

EXECUTIVE TALK AT THE NATIONAL RESILIENCE COLLEGE
PUTRAJAYA

“EMPOWERING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN THE PUBLIC AND
PRIVATE ADMINISTRATION – ISSUES AND CHALLENGES.”

28 March 2023

National Resilience College
Precinct 1, Putrajaya

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim,
Assalamu’alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh,
A very good morning,
And Salam Malaysia Madani,

YBhg Major General Datuk Haji Mohd Nizam Haji Jaffar,
Commandant of the National Resilience College,

YBhg Brigadier General Dato’ Norsham Md Tap,
Deputy Commandant of the National Resilience College,

YBhg Major General (R) Dato’ Abdul Rahim Mohd Yusuff,
Head of Academics, and

Gentlemen.

It is an honour and a pleasure to be with all of you today, at the National Resilience College. I wish to congratulate the College on the

commencement of the National Resilience Course, which aimed at nurturing “Strategic Thinkers of Statesman Quality.”

2. Thank you so much for inviting me today. To speak on the subject of Empowering Good Governance In The Public And Private Administration – Issues And Challenges.

3. I wish in the next 30 minutes or so to establish certain key points. In the remaining time, I look forward to discussing and exchanging views with you, on issues and challenges of good governance, be it in Public or Private sectors.

4. Good governance demands that governments must not only be representative, but must be responsive, to the needs of governing. A strong sense of responsiveness and commitment to serving the governed is required on the part of governments. It emphasises the effective delivery of services to the satisfaction of the people.

5. Eleven days ago, on 16 March 2023 YAB Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim officially launched the MRT Putrajaya Line. My wife, Wan Noorlina and I took a return trip on it on Sunday 19 March 2023 and we loved it. Not so much because it was free and it’s free until end of this month – but because it’s good.

6. As the first Chairman of MRT Corporation, I am very happy to see the efforts and hard work of so many men and women from various government agencies, be it at Federal or State level, Project Delivery Partner (PDP), contractors and many more – from the very first day when the project construction for MRT Line 1 (Sungai Buloh – Kajang) was

officially launched on 8 July 2011 – has now become reality. A reality benefitting the Rakyat.

7. I am going to use the MRT and my experience with it to speak about governance. The MRT demonstrates that a government-led critical and massive project such as this, can be executed and delivered on schedule, and more importantly within budget. The MRT Line 1 which I was closely associated with cost just over RM 21 billion as compared to the planned budget of RM 23 billion. A savings of RM 2 billion. In fact the First Phase of the project was completed 16 days ahead of its target deadline of 31 December 2016.

8. And all these while also attaining 50% of the value of work packages awarded to Bumiputera companies relative to target of 43%.

9. One may wonder, how did the Government achieved this? What's the secret – to deliver a project budgeted at RM 23 billion ahead of schedule and at a lower cost?

10. It is a cliché' to state that plans or projects are meaningless unless executed. Using a variation of Bill Clinton's successful campaign against then President George H W Bush: "It's the economy, stupid," the secret is "It's the implementation, stupid!"

11. Towards this end, we established the MRT EXCO to continuously track and monitor its progress and to resolve issues that may arise. Chaired by KSN (me), the EXCO comprised senior representative of relevant Ministries and agencies, including among others, MOF, EPU, MOT, Selangor State Government, DBKL, AG's Chambers, Auditor

General, MACC, PWD, DOE, MRT Corp, SPAD, PRASARANA and Project Delivery Partner (PDP).

12. The involvement of the Selangor Government was important because 31 kilometres out of the 51 kilometres MRT 1, are in the State of Selangor which has oversight on land and Development Approvals.

13. The AG's Chambers was involved to ensure that all the legal procedures were followed; as were the Auditor General and MACC. The motivation for involving them was to ensure people do it right from the beginning. NOT to catch the wrongdoings after the event! Of course some may debate on the issue of "conflict of interest" or "conflicted".

