Keynote Address
By
Y.Bhg. Tan Sri Nuraizah Abdul Hamid*
At
The Official Opening of the 4th Digital Library Conference
“Enriching Malaysiana Content For PERDANA”18 December 2002

Abstract
The speaker is positive that the Digital Library initiative can make significant contribution in the creation of a knowledge-based society and economy for the future growth of the country. However, a number of issues need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, its crucial to ensure that it is accessible to all levels and users. The speaker acknowledges the role of the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission in ensuring its successful access through the implementation of its communication networks. Secondly, technology must be regarded as a means to an end and PERDANA should be a technological innovation that facilitates knowledge creation. Thirdly, our rich social cultural heritage needs to be transformed into digital content and global knowledge has to be linked and tailored to meet local needs. Finally, PERDANA needs to be extensively marketed to meet and suit different needs and preferences. A mobile facility for PERDANA would be most suitable to ensure its availability to all walks of life.

Y.Bhg. Dato’ Zawiyah Baba,
Ketua Pengarah
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The World Development Report 1999, among other things, stated that:

For countries in the vanguard of the world economy, the balance between knowledge and resources has shifted so far towards the former that knowledge has become, perhaps, the most important factor determining the standard of living - more than land, than tools, than labour. Today’s most technologically advanced economies are truly knowledge-based.

It is an undeniable fact that knowledge and technology have become the most important factors in determining growth in the more advanced economies of the 21st Century. Economic growth is now driven by the accumulation and application of knowledge. Technology augments that growth by creating platforms for further discoveries and innovation, which are key drivers for economic progress. This symbiotic relationship between knowledge and technology creates a virtual economic cycle.

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Nonetheless, technological innovation does not occur without sufficient investment in human capital. Human capital is the coalescence of formal and informal education, training and experience embodied in the workforce.

In the US, arguably one of the richer and most technologically advanced nations in the world, more than 60% of the economy is knowledge-based.

In Europe, Ireland has been successful in transforming its once rural based economy through investment in education and information technologies. The result of those efforts is that Ireland is now Europe's largest exporter of computer software.

In the 1970's, more than 2/3 of Finland's exports was wood and paper products. Now, the country has gone through an economic makeover with more than 50 percent of the country's exports being knowledge intensive products. The country has now become a world leader in information technologies.

What about Malaysia, where do we fit into this?

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the Foreword to the Knowledge-Based Economy Master Plan, published in September 2002, the Prime Minister stated, and I quote:

*The dictates of the environment characterised largely by technological advancements, greater market integration and globalisation, heightened competition as well as the increasing creation and use of knowledge necessitate a paradigm shift and that Malaysia re-engineers herself to meet these challenges. Recognising the critical need for knowledge as input, Malaysia has embarked on the transformation from an input-driven growth strategy, that had served her well in the past, to one that is increasingly driven by knowledge in order to achieve sustainable high growth and development.*

The development of the Master Plan marks another key initiative of the Government to further accelerate the development of the nation into a knowledge-based economy as well as in achieving the objectives of Vision 2020. As you are aware, the Government had launched, in 1996, the Multimedia Super Corridor and its flagship applications, including the multi-purpose card, smart schools, telemedicine, e-government and others. We had also taken a bold and unprecedented step, in 1998, when the convergence legislation was tabled in Parliament to become the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA). The policy, regulatory and institutional changes that the CMA introduced, to enable convergence of the telecommunications, broadcasting and online services was, in fact, the first of its kind. These were among the many steps taken as a part of the Prime Minister's strategic vision to move the nation into a knowledge-based economy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If Malaysia is to become a globally competitive knowledge economy, the challenge is to collaborate and work together in making this a reality for all Malaysians. There is a need for an economic and institutional framework that will promote the efficient use of knowledge. Among others, this will include relevant legal instruments, an effective and secure financial system and a competitive and liberalised market.

Furthermore, Malaysia will need educated and skilled people to create, share and use knowledge. This will require an educational system that is both flexible and congruent to the needs of industries and all sectors of industries and all sectors of the economy.

