

Penyampai : TAN SRI DATO SERI AHMAD SARJI BIN ABDUL HAMID
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Distinguished guests, Cempaka Board of directors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I will like to express my appreciation to the management of Cempaka holdings for giving me the opportunity to address this special gathering of your company. I must say that this is not going to be an easy task, especially after the sumptuous dinner we were feted with a while ago. Talking about after dinner talks, I recall an anecdote by Sir Winston Churchill who was asked by a reporter what he found to be the most difficult task in his life.

Sir Winston promptly responded: " to climb a ladder leaning towards you, to kiss a girl leaning away from you and to give an after dinner speech". I am sure Ladies and Gentlemen, you can now empathize with me.

2. Reflecting on the topic I was requested to address this evening, "Leadership in Administration" , I cannot help but to look back at my experience as a Malaysian government officer for the past three decades. Well, regrettably,time waits for no man even if he happens to be the Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia'.

3. My "moment of truth" when I joined the civil service dawned on me when signing all my official correspondence as " Your Obedient Servant". This served as a constant and subtle reminder to me throughout my career, that I have assumed the humble position of serving the rakyat by whom I am being paid . Therefore I am morally bound to serve them to the best of my ability at all times and every time.

This constant awareness of one's responsibility to the rakyat was not only valid when I joined the service three decades ago, but is even more true and critical today as I approach the twilight years of my career.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 4. In the last thirty years, I have seen and been part of the transformation of the public service.

It was from one of maintenance of law and order and revenue collection in the 1950's and early 60's to that of development administration and institution building in the 70's and early 80's.

The recession years of the mid 80's prompted the government which until then had been the main catalyst in promoting national development to relook at its role in the development process. Consequently ,the public sector assumed a facilitative and regulatory role in the 1990's while the private sector acted as the engine of growth.

5. These transformations in roles of the public sector have been a rather smooth one. Fundamentally it is due to the fact that throughout the period, the leadership entrusted with administering this country had demonstrated high commitment, high calibre, and single mindedness in devoting themselves relentlessly to the service of the nation.

6. When we obtained our independence from the colonial masters, the political leadership recognized the important role of the civil service in the nation building process. It realized that the public service was a vital instrument without whose support the objectives and visions of the elected government could not be realized.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 7. For Malaysia to succeed, good development plans and policies alone were not good enough.What was more important and critical, was an administration that was supportive of the elected government's policies and one that was fully committed to serving the rakyat's needs. The political leadership, aware of problems in administration triggered the process of change in public administration

which was closely associated with the implementation of socio economic development. This transformation, Ladies and Gentlemen, was set in motion by our late Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak. The expression of a clear vision in the form of vision 2020, and the will to realize it, has provided the framework and the anchor on which the civil service could shape its practices and strategies as well as long term corporate plans to manage new situations, uncertainties and complexity. Thus, visionary leadership at the political level complemented by the ability of the public service leadership to operationalize this vision with undivided loyalty has contributed significantly to Malaysia's outstanding performance.

8. Malaysia today, which has been consecutively growing at a rate of 8% annually for the last 8 years has been quoted as a success story by many a nation including the U.S. and even the World Bank.! Clearly, it cannot be denied that the public administration machinery has played a strategic role in choreographing and more importantly, sustaining this commendable performance.

9. This has been further attested by the World Competitiveness report of 1994, published by the World Economic Forum and the International Institute of Management, which has ranked Malaysia 17th in terms of competitiveness in the world economy and third among non OECD countries after Singapore and Hongkong. The report also highlighted Malaysia's strong performance in the sphere of government, ranking us fourth in the world and third in the Asian region.

