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LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

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

14th January 2016, Thursday
Royale Chulan Kuala Lumpur

Keynote Address
by
YAB Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak
Prime Minister of Malaysia

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh, salam sejahtera dan salam 1Malaysia.

YABhg. Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi,
Former Prime Minister of Malaysia,

Tun Datuk Seri Utama Mohd Khalil bin Yaakob,
TYT Yang di-Pertua Negeri Melaka,

Y.B. Dato' Seri Idris Bin Jusoh,
Minister of Higher Education,

YB. Senator Datuk Seri Panglima Dr. Mohd. Salleh Bin Tun Said Keruak,
Minister of Communications and Multimedia Malaysia,

YABhg Tun Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid,
Chancellor Universiti Tun Abdul Razak, Chairman Permodalan Nasional Bhd,

YBhg Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah,
Chairman Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. I would like to begin by congratulating Yayasan Cemerlang and the Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute, as well as their partners, for putting everything together to stage this Special Commemorative Seminar on Tun Abdul Razak, our Prime Minister from 1970 to 1976.
2. This seminar is particularly meaningful to me, as this day marks the 40th anniversary of my father's passing. I am delighted to be able to share this moment with you – my dearest family members, relatives, colleagues and friends, and all of you who have taken time from your busy schedules to join us out of respect for my father.

3. That forty years also marks my four decades in politics, as a month after his passing, indeed because of his passing, I stood for election in his old constituency of Pekan. Tun Razak's towering achievements were one of the reasons that was a difficult decision to take. I was just 22, and had only recently returned from university in England. Was I ready to try to step into his shoes at such a young age?
4. In fact my father had not encouraged me to be a politician at all. He wanted me to be an accountant and enter the corporate world. Back then he thought I was too quiet and introverted for the rough and tumble of politics!
5. But it was the example Tun Razak had set that made me decide to take that course. Even before he became prime minister, I saw how hard he worked. He was not concerned with the trappings of office, or even his own health. The country and his work were all that mattered. Every moment of his life was devoted to that.
6. The Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation noted this in 1967 while he was deputy prime minister. The citation for his award includes these words, and I quote:

“ Often working 16 hours a day and living modestly, he expects and gets dedicated service from his subordinates. In his relentless drive to ensure that clear plans become early reality, the inhabitants of the old kampongs see their best hope for a new way of life in Malaysia.

In electing His Excellency, Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein, to receive the 1967 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership, the Board of Trustees recognises a politician administering with quiet, efficient and innovative urgency the reshaping of his society for the benefit of all.”
7. In pursuit of this he travelled constantly, averaging 60,000 miles a year to personally inspect projects and ensure targets were being met. And he was exacting, because he had high standards for himself and he expected others to meet them too.
8. According to one story, a District Officer was given three hours' notice that Tun Razak was going to arrive, and would be expecting a full and detailed briefing on the projects he was in charge of. The Officer became so nervous that when he heard my father's plane overhead, he apparently began trembling and sweating!
9. But this earned Tun Razak tremendous loyalty as well. He knew every single District Officer in the country, and even many of the Penghulus in the Mukims. That is an astonishing number of people. This attention to detail, and his deep commitment to bringing development to all Malaysians, made him an inspiring leader.
10. They knew that his commitment was real. He was so close to the rakyat, that I'm told that when a civil servant was told he was wanted to do a job, he would think that Tun Razak had personally issued the request, and would be extra-proud to fulfil the task.
11. In 1969, after the dark events of May 13th, he became Director of the National Operations Council with unprecedented powers. Many others in that situation would have held onto those powers. Indeed, his actions went against the grain of many leaders in the world and this region at the time.
12. But Tun Razak was a great democrat. He never wanted to use the powers he wielded – in fact he seemed fearful of them – and as soon as he could he sought to relinquish them. By 1971, peace and order had been restored in the country and Tun Razak willingly re-established parliamentary rule. That was a remarkably swift turnaround. It saved Malaysia, and it saved Malaysian democracy from the fate that many other developing countries endured.