Finally, we will need an efficient and innovative system of research and development to tap into global knowledge. Research and development institutes and centers should be well equipped to meet the needs of the public and private sectors.
It is, therefore, very clear that moving to a knowledge economy will require a coordinated effort from government Ministries, agencies, private companies and the community. The Smart School Programmer under Ministry of Education, the Multimedia Super Corridor and its Flagship Applications, the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 and other cyber laws as well as legal instruments undertaken by the Government are merely some of the pieces to a big jigsaw puzzle.

In this context, the Digital Library initiative is one such piece to that jigsaw puzzle and the National Library of Malaysia should be commended for contributing to an understanding of the bigger picture that is forming and being formed. With that in mind, I would like to take this opportunity to say that the Digital Library initiative can make significant contribution in the creation of a knowledge-based society and economy for the future growth of the country. This Conference can be an effective platform for strategising and sharing of ideas and experiences to ensure that intention becomes a reality. However, for PERDANA to be relevant and to contribute substantially to the knowledge economy initiative, a number of issues will need to be taken into consideration.

Firstly, let us look at the issue of access. I believe that power of knowledge and its usefulness lie in its ability to be shared and processed for the benefit of all. The communication networks thus play a crucial role in ensuring access to all repositories of such knowledge. The extent to which they are reached will be a key determinant in bridging the digital and knowledge divide.

The MCMC has an important role to play in ensuring access. The first three of the ten national policy objectives provided in the CMA relate to the establishment of Malaysia as a major global centre and hub for communications and multimedia information and content services; the promotion of information-based services that will provide the basis for continuing enhancement to quality of work and life; and nurturing local information resources and cultural representation that facilitate the national identity and global diversity.

To expedite the fulfillment of these objectives, the MCMC has developed a Framework for Industry Development (FID 2002-2006) which, among other things, aims to increase national communications and multimedia services penetration rates, promote the development of a fully digital National Network System, and implement a national broadband plan. Through the Universal Service Provision of the CAM, the MCMC plans to extend communication services to all underserved areas in the country. It is also our intention that the promotion of new services, for example, through 3G mobile network, digital Terrestrial Television, and other broadband technologies to the masses, will enable access to information and knowledge anywhere, at anytime and in whatever form they choose.

We see the Digital Library as an integral part of these efforts. Its role and functions will contribute directly to our own efforts to fulfil these national policy objectives. Thus, I would like to suggest that access to PERDANA must be looked at in a much broader context. It is not going to fully contribute to the final objective of developing a knowledge-based economy if it only reaches the academicians, the professional librarians, content developers, vendors and other professional groups participating in this Conference. Awareness and access must be extended to all levels and users, particularly those who would, otherwise, be marginalized in this process.

Let us now examine the second issue, the question of technology. I would like to remind here that we must be mindful of the fact that technology is only an enabler, a means to an end. Thus, PERDANA must be viewed from that perspective: a technological innovation that facilitates knowledge creation and transmission. Its importance must be focussed on what it can
This brings me to the final issue that I would like to draw your attention to. This is related to the important issue of marketing of the services offered by PERDANA. It is my view that this facility should not be the domain of students, academicians and related professionals. It must also serve the needs of people from all walks of life. Thus, the marketing strategy must be innovative and bold as well as differentiated to suit different people and different needs and preferences. And, as mentioned earlier, it must be, above all, accessible and simple. People not well versed in digital technology are usually afraid of the complicated processes and technological sophistication. The quality and usefulness of such a system would be gauged not by these factors but in its easy application. Just as the National Library system had, in the past, included a mobile library service for outlying areas, such an idea of a mobile facility for PERDANA might be a practical option, if it is not already in effect. I believe that it could be a powerful tool to enable the people in rural and outlying areas to develop a digital wavelength much earlier and more easily.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Indeed, there are many issues to be considered beyond creating a Digital Library. Participants in this Conference should use this opportunity to debate on the matter to ensure greater effectiveness and benefits of PERDANA. It can then contribute more significantly and strategically to our national objective of becoming a knowledge-based economy that can compete with the rest and the best of the world.

Dengan kata-kita itu, saya dengan sukacita dan bangganya merasmikan pembukaan Persidangan Keempat Perpustakaan Digital: Memperkayakan Kandungan Malaysiana Untuk PERDANA.
Sekian, wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh dan terima kasih.