14. Not all of us at the EXCO meetings were technical specialists but we listened to the Subject Matter Experts. If the other members or Subject Matter Experts have better ideas, we took that as our best idea. All information were shared across the board with openness so that it allowed for greater transparency amongst different stakeholders and government agencies; and to come out with the optimal decision. The best for the Country. Hierarchy of ideas, NOT hierarchy of positions. This enabled us, as a group, to arrive at informed decisions, within the 1 hour weekly meetings. And, this has allowed us to monitor and track the progress of the project closely.

15. It was unanimously agreed that the MRT shall be delivered on time. We agreed that the Sg Buloh – Semantan segment would be completed by 31 December 2016 and the whole 51 kilometres to Kajang by 31 July 2017.

16. I recall that in the initial stages there were requests by some parties in the EXCO to extend the target completion date by 6 months; but this was not agreed by the EXCO. In addition the cost of the project was capped and locked in.

17. I have just described to you that a project as massive as MRT Line One, can be delivered ahead of time and lower than budget. My challenge to myself all these years, and to all my colleagues who cared to listen: *Can't we replicate the same model for all projects? What is stopping us? Would it not be good service to the Rakyat if we are to monitor the implementation of public-funded projects the way we would monitor projects we pay with our own money? Who says KSUs cannot act (in a good sense) like KSN; or TKSUs like good KSUs? Or Brigadier General like PTU or PAT? It is all in the mind!*

18. I like to believe that a person is promoted to be KSU because he behaved like one and has traits of a (good) KSU. And, not so much someone thinks like PAT because he is PAT.

Gentlemen,

19. The MRT is a huge project. Built over 6 years at a cost of RM 21 billion. But it is only less than 10 % of Malaysia's budget for just one year. So: If the same level of discipline could be brought to the implementation of procurements, be it projects or supplies, we tackle the issue of governance.

20. It does not matter whether the allocation is for development or operational, or whether it is huge or small, it is for each and every official

at whatever level, to monitor the implementation of tasks under his purview. With responsibility.

21. I believe we have enough rules and regulations empowering the bureaucrats to do so. Such as the Financial Procedure Act and Treasury Instructions. And, the Controlling Officer for every Ministry is still the Secretary General of the Ministry! As well, the bureaucracy that implements policy decisions is under her purview.

22. I wish to state that transparency is within our control. We can make it happen. The policies, processes, and tools are all available within our grasps. Hence it is up to each individual, be it in the Civil Service, in the Military, the Bidders, the Project Owners – all must, in the words of then Chief Justice, Y.A.A Tun Hamid Mohamad: “Buat Kerja!”

23. This brings me to another point that I would like to highlight. “Buat Kerja” or “Work” is easy. It is us that makes it difficult. We write various rules and regulations to address certain issues. A rule may be very relevant when it was first written, but over time it may become irrelevant. Or worse, becomes counterproductive. Sometimes we write rules that from the very outset pose difficulties. Perhaps we did not think through and we did not consult enough. Or did not consult at all.

24. Unfortunately when approvals are difficult to get, and discretion or loopholes are available, economic value would be created by the difficulties. There are people who are willing to pay outside the system to get approval, or to get expedited approval.

25. Nevertheless, the converse is also true. When the process is transparent, predictable and easy there is no reason for people to pay beyond the normal prescribed rate to get the service. THAT is the basis of the work of PEMUDAH which was established by the Government. PEMUDAH was anchored on a facilitative mindset, but without compromising integrity. An example of this is the Government commitment of payment within 14 days! When payment is simple, prompt and predictable, there is no reason to NOT make payment! When payment is simple, prompt and predictable, there is no reason to make payment to get payment.

26. I believe we should not have too many rules and regulations. And for the rules that we think we should have, it should be promulgated with inputs from the widest relevant stakeholders. And those rules once agreed, must be implemented and enforced. And, when they are no longer relevant they must be abolished. And, abolished transparently.