10. However, despite our achievements, we should not be drawn into any degree of complacency. There is still much to be done. As a nation, we still face several constraints, which if overlooked will cost us dearly in the future. Our economic well being continues to be dependant on our ability to serve the international and regional community. As we had learnt dearly in the mid 1980's, we remain vulnerable to developments in the external environment-developments over which we have neither control nor influence over. Therefore, to serve the nation to the best of our ability, we must be able to adapt to changes which are often imposed upon us so as to remain competitive. If we fail to do so, than we will be easily marginalised by other nations, waiting in the periphery to replace us swiftly. To put it metaphorically, we are running a marathon race that never ends.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 11. As we move towards the next millennium, much debate surrounds the political, economic and social challenges facing us. Development plans and Vision 2020 are being utilized more frequently by policy makers, the media, corporate executives and special interest groups to focus the direction of government policy. These short and long term plans offer the overview of national trends and their implications for our country as we prepare to close this century and enter the next. As we study these trends and projections, it is becoming evident that we are experiencing a very important transformation of our society.

12. These transformations are not only evident here but even in the global political arena. Today, the Pacific Rim countries continue their remarkable record of growth in the world economy. While politically, the boundaries between countries are as clear as ever, competitively, many have largely disappeared. What has eaten them away is the persistent, ever speedier information revolution.

The concept of global village is fast becoming a reality. Today, thirty - nine years after independence, we can sit in our living rooms, watch the news and know instantly, what is happening around the world, even at the remotest part that we never could imagine. We can see for ourselves, what the tastes and preferences are in other countries, the different life styles, the sports, the latest in fashions.

13. Thus, it cannot be denied that we have come a long way since independence, especially in the social well - being of the people, which is the ultimate purpose of the government's existence. This has taken place hand in hand with economic growth, but even where growth lagged, the quality of life has improved for the average Malaysian. The political leadership played it's role in the transformation process through prioritising public spending on social programs such as health and education as well as development oriented projects.

14. However, the principal lever through which the government succeeded in performing these tasks was,

without doubt, our efficient and effective civil service. In the case of the Malaysian bureaucracy, the public service's integrity and commitment to their task can be summarized by the following quote: " Any wise minister will tell you that the fate of his government depends on the civil service. That is why , it is essential to have an intelligent, honest and efficient public servant".

15. Today, Malaysia is confronted with significant pressures for change. Essentially, there are two aspects of change: change itself and the management of change. To cope with the challenges posed by the constant changing environment, the management capability of our public sector leadership must be upgraded. Perhaps, we in Malaysia are fortunate because our current political leadership has envisaged a vision of the kind of society the leadership wishes to nurture , in particular , the values around which tomorrow's society will be organized and the will to contribute to the nation's development.

16. To build a resilient nation, to monitor the socio-economic development process (not just growth), to select technologies to be imported and or locally developed, to define an income distribution policy and guide its implementation, a vision has been created. That vision, which is the vision of Malaysia in the year 2020 will now permit our public sector executives to develop long term strategies and effective management practices to manage new situations, uncertainties, ambiguity and complexity. It should not be said that the long term corporate plans and strategies became dismally inept due to the poor support from the front end civil servants.

Ladies and Gentlemen , 17. Privatization has been a major development strategy in the Malaysian environment in the recent past. Privatization per se may have an effect on efficiency and effectiveness only if the new managers will act in the interest of the public.

For this to occur, the bureaucrat must define public interest in such a way that private sector managers can understand and work for it. With privatization of public services, it becomes imperative for civil servants to retain effective checks and controls over the service delivery so as to ensure the public interest is not in any way compromised. Therein lies the challenge of the public executive to serve the interest of the public at all times.

Ladies and Gentlemen , 18. The reality of technological supremacy, was driven home to us when the dominance of natural rubber and tin were shattered with the invention of hightech composites and plastics. While we agree that technology is of critical importance to induce development, what is even more important ,in my perspective is the importance of managerial skills to transfer technology or to manage development. Much of what has been achieved in Malaysia , in the recent past has involved importing new technologies through joint ventures and foreign investment. When these gains are exhausted, future rates of progress will need to be generated within Malaysia and this may prove to be far more difficult. Herein lies the role of the civil service in being courageous craftsmen of change.