13. For that alone, Tun Razak would be remembered as one of Malaysia's greatest leaders. But his achievements extended far beyond that, and immeasurably transformed our country and our region for the better.
14. At home, he instituted the New Economic Policy to eradicate poverty through increasing employment opportunities and raising income levels, and to restructure the economy to eliminate the identification of race with economic function or geographical location.
15. It had exceptional results. Overall poverty was reduced from 49 percent in 1970 to 0.6 percent in 2014, while Bumiputra participation in a number of professions increased markedly. Amongst doctors, for instance, Bumiputras went from 3.7 percent to 46 percent in that period, and amongst engineers, the share increased from seven to 35 percent.
16. Long before that, FELDA began its work to ensure that Tun Razak's dream that there should be "land for the landless" and "jobs for the jobless" could become a reality. By 1990, some 114,400 households had been resettled on around 500,000 hectares of land.
17. Rural development was very close to his heart. Indeed, he created a whole new middle class of Bumiputra professionals, raising generations out of poverty. He cared for the well-being of all, and was a prime minister for all races, all Malaysians. But his innate sense of social justice would not permit him to see the underprivileged, the bumiputra lag behind and not enjoy the fruits of the nation's economic growth. He would have been delighted to see the success of his policies to address the rural-urban divide and economic segregation in our country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

18. It was not just in those areas that Tun Razak had a crucial role. As far back as 1956, it was the Razak Report that set the foundations for our education system and the development of curriculums that were suited to our soon-to-be independent nation. Even before that, in 1951, he launched a campaign called "Sedia Bakti" (Ready to Serve) with the aim of changing the mind-set of the state civil service so that they would deliver even better for the people.
19. To bring the nation together after 1969, he formed the Barisan Nasional, bringing parties from all across the country to steer our nation forward. Its original nine parties have grown to 13 today, and the BN continues to work as Tun Razak envisaged, as a government by consensus and for the good of all Malaysians.
20. And underpinning that consensus and unity, he instituted the Rukun negara as national philosophy to support our democratic way of life, create a just society and preserve our rich and diverse cultural traditions. Allow me to thank Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah for recapping its basic tenets and summarising the gist of its preamble in his welcoming speech.
21. Abroad, Tun Razak was one of the founding fathers of ASEAN, as one of the five signatories of the Bangkok Declaration in 1967, which brought peace and stability to one of the most diverse regions on earth.
22. And later, as prime minister, he had the foresight to see the importance of our association with China, and established diplomatic relations in 1974, making Malaysia the first country in the region to do so.

Ladies and gentlemen,

23. Those are just some of the legacies of Tun Razak's leadership, and they have always been in my mind throughout my time in politics, from my days as a young MP, as Menteri Besar of Pahang, as a minister and then prime minister. They have been my inspiration, and as leader of this country I have strived to continue his work. He laid the foundations. It is for us, and for future generations, to continue building on them in a way that would make him proud.

24. The New Economic Model continues and extends the merit-based principles of the NEP that he introduced. Our 1Malaysia concept draws on the strength and pillars of the Rukun Negara. The relationship with China that Tun Razak forged has grown to such extent that it is now our largest trading partner.
25. He was one of the founders of ASEAN, and last year, as Malaysia chaired ASEAN, I had the privilege of being a signatory to the document that has transformed our ten nation association into a Community.
26. The affirmative action of the NEP was to ensure that the Bumiputra are not left behind. We argued for its inclusion in the TPPA – and this was accepted, which was a significant achievement. We have joined this agreement on our terms, and with affirmative action policies enshrined in an international treaty as never before.
27. What Tun Razak started, we have endeavoured to continue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

28. Later this afternoon I will be launching Tun Ahmad Sarji's book on my father, titled "My Recollections of Tun Abdul Razak", and we will also watch a special presentation on Tun Razak courtesy of Dato' Afendi Hamdan.
29. But what I am sure we can all agree on, and we do not need to be reminded of, is why Tun Razak truly deserves to be known as our "bapa pembangunan". He gave his life for this country. Today, 40 years after his passing, I stand before you and say that I am proud to be his son, and that every day I work to live up to that lineage. He is an example for me, and an inspiration for all Malaysians.

Thank you. Wabillahi Taufiq Walhidayah Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.