OPENING SPEECH

SEMINAR ON ‘GROWTH STRATEGIES FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ASIA’

MINISTER OF EDUCATION, MALAYSIA

Berjaya Times Square Hotel
Kuala Lumpur
September 19 – 21, 2005
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to extend a warm *selamat datang* and welcome to all members of the foreign delegation to Kuala Lumpur, and to the “Growth Strategies For Secondary Education” seminar. In fact we have with us today delegates from various parts of Asia: China, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, India, and Laos, apart from the local delegates. In attendance are also representatives from the World Bank Institute. It is indeed an honour for us, the Ministry of Education Malaysia, to be able to host such an important seminar on secondary education.

Let me begin by thanking the World Bank Institute for selecting Kuala Lumpur for this event. I believe this is because of the commitment of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia in enhancing basic education to achieve the Millennium Development Goals initiated by the United Nations. It also gives me great pleasure to inform you that the other co-sponsors of this seminar are the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) as well as the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.

The concerted effort between the Government of Malaysia and the World Bank in organising an international seminar like this acts as a platform for experts, specialists and practitioners of secondary education from member countries to share knowledge, ideas and experiences. Inevitably, the meeting of minds and dissemination of knowledge that will occur here within the next couple of days will contribute to our learning process and the capacity building of our human resources. This is a significant agenda for all of us as we move towards ensuring the attainment of quality in all levels of education.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education is a subject that is very close to our hearts. It is valued all over the world for its ability to develop human potential and to contribute to economic growth. Countries with highly developed education systems are also those with successful economies and high standards of living. The emphasis of the seminar is on secondary education as this level of education is seen as a tool to generate benefits and opportunities of social and economic development.

The development of secondary education is vital in producing students who are knowledgeable; skilled in ICT; practitioners of positive attitudes and values; creative and critical in thinking, and who are ready for tertiary education. The objective of this seminar is primarily to disseminate information on secondary education. Issues and strategies with respect to secondary educational policies and educational development in the Asian region will be discussed in depth.

Let me highlight the issues and challenges that are related to secondary education. These are as follows:

- Growing demand for secondary education due to the increase in demand for new knowledge, skills, values, and sophisticated technologies;
- Inequity in access to quality secondary education has become a major barrier in human development;
- Shortage of teachers affects the quality of secondary education and thus hinders the expansion of access to secondary education; and
- Funding secondary education to ensure that the education system at this level is at par with the rapid development of science and technology.
Ladies and Gentlemen

As we are all aware, social, technological and economic changes in the world today are occurring at a very rapid pace. The impact of globalisation upon us is just becoming fully manifest as we move towards economies which are based far more in service industries and the new knowledge economies. Economic and technological changes interact to produce not only new knowledge but new ways of working. Because of this development, secondary schools in particular, have to play a dual function. On the one hand, they need to prepare the citizens of tomorrow; on the other, to develop the nation’s workforce as a form of investment in human capital. Acknowledging this agenda, we need to urgently reflect upon the growth strategies of secondary education for Asia.

We have to move from the traditional and static structure of our secondary schools to accommodate changes that will bring in more dynamism to secondary school growth. What needs to be looked into may include transforming the classroom and envisioning the curriculum of the future. Questions such as what kind of citizens are we hoping to produce; what kind of future will there be; what kind of work structure and what kind of economy; need to be posed, considered and discussed so that the growth strategies that will be adopted in the future are apt with the changing times.

Students in secondary schools are at a period in life where the critical transition from childhood to adolescence is made. Depending on the country they are from, they leave their primary schools around 12 or 13 years of age and continue their schooling for a further 5 or 6 years. For most students, this period represents an important part of their lives where their personalities, values, skills and general competencies are honed and developed. It is therefore our responsibility as educationists, to ensure that there are
relevant strategies that ensure the holistic development of the individual to enable them to cope with life after school.

Today, secondary students are adolescents who can no longer be thought to be a homogeneous group of young people. They have to be seen as individual youngsters who are increasingly autonomous and independent. Hence our educational provisions for them, which may have been sufficient in the last decade or two, need rethinking to enable us to discover or develop the best approach to make them more interested to continue schooling and become effective learners.

The methods and approaches in learning and teaching in secondary education need to be made more effective, in line with the changing social and work structures in order to serve students better. Secondary students of today and the future have to be able to manage and make sense of their own learning. This means that today’s teachers are required to teach in ways which are very different from the manner in which they were taught. We need to take account of the fact that practical strategies by which teachers may continue to be effective classroom practitioners need to be developed. We also need to uphold teaching as a communicative activity and that communication and human relationships are central to the education processes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For Malaysia, the path taken to develop secondary education strategies has been exciting for us. Like many other nations, many of our educational development strategies are based upon the nation’s interests. We have worked upon four main thrusts that are access, equity, quality as well as efficiency and effectiveness of educational management.
More specifically, the development thrust for secondary education is geared towards providing more opportunities to qualified individuals that will enable them to attain education at the highest level, based on their cognitive ability and special talents.

