

Zeti Akhtar Aziz: Financial education initiatives in Malaysia

Speech by Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz, Governor of the Central Bank of Malaysia (Bank Negara Malaysia), at the Launch of Financial LATeracy in conjunction with opening of Special Exhibition on Financial Literacy, Kuala Lumpur, 28 September 2015.

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Ladies and gentlemen

Financial education has never been more important than in today's environment. Participating effectively in the financial system can improve the economic well being of individuals and businesses. Financial education is therefore key so that members of our society will benefit from the financial system and from the new technologies that are transforming our financial landscape. It will help consumers to better understand the risks involved in managing their finances and will facilitate better financial decision making. Building a generation with financial competence therefore needs to start from an early age. This has been the motivation of Bank Negara Malaysia in the development of the Pocket Money Book or *Buku Wang Saku* for schools that was first launched in 1999. We are very honoured to have progressed this project in collaboration with Datuk Lat whose illustrations have made the complex subject of fundamental issues in finance appealing to school children.

The universal appeal of Datuk Lat's distinctive caricatures which are featured in the Pocket Money Book or *Buku Wang Saku*, have attracted students, teachers and parents to use it as a tool to nurture good savings habits and to encourage responsible money management among school children. His works have over the years touched on many aspects of money management as seen from the context of ordinary Malaysians, leaving us with memorable and lasting impressions not only on prudent financial behaviour, but on Malaysian life and society. Important lessons about savings, conserving and avoiding wastage are powerfully conveyed through the remarkably creative and entertaining visuals that we have all come to know and love. True to form, Datuk Lat's creations are unparalleled in their ability to capture the hearts of Malaysians and through them, we are both educated and entertained. It is our honour to commemorate his works for such an important cause. Since 1999, 15 million copies of *Buku Wang Saku* have been circulated to more than 10,000 schools nationwide to be used in promoting good financial management habits which can make a profound difference in their future financial well-being.

Indeed, being equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools to make sound financial decisions has never been more important in a generation where our young people have more money to spend, are presented with a wider spectrum of financial offerings and are exposed to greater temptations to take on debt. Financial education is therefore a vital life skill; one that must be developed from an early age. It was with this motivation that the Bank initiated a number of efforts to enhance the financial competence of Malaysians through a nationwide savings campaign that was launched in 1996. This involved several key financial education initiatives for students and households in Malaysia, including the School Adoption Programme that was supported by the Ministry of Education and the financial industry. More recently, it has progressed to the integration of financial education into the school curriculum. This has been made possible through the successful collaboration between Bank Negara Malaysia and the Ministry of Education.

Ladies and gentlemen

The compilation of caricatures in *Financial LATeracy* is organised according to specific money management themes while the exhibition allows visitors to experience and appreciate the fine works of Datuk Lat while highlighting key money management messages. The timeless caricatures showcased in *Financial LATeracy* also embodies the true essence of a multicultural Malaysia, depicting the diversity of our people, cultures and traditions. Of significance is the

influence that his works have had in promoting social harmony and benevolent values that bring the diverse people of Malaysia together. Most Malaysians have grown up with his drawings. His works have touched on so many aspects of the lives of Malaysians, providing us with powerful insights into the social and political scenes of this country. The power of story telling by Datuk Lat transcends beyond the drawing of cartoons. He is among the artists who have been observers that are the most honest and critical of developments in our society. Through their sensitivity and expression, we are reminded of the things that we often take for granted, and sometimes highlighting how we fall short from attaining our fullest potential as a nation. Datuk Lat is one of such artists. A number of Datuk Lat's artworks adorn Bank Negara Malaysia's premises since the 1980s, reflecting the challenges we face as a central bank in ensuring a sound and robust financial system, in a light-hearted manner. This publication of the *Financial LATeracybook* aims to preserve these works for the benefit of our future generation. *Financial LATeracy* is also a way for the Bank to express its heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to Datuk Lat for his continuing support of our financial education initiatives. Today, *Financial LATeracy* pays a tribute to Datuk Lat's enduring legacy in this important endeavour.

Ladies and gentlemen

The *Financial LATeracy* exhibition is taking place during a time when more than 200 global policy makers and practitioners in the area of financial education from all parts of the world are gathering here in Sasana Kijang to participate in the meetings of the International Network on Financial Education and in the High Level Global Symposium, a network under the OECD, to explore new paths and ideas in advancing financial literacy. I am certain that the works of Datuk Lat will continue to inspire not only Malaysians but many others from foreign shores in this important cause through his unique brand of humour and poignant reflections of our society.