



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

By **YANG BERHORMAT DATIN PADUKA ZALEHA BT. ISMAIL**
Minister for National Unity and Social Development Malaysia

*Mr Yoshiro Kuwata,
His and Her Excellencies, Distinguished Participants and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh
Selamat Sejahtera dan Selamat Perpaduan,*



It is a pleasure to be here this morning and to say a few words at the 3rd Hitachi Young Leaders Initiative. Firstly, let me congratulate Hitachi for choosing Kuala Lumpur as the venue for this important event. I have been informed that this is the third such occasion of its kind, following the inaugural initiative in Singapore in 1996 and the Philippines in 1997. This event is part of a community service programme by Hitachi and is aimed at identifying and nurturing Asia's future leaders by bringing together 24 students, specially selected from leading universities in 6 Asian nations, including Malaysia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These are exciting times we live in. Exciting, because of the momentous occasion that approaches, as in a matter of months and days, the dawn of a new century will unfold before us. Exciting also, because of the possibilities that the next century brings in its wake. Who knows what new inventions mankind will make in the next century? What new heights will we scale in science and technology? What new worlds might we discover in space?

As we stand at the dusk of this century, awaiting the dawn of the next, let us now pause, and, for a moment cast our eyes back at our present century. Let us consider what we leave behind and ponder the achievements and failures of mankind in this 20th century.

For a brief but succinct account of our achievements, let me refer you to a recent issue of TIME magazine which profiled this century's twenty most influential scientists, thinkers and inventors. In introducing this profile, TIME says, (I quote) "This century that split the atom, probed the psyche, spliced genes and cloned a sheep. It invented plastic, radar and silicon chip. It built airplanes, rockets, satellites, televisions, computers and atom bombs. It overthrew our inherited ideas about logic language, learning, mathematics, economics and even space" (unquote).

What a proud and inspiring picture these lines evoke of mankind's state of affairs in this century. It celebrates human genius and the capacity to inquire and invent for the betterment of the whole species. However, is this the whole picture? Can we who are assembled here, especially you the participants, Asia's future leaders, stand in awe and wonder at what has been accomplished this far and bask in its achievements? To answer this, let me paint you another picture, one which presents an alternative view of the 20th century.



Disease, hunger and conflict have always been constant companions of mankind throughout history. However, in this century, disease and to a lesser extent hunger have been largely eliminated thanks to the advances made in the sciences. Conflict, however has not been a co-beneficiary of this progress. Hence this century saw two of the greatest wars fought on the face of this earth. The horrific results to life, property and entire communities stemming from the first and second World War as in the past 10 years alone, conflict has killed two million children, disabled another four million and uprooted a further twelve million from their homes. Some of these conflicts have raged for decades and have yet to be resolved. Even when the basic issues which prompted the conflict have been resolved, the conflict itself breeds secondary issues which take considerable time to be resolved. As an example, take the case of unexploded ordnance in the form of land mines and booby-traps. In some countries, these remnants of the war continue to maim and kill innocent children, women and villagers, long after the actual combatants have safely returned to their homes or even countries of origin.

If differences between nations or 'inter-nation differences' were the main cause of conflicts leading to wars in previous times, at the end of the 20th century, it is becoming increasingly clear that 'intra-nation conflicts', that is, differences between the people of a single nation, have emerged as the main source of modern conflicts. In this latter situation, people who have co-existed peacefully for centuries, suddenly begin slaughtering each other based on perceived communal, ethnic and religious differences. Thus new variations of Hitler's 'final solution' such as 'ethnic cleansing' have emerged, and are used to justify the brutal killings of non-combatant innocent fellow citizens, including children, women and the aged. We in Asia too, have not been spared this spectacle as shown by recent developments in this part of the world.

Given this disturbing scenario, that at the close of the 20th century, wars between people of a nation have emerged as the main cause of instability and destruction to mankind, the question arises, how do we deal with it? Perhaps more importantly, how do you, the future leaders of Asia, propose to deal with it during your tenure of leadership? What agenda would you plan and implement to regulate and overcome this phenomena?



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Quite honestly, I do not profess to know the right answer to this question. Hence, I propose at this point, merely, to show you how we in Malaysia have been managing this issue.

With a multi-racial population of about slightly over 20 million people, comprising 64 main and sub-ethnic groups, speaking a variety of languages, practising different religions and cultures and even possessing different physical characteristics, Malaysia can easily be ranked amongst those nations where diversity has instigated divisive pressures leading to violent conflicts. However, since our Merdeka in 1957 when we took over the administration of the country from the colonial masters, we have managed our social harmony carefully. The basis of our actions is of course that social harmony breeds investor confidence, which in turn is a prerequisite for economic growth. With sufficient growth we are able to provide more than the basic necessities and use the excess to put into place hard and soft infrastructure that is required for providing a better quality of life for Malaysians.

Towards this end, national unity has always been the ultimate aim of all government policies in Malaysia. A broad multi-dimensional approach touching disparate areas such as education, then national language, broadcasting, legal systems, the national economy and most importantly, community relations, have been utilised to ensure that differences within the various communities in the new country are not used as a basis for conflicts. A good example of this is the New Economic Policy which was implemented beginning from 1970 following our infamous 1969 racial riots. It was basically an economic agenda, specifically designed to remove the negative tensions which were the cause of the 1969 racial riots and thus to engender national unity in Malaysia.

Based on our efforts and God's blessings, Malaysia today stands proud as a nation which has achieved a credible level of development. In terms of food production, control of diseases, provision of health and educational amenities and a whole array of social facilities, Malaysia stands as a nation which has put to good use the excess wealth of a fast developing economy; thanks largely to the mature and astute leadership of the country which recognised the need to maintain social harmony in the country.

It is my hope that our experience in Malaysia would serve as a model for you when you consider how to avoid the divisive pressures so common among nations with multi-racial populations. Thus, while you engage in discussions and exchange views during the next few days on the strategies for economic development, education and social welfare for Asia in the new global age, remember, these views and ideas can only take root and mature into reality if there is a stable society. For without a harmonious society the best laid plans remain merely dreams.

Thank you.