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Tajuk : THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CONFERENCE OF EROPA
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1. I wish to thank the organizers of the General Assembly and Conference of EROPA for inviting me to say a few words in closing the assembly and conference. The role of our public service in promoting economic stability and social development of this region has become more critical today as we step into the next century and into an uncertain environment and unpredictable change. It is in this context that I see a continuing important role for EROPA in the coming decade. EROPA has a role to play in articulating some common strategies, through the exchange of knowledge and experience, to address some of the common issues that confront most of our nations as we march into the 21st century.

2. I congratulate the organizers for identifying "Achieving Quality Performance for the 21 Century " as the focus of this conference. In a world that has been subjected to dizzying and sometimes turbulent changes in the economic well-being of nation states and societies, public sector institutions have been subjected to intense pressure to nurture and sustain high performance with ever depleting resources. With globalization and the communication revolution, our collective survival will very much depend on close cooperation and collaboration between our governments to solve common and transboundary issues. A reliable and credible government will be a prerequisite for effective intergovernmental relationship, in the context of dealing with neighbouring countries and others throughout the globe.

3. Governments throughout the world, therefore, have taken various initiatives to embrace quality and workplace culture tailored to performance and continuous improvement.

They are aware that an inefficient public service would not only adversely affect the public and the country's position in the world, but could also be a drag on its private sector which is increasingly forced to play in a global playing field. The public-private sector partnership to promote development can only materialize if the public sector can match the quality standards of the private sector. Many public services have responded to these changes and pressures by institutionalizing reform agendas such as in the case of Malaysia, Singapore and Hongkong. These countries have reorganized their public services through strategies such as reengineering and the quality revolution thereby emulating the private sector. Infact, many have their own national agendas such as in the case of Canada with its PS2000, United Kingdom with its A Next Steps@ and Singapore with its PS 21. All of them are focused on transforming the public service from a rule- oriented culture to one that meets or exceeds the public's expectation. As Osborne & Gaebler argue: 'The fact that government cannot be run like a business does not mean that it cannot become more entrepreneurial' There is a vast continuum between bureaucratic behavior and entrepreneurial behavior, and, government can surely shift its position on that spectrum'

4. Many of these reform proposals borrowed heavily from the private sector experience. These proposals have served private sector management well. They should serve public management equally well. We in Malaysia strongly believe in cooperating and learning from the private sector and are seriously implementing the Malaysia Inc. concept.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. Over the last 3 days you have been busy examining the challenges facing the Public Service in the 21st Century. As I understood it, you're covered many aspects of the challenges which include: - Quality service delivery and customer orientation; - Improving productivity in the public sector; - Structural adjustment including right-sizing for a mall, lean and smart government; - Alternative service delivery including privatisation, outsourcing and contracting-out; - Managing human resource development and enhancing professionalism; - Decentralization through development of control to lower levels of management; - Responding to the IT Revolution and its impacts on public service delivery; and - Enhancing accountability and ethical values in the public sector.

6. As much as Malaysian participants have learnt a lot from the experience in other member states of

EROPA. I hope our overseas participants and guests would have benefitted a lot from the participation at this Conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. The future requires public service institutions to become learning organizations - organizations where ideas and solutions come from everybody, where the status quo is always challenged and continuous improvement in organizational performance becomes a way of life. This requires reeducating the entire organization to create a virtual learning organization. I, therefore, propose that the EROPA member states adopt an agenda for institutionalizing the quality revolution and organizational learning in our public service so as to ensure a positive culture of peak performance. This agenda can be in the form of an EROPA action plan that allows member countries to :- (a) exchange information and expertise on quality implementation and management; (b) benchmark against best practices in member countries; and (c) document case studies and innovations to be shared among learning institutions in member countries.

8. I know all of you are now looking forward to return home to your respective countries. I hope you'll bring back with you not only a new understanding of the role of the public service in the changing environment of the coming century but also pleasant memories of your stay in Kuala Lumpur. I wish you a safe journey home and look forward to your continuing interest and support for EROPA.

Thank you and bon voyage.