

## **Keynote Address**

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Australia-Malaysia Forum on "Australia-Malaysia Relations: Deepening Co-operation, Strengthening Ties",  
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Honourable Michael Johnson, Member of Parliament  
Mr. Robert Cotton,  
Council Member of the Australia  
Malaysia Institute  
Data' Dr. Michael Yeah, CEO and Director of ASLI  
Professor Richard Larkins,  
Vice Chancellor, Monash University  
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, I am very pleased and happy to be here again. Melbourne was the first Australian city that introduced me to Australians many years ago. Being an old boy from one of Australia's well known Public School (Geelong), Melbourne is naturally a welcoming city. As such, I would like to thank the Australia-Malaysia Institute, Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute and the Monash Asia Institute for inviting me to come again to Melbourne and to deliver this Keynote Address at this Forum.

It gives me great pleasure today, to speak on the subject "Australia-Malaysia Relations: Deepening Cooperation Strengthening Ties". It is indeed apt, timely and relevant to deal with the subject taking into account the current developments in our relations within the region and beyond. When deliberating the question of deepening cooperation and strengthening ties between Malaysia and Australia it is relevant to consider the underlying basic fundamentals governing us, as two sovereign nations. In this context, I refer to the need to have an in-depth understanding on some of the shared values. Without clear understanding and perceptions of these, it would lead us to unnecessary misperceptions or misunderstandings.

The people of Malaysia and the people of Australia have a long history of positive interactions for more than 50 years. Australian soldiers fought against Japanese occupation in Malaya during the Second World War, and then against the Communists insurgencies during the Emergency in early 1960s. Australia also played a significant role in the capacity building of Malaysia during our early days of independence, particularly through education links. However, I do not intend to dwell on the history, but suffice for me to say that based on our common heritage we can move forward to greater heights.

Let me also say we appreciate what we have done together though we may have our differences. But this is to be expected, but we should manage them in a way that would not jeopardize our long term interest. We should build on the common factors that add value to this established relationship. History shows that in the last two decades, Malaysia-Australia bilateral relations could have been better. Over the years there had been occasional marked differences between Malaysian and Australian leaders on issues of importance to our individual country and region. I hope this has come to pass. We should not be looking at specific issues alone to determine our bilateral relations but rather at the overall long term interests of both countries.

Undeniably political relations might be frosty at times, but trade, economic, defence, education and other links continued to expand and strengthen over the years. Since 1986, Malaysia and Australia have held formal trade and economic talks through the Joint Trade Committee process. Malaysia is Australia's third largest trading partner in ASEAN and 11th largest foreign trading partner. Malaysia's total trade with Australia in 2005 amounted to RM 52.43 billion (A\$18.5 billion) a 132.22% increase compared to RM22.57 billion (A\$7.9 billion) in 2004. Malaysia's total exports to Australia in 2005 stood at RM 36 billion (A\$12.7 billion) compared to RM15.78 billion (A\$5.5) in 2004. Imports from Australia in 2005 stood at RM 16.34 billion (A\$5.7 billion) compared to RM 6.79 billion (A\$2.4 billion) in 2004.

Bilateral defence cooperation has been longstanding, constructive and dynamic through the Malaysia-Australia Joint Defence Program and the Five Power Defence Arrangement. We have nurtured a strong

positive defence cooperation. Such strong defence collaborations are consistent to Malaysia's and Australia's value on security and stability at the regional and global level. We recognise that stability and security are necessary imperatives vital to our long term national interests. Malaysia just like Australia would respond appropriately within its means when our participation or assistance is required to support regional or international efforts for peace and security within the context of the UN and the region. In this regard, Malaysia had sent its monitoring team with other EU and ASEAN countries in respect of Aceh and in the latest crisis in East Timor. This is a clear testimony of our strong commitment to assist a neighbour as and when required, to ensure that regional security and stability are maintained. We are very happy to be working together with Australia and other participating nations in this case.

Cooperation in education remains strong in Malaysia-Australia relations. In Melbourne alone we have no less than 6,000 students in your various educational institutions. More than 150,000 Malaysians are alumni of these institutions. They are valuable assets of the country for our human capital development and contributed positively in the shaping of Malaysia into a nation state that is progressive and open. Certainly education is the bridge in providing networking between us and creates a better understanding of each other.

