

Organised by:



LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP
SPECIAL COMMEMORATIVE SEMINAR ON
TUN ABDUL RAZAK
(PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA, 1970 - 1976)

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Royale Chulan Kuala Lumpur

Opening Address
by
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Tuns, Toh Puan
Excellencies
Tan Sris, Puan Sris, Datuks, Datins
Distinguished Speakers
Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Let me begin by thanking Yayasan Cemerlang and the Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI) for bringing us together today. We are here to celebrate the life of Tun Abdul Razak and I am honoured to have been invited to deliver the opening address. It is true that I am a nephew of Tun Razak's. However, he belongs to all Malaysians and so I am here to commemorate him as one of the people.
2. Tun Razak was more than just our second Prime Minister. He was more than just a hero of our struggle for independence and nation-building. He was more than just a wise and great leader of our country. What he was and what I hope history will remember him for is the exemplar of being a Malaysian.
3. Today as we commemorate the 40th anniversary of his passing, I would like to share with you all some thoughts of mine on what Tun Razak's life and legacy can teach us

all. His achievements of course are well documented. The important thing however is for us to understand what message these things can hold for us today.

Tun Razak's Achievements

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. The Malaysia that Tun Razak became Prime Minister of was very different from the country we are today. At that point of time, we were still a largely agrarian and mining economy. The sufferings of colonialism and war were still in living memory. Moreover, the communist insurgency and the bloody May 13 riots had deeply divided the nation.
5. These challenges were unprecedented. There was no model to learn from and handling them required courage, exceptional wisdom and leadership. It was a time when the nation desperately needed a leader who had the political will to do what was right. Something needed to be done, urgently. The "business as usual model" during that time was no longer viable, which was what persuaded Tun Razak to embark on a mission to create a better Malaysia.
6. As I have said earlier, the many great things that Tun Razak achieved are well-documented. He gave us the New Economic Policy (NEP), which eradicated poverty irrespective of race and restructured Malaysia's economy. Many of the national institutions that we take for granted today were founded under his watch: FELDA, FELCRA, Tabung Haji, MARA, PETRONAS, SIRIM and MAS. These were just a few of the sources of national pride and development that he gave us. He introduced dynamic education policies and left behind several profound legacies, most notably expanding access to secondary and tertiary education.
7. Tun Razak was also a politician, and a gifted one at that. In aftermath of May 13, he brought together a diverse coalition of political parties under the aegis of Barisan Nasional (BN). This model of inter-ethnic political cooperation was and remains unique on the world stage. While it has sometimes undergone stresses, this model prevails to this day.
8. Let us not also forget that he was Malaysia's First Defence Minister and I feel very keenly the big shoes that I, his successor have to fill every day. In terms of foreign policy, Tun Razak established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. In doing so, he arguably set into motion the warm and dynamic ties which have lasted between our two countries even till this day. Tun Razak was furthermore, a champion of non-alignment and of the ASEAN Way. It was he after all, who signed the Bangkok Declaration of 1967 which was the founding document of ASEAN whilst he was still Deputy Prime Minister.
9. Fast forward to 2016, we are arguably still benefitting from his legacies. Malaysia today is urban, industrialized and progressive. The Bumiputera community now enjoys educational and professional opportunities that previous generations could only dream of. Indeed, even I was one of the beneficiaries of this. But Malaysians are also vocal and conscious of themselves. They are less deferential and ready to scrutinize their leaders. These are things that Tun Razak would have welcomed.
10. We straddle the world and in a time of growing polarization are emerging as a bridge between otherwise irreconcilable civilizations. More importantly, he gave us a sense of nationhood and belonging. He showed us that tragedy need not define us and that the nation's best days were still ahead of it.