27. However, transparency alone will not be sufficient. The people providing service, be it in the public or corporate sector, must have desirable values. Here the role of institutions such as universities and other IHLs, IIM (Institut Integriti Malaysia), which I was privileged to chair when I was KSN, INTAN and National Resilience College are so critical in instilling these values. I would like to refer to them as The 10 Commandments.

28. For me these are:

- i. Customer / Rakyat Focus
- ii. Sense of Urgency
- iii. Complaint is a Gift

- iv. No Wrong Door (Collaboration / Whole of Government)
- v. Seeking Knowledge / Continuous Improvements
- vi. Giving Honest Views (Courage to Speak)
- vii. Engagement
- viii. Integrity

29. Let me expound on some of them.

CUSTOMER FOCUS

30. First, on Customer Focus. Or in today's context, Rakyat Focus. This must be the *raison d'être*. The reason for the existence of the Public Service. Why else should we be paid from public fund, if not to serve the public, to the best of our ability?

31. I am going to give 2 examples:

Example 1

The clerk in the Land Office in Pekan in the early 1960's should accept the payment of Quit Rent from the villager from Cherok Paloh, my kampung, even if the villager arrived at the office when it was about to close! Bear in mind that in those days, the villager would have to cycle and took the ferry in order to get to Pekan!

Example 2

The clerk at the Sepang Land Office should collect payment of Quit Rent from Tan Sri Ismail Adam, when he arrived at the office around noon one day in October 2007, instead of asking him to come after lunch hour. Tan Sri Ismail Adam who was at that time

the KPPA – Ketua Pengarah Perkhidmatan Awam – described his experience as “Cherok Paloh all over again!!”

32. So from time to time when I was the KSN, I received complaints from people about the situation of “Cherok Paloh all over again” whenever they were made to run around in trying to get service. From the public service. I am sure many of us have experienced being told to return either after lunch hour or the next day, or to bring irrelevant documents for a service that could be completed within a few minutes.

33. But this behaviour, I must add, is not exclusively confined to the public sector. I experienced so many instances of much more tardy service from the private sector. I am sure all of us have bad experiences with them. Some people may retort that as a customer of the private sector unlike that of the public sector, I have choices. And that I have the freedom to deny the recalcitrant establishment my patronage. And, for me to vote with my wallet.

34. Let me then ask: What if that grocery store is the only one in the remote kampong? Or, the ATM is the only bank on Fraser’s Hill! So, my answer to that is, I am their Rakyat and my payment for the service or goods that the private sector provides, for example to Astro, is the “tax” that they collect from me and from others. Therefore they must be responsive to their “citizens” needs. No difference from the services expected from any Government department!

COURAGE TO SPEAK UP

35. Second desired value of public officials, is the courage to speak up and provide honest opinion. Speaking up doesn't mean we have to shout. It just means that we share our honest thoughts and ideas, even though our idea may be different from our higher ranking officers. It is important that we give our views, particularly if we are the expert in the field. In order that we can improve for the common good.

36. I find the unwillingness to "Tell Me" baffling. Some cited "there will be negative repercussions from higher authorities and I could be punished". Others may argue "I can't do much as I do not have the authority nor autonomy to act". Or "I am just a junior officer. Nobody will listen to me".

37. This is where I believe we must promote a culture of allowing people to speak up, of giving warranted contrarian views. A culture of adopting the best ideas. And, we must encourage and reward officers who traverse beyond just his or her department, division or ministry. One must see beyond one's current remit. We do not have to wait to have certain job titles before having the courage to speak at that level of authority. We must have a culture of promoting "hierarchy of ideas rather than hierarchy of positions". I am very conscious that I am speaking to an audience where command and control structure is so traditional.

38. In MITI where I spent 28 years, and later as KSN, I promoted officers who dared give ideas and diverse perspective. The kind of officials who could make me look like a fool in private, but because of that allow me to be smart in public.