Notwithstanding the strong beneficial relations that I have enumerated and yet I feel there are still lingering doubts and uncertainties among Australians towards Malaysia. If there was any sense of discomfort, I find it difficult to understand why this should be so. Understandably, there should be some fundamental differences on how we perceived our role on global issues. Can it then be said that our relationship is driven by the milieu of our cultural dimensions or political posturing that sometimes create a void in the understanding between us? As an example, I was somewhat surprised when Foreign Minister Downer mentioned during the launching of the Australia-Malaysia Institute at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra on 28 March 2006 that Australian businesses have not always felt terribly welcome in Malaysia. Let me stress that Malaysia as a trading nation and open economy welcomes all foreign investors and we provide conducive and friendly environment for such endeavors. I therefore hope through forums such as this we could allay any uncertainties or fears that may exist between us. We should be bound by our Commonwealth heritage, relationships in trade, defence, and education that are mutually reinforcing and beneficial to both countries. There are more to gain from strong constructive collaborations than to belabour on our differences. Indeed, there are numerous common features that should become the basis of a formidable relation. There is no doubt in my mind Australia and Malaysia shared the intrinsic values of wanting both countries to have an enduring relationship.

We stand on a common platform of seeking peace and stability so that our region will be secured, stable and prosperous. We want to see conflicts, extremisms in all forms and manifestations are subservient to tolerance, moderation and pragmatism. We can go on and on, but one thing is certain, we have to agree that the time is opportune to translate these intentions into a strong political will and commitment to move forward and strengthen the bilateral relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Since Abdullah Ahmad Badawi resumed office as the fifth Prime Minister he has introduced various changes and set new priorities for the Government, yet building on the foundation that has been solidly laid by leaders before him. Malaysia had spelt out its goals of becoming a fully developed nation by 2020. Australia, definitely could be a positive contributor to the achievement of this objective. As Malaysia places greater emphasis and seriousness to knowledge-driven economy and is focused on performance as the basis of our success, I am confident Australia is well positioned to take advantage of them bearing in mind our existing bilateral and regional involvements. Malaysia is geared towards excellence, integrity good governance in maintaining our democracy. I take note that this Forum will be discussing the Ninth Malaysia Plan in greater detail later. I welcome such discussion since it will help you to understand better about Malaysia's development policies and the opportunities it represents towards becoming a more developed, just and united nation by the year 2020. More importantly, I am sure the discussion will identify areas of cooperation and collaboration to enable the participation of Australian businesses in Malaysia's implementation of the policies, strategies and programmes.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Earlier I mentioned that Malaysia's economic growth is inextricably linked with external factors. Malaysia is keenly aware that, in order to develop and prosper it is quite impossible to do

so on its own except in partnership with other countries in the region and the rest of the world. In fact, Malaysia considers its economic diplomacy, not only at the bilateral but also at the regional and global levels, as a core element in its international relations to secure the country's wider foreign policy objectives. Malaysia wishes to have friendly relations with all countries and be enemies with none Malaysia has no wish to impose its ideas and values on other people. Neither do we expect others to impose theirs on us. We would, however, be willing to share our experiences and knowledge with other countries.

In the conduct of bilateral relations, Malaysia as a country within the ASEAN comity of nations gives primary importance to the fundamental principles as enshrined by the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of 1976 in Southeast Asia, in particular; Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; Non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; Settlement of disputes by peaceful means.

These principles are in my view core factors in the inter-state conduct, including the fight against terrorism at the national, regional or international levels. The Malaysian Government put a lot of attention and resources in its fight against terrorism in collaboration with other members of the international community. I also wish to assure you that the Malaysian Government has the solid support of the Malaysian people in its fight against international terrorism. However, in this regard it is also relevant that we give our focus to overcome the root causes of these problems.

Ladies and Gentlemen, The Honourable Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had made two visits to Australia since he took office in October 2003. The first was an Official Visit in April 2005 and the second was a working Visit to Perth in February 2006 to receive the Honorary Doctor of Technology Award from the Curtin University of Technology.

In his Keynote Address at the Curtin University, Prime Minister Abdullah had taken the opportunity to explain in great detail what the approach of Islam Hadhari is, incorporating tolerance, harmony and justice as well as good governance, protection of the minority, women and children to sustain our multiracial society. He also made it clear in his keynote address by emphasizing that Malaysia and Australia shared a long history. He considered Australians as tolerant people and that Australia is an open country which is committed to defending the dignity of the human person and devoted to fostering peace and goodwill among nations.

He expressed the view that Australia and Malaysia were well placed to lead by examples in the matter of managing societies which were racially and religiously diverse. He strongly believed that Australia, which had established racial harmony and religious tolerance at the domestic levels, was eminently qualified to lead by examples as a country which was very involved in harnessing the dynamics of diversity, and making them served positively in the process of nation building and the pursuit of national interests. He added that Australia could therefore speak up and speak out, at the international level, for a genuine transformation in relations between the West and the Islamic world. Australia could help bring an end to the animosity and antagonisms of the past and the present. Australia could contribute towards building bridges between peoples and cultures.

For those who follow the history and trend of Australia-Malaysia political relations, such expressions by a Malaysian Prime Minister is very defining in reflecting Malaysia's desire towards strengthening and deepening ties with Australia. I like to encourage you to make full use of this atmosphere of friendship between Malaysia and Australia for our mutual benefit.

Thank you.