



PARLIAMENT OF MALAYSIA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**HIS EXCELLENCY TAN SRI AZHAR AZIZAN HARUN
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

COMMONWEALTH DAY 2022

WEDNESDAY, 23 MARCH 2022

PARLIAMENT OF MALAYSIA

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh dan Salam Sejahtera.

SALUTATIONS

His Excellencies, High Commissioners of the Commonwealth Countries;

His Excellency, Tan Sri Dato' Seri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim

President of the Senate;

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. It is my pleasure to be here with all of you to celebrate Commonwealth Day 2022. Indeed, on behalf of the Parliament of Malaysia, I am privileged and honoured to host this year's celebration, which

coincides with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebration as a recognition of the services of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as the Head of the Commonwealth.

2. Since acceding to the throne 70 years ago, the role that Her Majesty The Queen has played across the Commonwealth has been tremendous and exceptional. As a respected figure, Her Majesty The Queen has been the unifying symbol of the Commonwealth. Malaysia, being one of 54 member countries of the Commonwealth, recognises the importance of Her Majesty The Queen's role in ensuring the development of free and democratic societies and the promotion of peace and prosperity to improve the lives of all the people of the Commonwealth as expressed in the Commonwealth Charter.

Honourable ladies and gentlemen,

3. On this Commonwealth Day 2022, it is crucial for us to look back at the principles and values set in the Commonwealth Charter. The underlying determinants for the need of the Commonwealth rest in popular demands for democracy, human rights, and better economic opportunities. Furthermore, all 16 articles of the Charter, namely democracy, human rights, international peace and security, tolerance, respect and understanding, freedom of expression, separation of powers, the rule of law, good governance, sustainable development, protecting the environment, health, education, food and shelter, gender equality, young people in the Commonwealth, the needs of small states, the needs of vulnerable states, and the role of civil society succinctly and appositely address overarching issues in the Commonwealth.

4. As we celebrate Commonwealth Day 2022 with the theme 'Delivering a Common Future', it is essential to note that the London Declaration, adopted in 1949 to mark the formation of the modern Commonwealth, recognises the free association of independent member countries, hence an equal say for all members regardless their size or economic status. Therefore, I would like to quote the Queen's Commonwealth Day 2022 message,

Our family of nations continues to be a point of connection, cooperation and friendship. It is a place to come together to pursue common goals and the common good, providing everyone with the opportunity to serve and benefit.

In these testing times, it is my hope that you can draw strength and inspiration from what we share, as we work together towards a healthy, sustainable and prosperous future for all.

Honourable ladies and gentlemen,

5. I am pleased, although with great caution, that we are able to meet today to commemorate Commonwealth Day since we had the last Commonwealth Day in Parliament in 2019. The past two years have been difficult as the whole world had to grapple with the ravaging Covid-19 that has devastated the livelihoods of many. As it stands, the pandemic has infected more than 450 million people, with more than 6 million casualties globally.

6. Compared to the bubonic plague or the Black Death in Europe in the 14th century that killed about 25 million people, and the 1918 influenza pandemic or widely referred to as Spanish flu, recorded at least 50 million deaths, our experience with Covid-19 for the past two years is nothing short of the virus' predecessors. The Covid-19 has affected everyone, imperilling every dimension of our wellbeing, stunting the progress and development that the world has made.

7. With the constant emergence of new diseases in the past decades, it seems that the more frequent interactions among humans, the environment and wildlife have squeezed local ecosystems hardly that deadly viruses spill out. Scientists generally believe that we are exiting the Holocene, which has lasted some 12,000 years during which human civilisation as we know it came to be. Preceding the Holocene is Anthropocene, denoting the current geological age, in which humans are a dominant influence on climate and the environment, shaping the future of our planet. The tension on the planet mirrors the strain facing many of our societies. Planetary imbalances and social imbalances exacerbate one another. As Cassius famously remarks in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "The fault...is not in our stars/ But in ourselves."

8. The recent UNDP Special Report 2022, "New threats to human security in the Anthropocene: Demanding greater solidarity", noted that an estimated six of every seven people across the world already felt insecure in the years leading up to the pandemic. Approximately 1.2 billion people live in conflict-affected areas, with almost half of them (560 million) in countries not usually considered fragile, reflecting the spread of different forms of violent conflict. Hunger is on the rise; about

2.4 billion people now suffer food insecurity, resulting from cumulative socioeconomic and environmental effects generated prior to 2019 and were augmented by the pandemic.