39. At PETRONAS we have a set of Cultural Beliefs that include Shared Success, Nurturing Trust and Tell Me, where it is “safe” to give differing views. In addition, PETRONAS Whistleblowing Policy is made available, fully transparent and accessible to the general public. The policy is designed to allow both employees as well as external parties, be it vendors, sub-contractors or any member of the public to make a complaint. This is important for PETRONAS as it allows the organisation to address any misconduct by their employees.

INTEGRITY

40. Let me now speak about Integrity. To me, integrity is abhorrence of corruption. This is FRONT and CENTRE. But integrity goes beyond it. It is about giving one’s best. About discharging one’s Amanah. Beyond just the minimum requirements. Beyond what is just good for the current position we are in. To me, integrity is about having the mindset of KSU even as an Assistant Director! About having the mindset of PAT even when you are only commanding a Brigade or a Battalion. Therefore integrity incorporates all the Ten Commandments.

41. The test of integrity is about always doing the right thing, even when no one is watching. In fact, PARTICULARLY when NOBODY is watching! Like a golfer declaring his air shots.

42. I am confident that a transparent service that is delivered with ethics, shall definitely promote more efficient and effective use of our resources. That is why going to the ground – turun padang – announced as well as unannounced, is useful. To see what’s happening on the ground. And,

more importantly to do something about what can be improved on the ground.

43. However, in this digital age, we can go to the ground without physically going to the ground! There are so many people for example who are willing to tell us at night which street lights are not functioning, or where there are burst pipes. We only need to appreciate and be responsive to these feedbacks. Change the light bulb and repair the pipes. In a way, to treat the Rakyat as Penjawat Awam. The flip side of Merakyatkan Perkhidmatan Awam.

44. And, I believe the Rakyat like it. I can say this with certainty. Tan Sri Yong Poh Kon, my PEMUDAH Co-Chair and 9 other Corporate Bigwigs in PEMUDAH were “pro-bono civil servants” since we started PEMUDAH in 2007. Working on Malaysia’s Ease of Doing Business and improving our country’s competitiveness. Actually I got a feeling they didn’t mind paying the government to be in PEMUDAH in order to make life easy for their businesses; in very ethical ways. So are the rakyat who tweet, email or communicate by whatever means, suggesting improvements.

45. Before I conclude on this subject of governance, let me bring up the issue of Hippocratic Oath. The famous Hippocratic Oath which dates back to the Iconic Greek times in the 5th century BC was historically taken by physicians and other healthcare professionals swearing to practice medicine honestly. Although amended and revised over the years, one poignant commitment in this oath is, *“That I will not withdraw from my patients in their time of need”*. How does this Oath fare today where we have ambulance chasers and insurance companies ruling the medical

industry? How does it fare with large pharmaceuticals said to be the main paymasters of political campaigns?

46. And if Governments and Public Service are likened to physicians and health care professionals, how can it withdraw service from the B 40 in their time of need? Isn't that the oath of Government?

47. Having served in the public sector for almost all my working life, I would argue, that the role of Government must not be devalued to only correcting the monetary demands of markets. It has to take into consideration the distributive justice which Aristotle spoke about in his work. The public sector's role cannot be only to nudge, fix or incentivise good behaviour and, penalise and castigate the bad. It cannot be focused on just maximising GDP and balancing budgets. It must involve consumer experience and it has to lead in distributing social justice especially in fundamental areas like healthcare, education, housing and social cohesion. And, on providing "safety net" by whatever name!

48. Let me end by referring to a reportedly old Arab saying which in essence means, "*Justice lies in the heart of the judge*". There can be laws and there can be judges. However, ultimately justice can only be served where there is sound ethics in the hearts of those serving the judgement. The public service presides over the providence of the people of a country. So the service offered must realistically reflect the complexities of humanity.

Wabillahitaufig wal hidayah, wassalamu'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.