

SPEECH AT THE LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF THE BOOK "AHMAD  
SARJI ATTAINING EMINENCE" BY LIM CHANG MOH

Petaling Jaya Hilton

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By Tun Abdul Hamid Mohamad

Chief Justice of Malaysia

This is my last speech at a book launching ceremony before I retire. Tun Ahmad Sarji has managed to catch me exactly one week before my retirement. I thank him for giving me the honour.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I came to know him Tun Ahmad Sarji from a distance when he was appointed the Chief Secretary to the Government, the number one civil servant in the country. His appointment was one month before my appointment as a Judicial Commissioner of High Court, Malaya stationed in Penang. But, I came to know him in person after he retired. When most people would have disappeared into obscurity, he seemed to be more active. He seemed to be everywhere and doing everything, but always at the right places and doing the right things.

We used to meet at conferences organized by IKIM, of which he is still Chairman. In June this year, we were both awarded the S.S.M. by the Duli Yang Maha Mulia Sri Paduka Baginda Yang di Pertuan Agong. That, I think, leads to what is happening now. There is one more thing that I must mention. Every year, around Christmas, I would anxiously wait for his announcement of the ASB and ASN dividends because whatever saving I have for my old age is there. That shows the degree of my dependence on him. So far he has not failed me and millions of Malaysians like me. Of course, at times, owing to factors beyond his or anybody's control, the dividends are less than the other years. That is understandable. Thank you Tun.

Before starting to write this speech, I asked for Tun Ahmad Sarji's C.V. Having read it, I decided that I should not even try to summarize it, because

I did not know what to omit as they were all important and it would be too long to mention all. Just consider the contrasts: from Sekolah Melayu Pasir Putih to University of Harvard, from an Assistant District Officer to the Chief Secretary of the Federal Government, from President of Lawn Bowling to Tokoh Ma'al Hijrah. He wrote on such topics ranging from Civil Service Reforms to Irama Lagu P. Ramlee and Hang Tuah – Tokoh Epik Nasional. He received more titles than he can use, so he settled for the shortest: "Tun". He received enough decorations to be divided amongst his children according to "faraid" if they were transferable, and so on. So, I gave up!

I also asked for an advanced copy of the book. I received it on the Hari Raya eve when I was almost alone in the office. The timing was perfect. I had the long holiday to peruse it.

Being a biography, it is quite natural that the book focuses on Tun Ahmad Sarji, the subject, from a kampong boy in Tapah where I served as a Magistrate in 1970, to Chief Secretary to the Government and more. However, Tun Ahmad Sarji does not exist in a vacuum. There is a bigger story around him which makes him what he is and which we cannot fail to notice. That is the story of Malaysia.

Politically, the story traversed from the then Malaya which was a British Colony, the Japanese occupation, the "Bintang Tiga" episode and the Communist insurgency, during which period, in his own words to me, he used to see corpses on the road on his way to school. Then there was the rise of Malay nationalism, in his home State under such romantic name as Dato' Panglima Bukit Gantang, who seemed to have impressed him in his early years, besides the British District Officer of Batang Padang, of course. Then came the most historic event of the country, i.e. Merdeka. On a personal level, I remember that with my savings from the Federal Minor Scholarship, I bought the first radio in my village to hear the shout of "Merdeka". He was older. Certainly, he understood it more than I did. That was followed by the formation of Malaysia and "Konfrantasi", the May 13 incident, the constitutional crisis of 1993 and the more recent events which we are more familiar with. He witnessed them all and, at times, was

somehow involved in them. Indeed he was somehow involved in all aspects of the development of the country be it economic, educational or social.

Such is the richness of the life's experience that he has lived.

Looking at Tun Ahmad Sarji's life history and reflecting on my own that spanned about the same period, minus a few years at the beginning, I can only say: "Thank you God and thank you Malaysia". I hope I am not alone in this. I am sure Tun Ahmad Sarji is with me on this. And I hope more Malaysians will learn to say "Thank you Malaysia."

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is one very interesting discovery that I made in the book i.e. the part played by the *Bulan Bahasa Kebangsaan* (National Language Month) in his and my lives. Tun Ahmad Sarji attended the elocution contest at the State Level Final at the Kolej Islam Kelang to see his *Toh Puan* spoke. I met my *Toh Puan* at the National Level Final at *Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka* one year later where we were both national champions in our respective categories. Perhaps, Tun, after our *Isyak* prayer tonight we should recite the *Surah Al-Fatihah* for Allah Yarham Tan Sri Syed Nasir Ismail who had organized the competition!

Ladies and gentlemen,

The author, Mr. Lim Chang Moh, is well qualified to write on Tun Ahmad Sarji. He went to Hutchings School and Penang Free School before going to the University of Malaya. He was a sub-editor of The Star newspaper and later joined the Malay Mail where he rose to become the Production Editor until retired. He wrote the weekly Movie Review Column for The Malay Mail for 30 years. He wrote the biography on Cartoonist LAT for the LAT Exhibition at Museum Negara and compiled a biography on Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman who was Managing Director of Malaysia Airlines. And this is more interesting: from 1993 until now he is a columnist for Rod & Line Magazine, an angling magazine. I say "interesting" because I was the first President of the Penang Angling Association and, at one time, I was also the President of the Malaysian Angling

Association and had written a few articles in the same magazine. My first article, which was published in three installments in the early issues of the magazine, carried the title: "Angling and the Law". Equally interesting, two weeks ago, my second son told me that he was following it up with his own article entitled: "Angling and Patent Law." From there we can see the development towards specialization.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. Lim is no greenhorn and he knows his job. What amazes me is the great detail that this book contains. It is certainly not just a "*Hikayat Ahmad Sarji*". Besides, the quotations reproduced at the beginning of every chapter are worth memorizing and if I have the time I would like to repeat them all. But I don't. So I won't. However, there is one line at the beginning of Chapter 4 that I must repeat:

"If you think you work harder than an average worker, you're an average worker."

That is certainly more eloquent than my own blunt motto: "*Buat Kerja*".

Ladies and gentlemen,

If I were the Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia now I would make this book a compulsory reading for newly appointed PTD officers. It will give them an overview of the history of the development of the Civil Service in Malaysia and the part they are expected to play in the administration and development of the country. Indeed members of the public too should read this book so that they know what the job in the public service is like. Hopefully, the more they know the less they complain.

I congratulate the author for writing and the publisher for publishing this book. In my judgment, this is a quality book. Even the paper is of high quality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the name of Allah, most Gracious, most Merciful, and with great pleasure I hereby officially launch the book "Ahmad Sarji Attaining Eminence" by Lim Chang Moh. May it be a great success.

Thank you.