

Malaysian Bar Lifetime Achievement Award Ceremony
14.8.2026

Acceptance Speech
By Dato Cyrus Das

1. It is a singular, and indeed overwhelming honour for me to be given this award by the Bar.
2. I wish to say it is wholly unexpected, and I was totally unaware of my nomination and of the award itself being conferred until informed by the Bar Council.
3. I accept this honour in all humility, and state that I am suitably embarrassed by all the things said this afternoon, and the generous citation read by my good friend and colleague Encik Abdul Rashid. It was sufficiently partial coming as it does from a colleague who has been involved with me in the many public interest cases that we did together.
4. Do excuse me if I do not dwell any further on this, and move to something more important.
5. Do bear with me, and permit me to express some unsolicited opinion on the challenges the Bar is likely to face in the years ahead.

6. It is important we recognise the role the Malaysian Bar plays in our civic society.

7. It is beyond Sections 42 that enjoins the Bar to uphold the cause of justice without fear or favour. In truth the Malaysian Bar enjoys in the public eye a status far beyond its statutory role.

8. It is reflected in the famous observation made by an outstanding Malaysian politician of yester years, the late Tan Sri Tan Chee Khoo when he said of the Malaysian Bar back in April 1981:

'We look to the members of the legal profession to be in the vanguard of the fight (for democracy) ... the people of the country salute the Bar Council'

9. In fact the third Prime Minister, the late Tun Hussein Onn, himself once a practising lawyer, said this:

'It is the duty of the legal profession to uphold the cause of justice without fear or favour. To effectively discharge this role, the profession must remain independent and be seen to be so. The Bar has a duty to speak up on matters of public interest affecting citizen's rights'

10. In my own experience over several decades, the record of the Bar has shown that it has never deviated from discharging this role.

11. Very often the stands and the positions the Bar has taken, and the causes it has championed has met with official criticism sometimes in the harshest of terms. This is inevitable as encroachment of fundamental rights do not emanate from the private sector but the public sector and it is the conduct of the executive authority that is often subject to challenge.

12. The Bar however does not run on the popularity of its stands but on the principle of seeking public accountability of those holding public office. It is on the principle that all power is a trust and is subject to the famous idiom '*be you ever so high, the law is above you*'.

13. In the years ahead there are bound to be unexpected and unforeseen challenges facing the Bar as politics and divisiveness in society may seem to consume the nation. The members of the Bar Council must be vigilant and guard themselves against the infiltration of the politics of divisiveness into the Bar.

14. The Bar should not allow itself to be overwhelmed by these public discourses but remain steadfast always towards two overarching principles – the rule of law and constitutional supremacy. They are inseparable.

15. I venture to suggest that there is no legal value more important in public life than the doctrine of constitutional supremacy and an adherence to the rights enshrined in the Federal Constitution.

16. It must ever be the role of the Malaysian Bar to uphold this doctrine.

17. Constitutional supremacy has as its cornerstone principle the basic structure doctrine that guarantees that the essential pillars upon which the Constitution was framed close to 70 years ago always remain intact for the safeguard of the present and future generations; that it is not subject to any radical alteration by Parliament by the exercise of its amending power that denudes fundamental rights or executive accountability as enshrined in the Constitution.

18. All constitutionalists recognise there is no other adjectival constitutional principle that is more important than the basic structure doctrine – it safeguards the essential features of the Federal Constitution and puts it beyond the reach of a passing or temporary majority in Parliament.

19. The Bar must be ever vigilant against any transformative alterations of the founding principles on which this country and its Constitution is built and of its essential character. It must be ready to take up such a challenge at every turn, and not rest until the threat has abated.

20. It is my humble proposition that there could be no greater challenge facing the Bar and the Bar Council in the years to come than the defending of constitutional rights and importantly the judicial power of the Courts and the independence of the Judges.

21. May I end with an apology. I am sorry to have inflicted upon you on this pleasant afternoon a somewhat weary discourse on constitutional principles.

22. But it is an opportunity I did not wish to miss to address you on something more important than ourselves – of the changes I see coming after several decades at the Bar, and importantly of core values that must not be allowed to change if the Bar is to continue its role of being in the forefront of maintaining constitutionalism and the rule of law in our country.

23. (Personal acknowledgments)

24. May I thank you for being present here today and honouring me, and thank again the Awards Committee and the Bar Council for bestowing me with this singular honour.

25. I wish you a very pleasant afternoon.