19. The key ingredient of course must lie in developing the nation's human resources. The importance of committed and motivated civil service officers , in the context of public sector administration should never be underestimated. In reviewing my own motivation in the public service, I found several rather than one single factor which inspired me. First, there is a joy in learning new skills and knowledge which I have acquired throughout this long career. I feel that it is my duty to show my gratitude by serving the nation to the best of my ability. Secondly, I believe strongly that we are all part of a larger effort that leads to a better life for individuals in our society.

Public service is, ultimately based on the view that human conditions can be improved, an optimism which perhaps forms the core motivating factor to serve the "rakyat".

20. In order to remain motivated, we have to believe that our actions can have some impact on the delivery of public goods and services. A final motivation for public service is the importance of constantly reaffirming the credibility of government services in the public's mind. One vital way to reaffirm is to have a civil service that delivers quality services at all times . This presupposes a cadre of individuals who can understand and manage public institutions . If, as public servants, we are rusty, run down , out dated and complacent, than there will be negative reactions against the civil service. The process of good

government therefore demands dedicated professionals to make it work. That credibility is what creates public trust. Simple it may seem but that is the crux of public administration: what are the needs of the Rakyat and how best can we meet those needs?.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 21. It is said that this is the age of information technology. As such, public executives just like technocrats and traders will have to rely on information and computer technology in every phase of their operational activity. Public executives therefore face the prospect of redundancy and obsolescence if they fail to employ the power of the microchips. As more and more of the workforce become knowledge workers, we in the public sector will have to learn to manage knowledge for productivity. Peter Drucker likens the new generation of workers as "volunteers" . If they are not managed properly, they may move to greener pastures which may not be cost effective to the government.

22. Gone are the days when the public is a docile and passive spectator, contented with limited choice of public goods and services. Not long ago, they did not mind one television channel, queuing in government clinics and scrambling at government service centers. This situation has changed drastically. A whole new generation has grown up to television whose values, taste, and standards have been influenced by global advertising. Today, people are able to source information from any part of the world in a matter of seconds. We therefore can no longer provide sub standard service because they know what is best. In such an environment the public service will always need to keep in tandem with current developments so that they are sensitized and do not lose their relevancy in the changing environment.

23. In our quest to be a developed nation, we are stressing on quality consciousness, excellence and exemplary work ethic .If we want this vision to be shared and deep- rooted, so that over a period of time we will have a quality culture in the public service, we need effective leadership at the helm. What are the qualities of a leader? Peter Drucker once said as follows: "Among the effective executives I have known and worked with, there are extroverts and aloof , retiring men, some even morbidly shy. Some are eccentrics, others are painfully correct conformists. Some are fat and and some are thin.

Some are worriers and some are relaxed. Some drink quite heavily and others are total abstainers. Some are men of great charm and warmth; some have no more personality than a frozen mackerel".

24. I believe that there is no ideal leadership style and most probably no ideal leader who can handle all situations. However, I do believe that no quality of leadership is more pervasive and pertinent than the quality of optimism. To lead successfully, one must believe that his or her leadership will make a difference. Similarly, energy and enterprise must accompany such optimism. We must exert every effort to train and to obtain the best possible staff for the public sector , always realizing that the better the staff performance, the more we can achieve as an institution. Of course continuing and institutionalizing the quality revolution via ISO 9000 is a critical imperative of future public sector leadership. Inculcating good values, ethics and morality is extremely important.

These qualities cannot be effectively shaped and maintained in isolation. It requires a supportive environment which will lead to responsible conduct in the public service.

25. To conclude, the government recognizes the importance of capable public service leadership at all levels and in all fields to ensure the objectives of vision 2020 are achieved. Unlike political leadership , public service leadership will only be effective if they are well equipped with knowledge, skills and the right attitude of serving the nation. They should be committed and forever striving to be one step ahead. In ensuring such leadership qualities are nurtured among public sector managers, the government has continuously supported training activities especially those undertaken by INTAN . In addition, officers are also sent overseas to upgrade their skills and knowledge so that they are more effective in the workplace. It is hoped that these efforts will continue to enable the Malaysian civil service to serve the country with the appropriate leadership qualities at all times . I am confident that we are now very much on the right track towards meeting the objectives of vision 2020.