9. These are among examples of threats to human security in the Anthropocene context. As the Covid-19 pandemic got underway, its unprecedented nature that caught the whole world off guard must serve a lesson to how we reimagine and rebuild our world. Leo Tolstoy wrote in his famous *War and Peace*, “all we can know is that we know nothing. And that’s the height of human wisdom.” In the age of the Anthropocene, human wisdom is what we shall need most.

Honourable ladies and gentlemen,

10. Climate change has become vital with the frequent occurrences of flooding, wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, and typhoons that witness a new and terrifying level of destruction and devastation. Malaysia is estimated to experience an increase of between 1.9 to 2.1 degrees Celsius surface temperature by the end of the century. With this increment, the average rainfall will also see an increment of 14 to 25 percent, whereas the sea level will increase up to 0.73 meters within the same period.
11. So much for the calls to address the issues of global warming and climate change in various platforms at the international, regional and local stage, the calls for climate action are fast becoming mere climate rhetoric. But we realise what is at stake if calls are not followed by concrete actions so that our future generations will not have their

'hopes and dreams drown in empty words and promises', to quote from environmental activist Greta Thunberg.

12. Rising concerns over the recent frequent flooding in the country, including the incidents in the heart of Kuala Lumpur city centre, indicate that all is not lost. Dewan Rakyat, for example, on 9 March 2022 discussed the issue of flash floods that occurred in the Klang Valley under the motion for a definite matter of urgent public importance. I also have allowed the motion to be discussed in the main chamber of the Dewan Rakyat, which would usually be brought to our Special Chamber. I thought this was a pressing issue as it affected the planetary and social imbalances mentioned earlier.

13. Likewise, in the parliamentary questions session, I applaud members who have consistently brought the issue of climate action to the forefront. It shows the perceptiveness of our members and the House in discharging their representation and oversight functions. Our country's commitment to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) through active participation in the Conference of Parties (COP) must be demanded.

14. The formation of the Malaysia Climate Action Change Council (MyCAC) chaired by the Honourable Prime Minister himself to address all related matters to climate change is hopefully to bear fruitful actions. The then UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, rightly pointed out in 2014,

Climate change is not just an issue for the future, it is an urgent issue for today. Instead of asking if we can afford

to act, we should be asking what is stopping us, who is stopping us, and why? Let us join forces to push back against sceptics and entrenched interests.

Honourable ladies and gentlemen,

15. Moving on now to the final point that I would like to touch upon. Article 8 of the Commonwealth Charter on Good Governance, ‘reiterates our commitment to promote good governance through the rule of law, ensure transparency and accountability, and root out, both at national and international levels, systemic and systematic corruption.’ This article demands our commitment to ensure our governance and institutions are not only in order but also resilient to any forthcoming challenges.

16. In a wonderful work by Professor Daron Acemoglu and Professor James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, they explained that the factor for the underdevelopment of a country is failed institutions. Rotten regimes, exploitative elites and self-serving institutions with frail and decentralised states are contributing to poverty, conflict and even outright failure. In sum, it is man-made political and economic institutions that underlie economic success, or the lack of it.

17. In their latest *The Narrow Corridor*, further emphasis is put on the importance of liberty for people to be able to make free choices about their lives and have the means to carry them out without the menace of unreasonable punishment or draconian social sanctions. The Narrow Corridor, as both writers argued, is a passageway in which the power of the state and the power of society remains in balance that

leads to the more accountable and responsive states to citizens, which in turn, transforms people's lives because it removes the dominance of states and elites over them.

18. Borrowing Thomas Hobbes' 'Leviathan' term, it is where the Shackled Leviathan emerges, constituting the struggle of state and society that contributes to the strengthening of both. Outside the narrow corridor are the Despotic Leviathan and Absent Leviathan, which are explained by the power of states and the weakness of states, respectively. In my view, Parliament as both people's representative and legislative institution shall always keep this narrow corridor intact to ensure the underpinning principles of the Commonwealth Charter will be upheld.

Honourable ladies and gentlemen,

19. Finally, delivering a common future shall bring our Commonwealth fraternity closer. Shared values and principles, guided by the Commonwealth Charter, with a long history of our Westminster parliamentary democracy, shall always be treasured. Democracy, as in Article 1 of the Commonwealth Charter, 'recognises the inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, and governments, political parties, civil societies are responsible for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices and are accountable to the public in this regard.'

20. Therefore, our continuous faith in democracy and parliamentary democracy ensures we will have a strong foundation in our governance system. On this Commonwealth Day, let us continue to celebrate our diversity, strengthen our commonalities through the

shared values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter, and remain optimistic for a brighter common future.

21. On that note, I wish you every good fortune with best wishes for Commonwealth Day 2022.

Wabillahitaufiqwalhidayah,

Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Thank you.