The Challenges of Today

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. No doubt, Malaysia is very different from Tun Razak's time. However, we cannot deny that our country is once again facing very deep and dire challenges. Malaysia has been affected by the global economic slowdown including the decline in crude oil prices. There is a real fear, although the fundamentals of our economy remain strong, that the worse may be yet to come. Also, the struggle to build an integrated and united Malaysia continues. Often, it seems like the odds are against us.
12. However, we would be doing the memory of Tun Razak and those of our other national heroes, a great disservice if we were to throw up our arms and wallow in self-pity. Malaysia, like Tun Razak was and is a nation of doers. We are eternal optimists and world beaters. Moreover, our national heroes would never want us to dwell on the past, much less be afraid of the future. What we can do is to take inspiration from their lives and find ways to forge ahead.

The Lessons of Tun Razak

Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. I would like to propose that there are 5 take-aways for us from Tun Razak's life and leadership. It would of course be impossible for us to encapsulate his entire life, in just one speech. These points therefore are what I feel are most important and relevant to our time. The 5 points are:
 1. Be inclusive
 2. Nurture talent
 3. Be willing to take risks
 4. Have big ideas
 5. Never be afraid to make difficult decisions
14. In terms of inclusiveness, Tun Razak believed that a nation could only be great if it provided opportunities to all its sons and daughters. It was essential to him that Malaysia not only have a bright economic future but that it would also emerge as a fairer society. He knew that the country could not prosper without tackling the inequalities which were rife in our society. However, it would be a great disservice to his memory if we were only to regard him as a narrow-minded Malay nationalist.
15. Here was a man after all, who was loved and respected by people from all walks of life. He was a man who was at ease both working and socializing with people of all races. The prime beneficiaries of the NEP was the Malay community but ultimately all Malaysians gained from the growing pie that it created.
16. In these times of growing concerns over the rising cost of living, we must remember that policies must be made with the good of all in mind. There is of course, a lot of talk about doing right by the so-called bottom 40 percent or B40 of our society and this is only just. However, we must also not forget that often the "have a littles" also need to be helped. Whether in terms of education, cost of living and even our everyday social interactions we must remember, that we are a multi-racial and multi-religious country. No one must be excluded. No one must ever be made to feel that they are not welcomed here. That is the way Tun Razak wanted it and we must continue this if Malaysia is to realize its full potential.

17. Second, Tun Razak listened, especially to the young. A generation of leaders not only in politics but also in government rose under his careful and nurturing guidance. These included men like Tun Dr Mahathir Mohammad, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Tun Musa Hitam, Tengku Razalaeigh Hamzah, Tun Ghazali Shafie and my own father Tun Hussein Onn to name just a few. Tun Razak knew how to spot talent and how to encourage it. He did not feel threatened by new ideas or the enthusiasm of youth. Indeed, he embraced it whole-heartedly.
18. I feel that it is crucial for Malaysia to rediscover this. Many young Malaysians today feel that their opinions don't matter and that opportunities for them to rise are limited. We must listen to our young, we must make them feel that they are important stakeholders in our country. At the time when the world is grappling with the rise of extremist groups which prey on the young, like the so-called Islamic State or DAESH, the importance of this cannot be exaggerated. Tun Razak knew how to deal with insurgencies. You can beat the threat militarily but true victory lies in integrating the society in question.
19. Next, Tun Razak was never afraid to take risks. Let us return, to those fateful days of 1974. People today, forget what a momentous decision it was for Tun Razak to open relations with China. It was after all, still regarded in the region and the world with fear and suspicion. Moreover, it was still supporting the remnants of the communist insurgency in our country. Nevertheless, Tun Razak went to Beijing and the rest they say is history. The first mover advantage that we enjoy with China today, could not have come about if he had not been so bold and decisive. Furthermore, Tun Razak's foreign policy imperatives, of striking a balance, of seeking to bring together both East and West should guide us still today as we seek to navigate the growing superpower rivalry in our region.
20. Fourth, Tun Razak always had big ideas. He had a can-do attitude. Lesser leaders, would have lowered their goals and expectations. Tun Razak however, wanted to transform Malaysia and so he worked night and day to bring this about. He never got distracted with trifles and would never associate himself with the mediocre or substandard. Who would have thought for instance, that PETRONAS which was set up by Tun Razak to pioneer Malaysia's oil and gas industry, would one day become a Fortune 500 company? And yet he remained a simple man. He was frugal and a model of probity.
21. We must not be afraid to think and dream big. We have it within us to create great things if we want it and are willing to work hard for it. As some of his contemporaries here today will no doubt attest to, Tun Razak was willing to burn the midnight oil and traverse every nook and cranny of our land to serve the nation. We too must be as dedicated and tireless in our work.
22. Finally, Tun Razak was never afraid to make difficult decisions. 1974 was also, the year in which electoral democracy was fully restored to Malaysia. Again, this was a weighty decision. It would have been easy for Tun Razak to have continued to govern Malaysia via the National Operations Council (MAGERAN) by citing racial tensions. However, he chose not to take this route and submitted to the judgement of the voters. They in turn, expressed loudly and clearly, not only their approval of his policies but also their faith in democracy when they voted BN into power. There is a saying that "fortune favours the bold" and this was something Tun Razak lived by. He never shrunk from difficulties because he knew that Malaysia's future was at stake. Today, we need his courage and willingness to persevere, more than ever before.

