now stands at 97.5 percent and 98.6 percent respectively.

11. The government has also introduced High Performance Schools Program that will raise the standards of our government schools to meet international benchmarks. Through a rigorous performance management regime, High Performing Schools are rewarded with more freedom in decision-making, financial incentives, human resources flexibility and chances for students' improvements and teachers' professional advancements. The performance of 10,019 government schools nationwide is ranked on a yearly basis, with reward systems for head teachers and principals are in place to motivate them to improve school performance.

12. Apart from this, the government has also embarked on public-private partnership for education initiatives such as the Trust Schools and Teach for Malaysia Program. These initiatives are to harness the strengths and expertise of the private sector and non-governmental organizations to provide further impetus in improving the quality of our schools and promoting efficiencies and effectiveness of the education delivery system.

13. Another big result that the government strives to deliver is the School Improvement Programme (SIP). This program was introduced to assist underperforming schools to gradually improve their performance and raise school standards over time. The result is encouraging. After only one year of implementation, significant improvements were found in 140 out of 290 primary schools, where in some cases School Average Grade has improved as high as 40%.

14. Beyond school achievements, the government envisions the creation of a regional hub for education excellence in Malaysia where the best of minds of the world converge. As a hub for education excellence, Malaysia stands to gain not only from the inflow of international students, but also from the setting up of branches of top-notch universities and international colleges in the country. I am proud to note that world class institutions such as The University of Nottingham, John Hopkins University and Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, to name a few, have chosen Malaysia as their home in this part of the world.

15. The government implements various initiatives under the Education National Key Economic Areas to step up efforts to make Malaysia a regional hub for education excellence. In this regard, a number of key areas in the education sector that have great potential for future growth have been identified. These include early childcare education, basic education, technical education and vocational training and tertiary education. With 13 Entry Point Projects (EPPs) have been approved, the education sector is expected to deliver a total of RM 60.7 billion in GNI by the year 2020.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

16. With the amount of hard-work, ingenuity and the implementation of new programs and approaches to human capital development in the last three years, I have no doubt that our education system is now geared toward achieving our national goal, that is to transform our country into a fully developed and high income nation by the year 2020. Our teachers and educators have done a commendable work thus far and yet there are still rooms for continuous improvement. Indeed, the Government has now set its sights on a bolder quantum leap in education, rather than incremental steps.

17. It is in this spirit of continuous improvement and the urgent need for a quantum leap in education that I recently announced a comprehensive national education review. To this end, the Ministry of Education has established a fully dedicated taskforce chaired by its Secretary-General and Director-General supported by a project management office (PMO). Its purpose is to conduct a full diagnosis and establishing a fact-base on Malaysia's education system. Both internal and external sources of data and evidences were studied with the aim of ensuring a high degree of rigor, robustness, credibility and objectivity. This included reports by reputable institutions both local and foreign, interviews with principals and teachers, surveys and various benchmarking exercises.

18. Based on the current assessment done so far, some findings do stand out. Among others, it shows that Malaysia has achieved considerable progress in the last 60 years in providing education access to the masses where in 1950, sixty (60) percent of the total population aged 15 years and above were not educated at school levels, but in 2010 this significantly dropped to nine (9) percent (source Eurostat, United Nations, 2010). However, where access to success is measured, a recent 2011 Jobstreet Survey job interview rejection factors among fresh graduates indicate that sixty (60) and fifty six (56) percent of job employers cite bad character or attitude and poor command of English language respectively. On the Ministry front, an interim 2012 UNESCO report highlights a need for the organization to reduce the high degree of bureaucracy that exist which hampers policy execution.

19. Against this backdrop, the Ministry takes heed of the various findings with a view of producing a blueprint and roadmap for a thorough transformation of the education system by the end of 2012. This will include 9 critical levers for development believed to be pivotal in maximizing its chances of success including i) teachers, ii) school leaders, iii) school quality, iv) curriculum and assessment, v) multilingual proficiency, vi) post-secondary opportunities, vii) parents and community, viii) resource efficiency and effectiveness and ix) Ministry delivery capacity and capability.

20. To support this endeavor, a series of national dialogue will be held nationwide in the months to come to receive feedback from the public on how we can best improve our education system. This exercise is historic in a sense that for the first time after more than 30 years, our education will undergo a thorough review to improve its quality and raise its standard. It is also historic in a sense that the government is embarking on a national exercise to gain public feedbacks on the education system in an open and inclusive environment. Depending on the final blueprint produced and if required, this may entail considerable structural changes in education delivery, or re-examining current policies, or streamlining operational practices or others.

21. Having said this, our national aspiration is clear. We have to nurture the full potential of our young generation and prepare them to meet future challenges. They are the ones who will propel our nation to greater heights in this highly competitive global world. The task to make

them better equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to face this monumental challenge is shouldered by all of us in this hall and by Malaysians at large.

22. I believe that everyone can contribute to meeting our national aspiration by giving constructive, creative and imaginative ideas to improve the quality of our education system. The time has now come for Malaysians from all walks of life to take the imaginative leap forward and embark on a national journey to raise the standard of our education. And I would like to welcome all of you on board this national journey.

23. In this whole exercise, we will continue to be guided by the National Education Philosophy which aims to develop individuals' potential in a holistic and integrated manner so as to produce those who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced. In the same vein, we will continue to be reminded that education also fulfills social, ethical and moral functions that will ensure a harmonious and prosperous future for Malaysia.

24. In a nutshell, improving the quality of our education system and student outcome remains the top priority of the government. The success of our national transformation, of whether we will become a developed nation by 2020, depends on how our education system delivers big results fast in the years to come.

25. On this note, I would like to call on all stakeholders to engage more frequently with each other and have an open and informed discussion about what is best for our education system. Also, I would like to once again commend ASLI for pulling together some of the brightest minds around for this purpose. I do hope that discussions at this summit will offer some insights into the future of our education system and find effective ways to improve its quality. I therefore urge the education community to forge new strategies to improve, enhance and elevate the standard of our and bring it to greater heights. With that, I wish you all every success in your endeavor.

Thank you.

Wabillahi al-taufiq walhidayah wassalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.