We have taken into consideration that due to the onset of globalisation and strong competition at the market levels, course contents needs to be diversified. There should be good use of information and technology, particularly in communications among the teaching staff, and between them and the students. We realise that there is an increasing need to make preparations for the changes in the mode of delivery and to offer subjects with strong industrial relevance. To prepare students for the realities of today’s business world and the new economy, we will be putting more emphasis on virtual learning; where students make use of on-line learning and the interactive multimedia courseware.

We are making plans for the increase in the participation of students at the secondary level of education from the physical as well as non physical components. We continue to make efforts to provide adequate and appropriate infrastructure for these students so that the learning environment is always conducive. We offer various fields of studies to enable them to choose relevant courses and prepare them for their career path. We have widened their subject choices to include arts, science, religious as well as technical and vocational subjects. In order to fulfill the needs and abilities of all the secondary students, Malaysia has also established and expanded regular secondary schools, fully residential schools, technical schools, sports schools and special education schools. Our latest educational statistics (for 2005) show that the total number of secondary schools in Malaysia is 2018 with an enrolment of 2,160,283 students. We have 133,671 secondary school teachers and 27,451 non teaching staff.
At this juncture, I would also like to point out that Malaysia is progressing towards bridging the gap between the rural and urban secondary schools in terms of providing educational inputs such as physical infrastructure, professional and qualified teaching staff as well as sufficient financial allocation to students in the rural areas and from poor families. We have established support services so that these students have access to quality secondary education. On going strategies to reduce the barrier that exists between rural and urban students, in the hope of reducing inequity in access to secondary education, continue to be implemented.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next few days, I believe you will be discussing issues and matters regarding secondary education such as access and equity, balance between general and vocational education, teaching preparation and professional development, curriculum reform in the knowledge-based economy, and the ICT revolution in curriculum and instruction, to name a few.

This seminar will include discussions based on more than 20 paper presentations that cover issues and topics encompassing New Trends in Secondary Education; History and Structure of Secondary Education; Curriculum Reform in Secondary Education; Teacher Preparation, Qualifications and Compensation; The Role of ICT in Secondary Education; Labour Market Demand and Competencies in Asia; Secondary Education Finance; and Policy Issues in Secondary Education. I trust you will find such topics interesting. As for the speakers, they are all renowned in their respective fields and will be able to provide you with the current state of secondary education in their countries for us to learn from their experience.
On this occasion, we will have the opportunity to work together to improve our children’s education and prepare them for the future. As part of the global community, we need to seek ways in which we can manage education strategies and resources so that we can offer education services of significant value to the students. Obviously, there is diversity in the education system among the Asian countries, particularly as they are at different stages of economic development. This, ladies and gentlemen, accounts for the different paces of development of secondary education in Asia.

However, let us be reminded that diversity is, in effect our strength that can propel us forward. Despite the existing diversity, we all have common concerns – that is to provide our secondary students with the best growth strategies for secondary education in Asia. With effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation, there is no reason why our secondary education development cannot be at par with that of the developed nations. This diverse and eclectic stance will help all of us to challenge the accepted norms in education and provide valuable insights in developing good strategies for the growth of secondary education.

The idea of collegial sharing and consultation, where we learn from and through each other will infuse this region with vibrancy and dynamism. The open sharing of experiences and discourse will provide this region with fresh ideas, sound values and constructive experiences. This is one of the ways in gaining insights into our mutual concerns thereby developing more accurate strategies with respect to the development of secondary education.

Ladies and gentlemen,
We have been fortunate enough to be given a golden opportunity whereby we can benefit from each other. We can learn from countries which have good practice and innovation in secondary education and reflect upon practices that have not worked well so that we will not make the same mistakes. These will act as valuable inputs for our educational policy makers.

I also hope that all of you will use the seminar as a platform to strengthen the existing network to facilitate your professional development particularly in the quest to improve the secondary education in your countries. I am sure that all participants from participating countries will greatly benefit from the presentations and discussions to be held throughout this 3-day seminar. This is essential for us educationists as we prepare to face the challenging tasks that lie ahead of us. Let's equip ourselves with a passion for excellence and quality in secondary education so that our students will be prepared for a future that is more secure for them all.

Thank you.