Leadership is Key

23. At the heart of these five points is one single imperative: leadership. Tun Razak was a leader. He included people. He listened. He took risks. He had big ideas. He was not afraid to make difficult decisions. And by doing this, he uplifted Malaysia and set it on the course of greatness.
24. Today, as we begin talking about what Malaysia should be like after 2020, we too need to be more inclusive. We need to nurture our best talent and take risks. We need to have big ideas and not be afraid to make difficult choices to realize them. We must boldly, push ahead but also not forget the lessons of the past.
25. Much of what made Tun Razak a great leader stemmed from simple common sense. He was rooted in his values. He truly believed in them and not for the sake of political expediency. Moreover, he led by example. I have already alluded to his work ethic. By pushing himself hard, he had the credibility to demand the best of those around him.
26. It is true, that leaders set the tone of their nations. But leaders are also only as good as the people they lead. Malaysia is only as strong as its weakest link. As we grapple with the challenges that the years to come will bring, I hope that all Malaysians will never shy away from giving the government honest and constructive feedback. We may not always agree but surely it is possible for us to air our views in a civil manner. We get the government we deserve: but we also get the future that we chose.
27. Tun Razak chose a united and prosperous Malaysia. He chose to serve and he chose to lead. He chose to believe in our country and its people, in their promise and potential. And because he and our leaders made these choices, we continue to be blessed with peace and stability.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

28. In ancient times, men looked at the stars and found their heroes in the constellations. Today we find our heroes in men such as Tun Abdul Razak. To this day, many of us identify him as the personification of trust, courage and wisdom. But to me, more importantly, he gave us hope for a better future.
29. This came at a great personal cost. He literally gave his life for our country. He was taken from us too soon and we are the poorer for it. Tun Razak deserves to be honoured by all Malaysians. But let us also remember that real reverence goes beyond naming roads, schools, and housing estates after him. Rather, the supreme tribute and duty is by holding fast to the principles that he lived by.
30. Let us complete his vision. It is now for us to dedicate ourselves to the unfinished work he has graciously started. We must carry the torch forward. We must leave a better Malaysia and a better world to our children and grandchildren.
31. We must be worthy of Tun Razak's legacy. But I also believe that it lives on in every Malaysian, whether we realize it or not. While each generation has its own heroes, the truth is that they walk in the trails blazed by those before them. Malaysia's journey is far from complete. But with God's blessings and the example of icons like Tun Razak, we will reach our destination safely and in glory.

32. Once again I express my gratitude to the organisers for allowing me to open this seminar. I am very much looking forward to the sessions that will follow as well as the thoughts of the distinguished line-up of speakers. It is therefore, my great pleasure to declare the Special Commemorative Seminar on Tun Abdul Razak open.

Thank you.