

BORIS JOHNSON

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Transcript of Boris Johnson's speech

“GREAT CITIES – THE FUTURE”

Your Royal Highness, Your Royal Highnesses I should say, Prime Minister, Datuk Charon my old friend, Ladies and Gentlemen, very, very distinguished guests, it is a huge honour that you've done me in inviting me to come here tonight and on behalf of all the politicians and city planners of London I have come to offer a surrender to the city fathers of Kuala Lumpur. We are figuratively waving the white flag folks because as some of you may know, we've seen in London recently the creation of some truly colossal buildings.

The Shard has gone up, erupting through the surface of the Earth like some gigantic cocktail stick. Coming up through the surface of a super colossal pickled onion. A building of course constructed with the help of Islamic finance and so tall that you can allegedly see France from the top of it.

But this morning as I went for my morning run, at about the speed of an 85 year old through Kuala Lumpur and I came beneath the shadow of the Petronas Towers. My neck cricked back and back and back and I looked up and these things a fully hundred meters taller than The Shard. My sense of inadequacy had been completed when I talked to the Datuk Bandar of Kuala Lumpur and he showed me his plan for a building of 682 meters that I think you are going to put up and that is two and a half times The Shard folks. And as soon as I saw that I knew that the game was up and we couldn't hack it in London. We can't go up 682 meters. Absolutely no way we can do that. Not even my Deputy Mayor Chief of Staffs Eddy Lister who loves tall buildings will try and get that one past.

So Prime Minister Najib you will win the race for the skies. We surrender. We surrender. But you should not underestimate, you should not underestimate, the growth that is taking place in our city. Here in Malaysia you have an economy expanding at I think 6.1% a year, the fastest growing economy in ASEAN. But we now, in spite of the downturn, we have an economy growing in the UK faster than any other economy in Europe. Thank you for that ripple of applause.

We have in London the most productive and dynamic region in the entire EU beating North West Ballough, the whole lot of them, and of course rather than thinking competitively, you know, who has got the biggest skyscraper I see so many ways inside

of being here, so many ways in which each city can harness the ambition and drive of the other to mutual benefit.

We in London need hundreds of thousands of new homes and we need to develop brownfield sites across the city.

And now thanks to Malaysia. Thanks to SP Setia and Sime Darby and EPF and the great work done by the Prime Minister and indeed Tan Sri Liew who is here and many others after forty years of decay we are turning that mouldering old hulk of a power station at Battersea, that was fit for nothing but the final shootout in the most depressing British gangster films you ever seen. Or the cover of a Pink Floyd album, into a powerhouse of growth with hotels, restaurants, tens of thousands of homes in that whole Vauxhall Battersea Nine Elms area that would not have existed if we had not had investment from Malaysia.

And on this trip we have discussed plenty more ideas. Thank you. It is a most wonderful thing. And I want to pay tribute to everybody in the government of Malaysia who has helped and we have discussed plenty more ideas for projects that could help us create homes, even more homes for the people in our city because we are dealing in London with the consequences of success.

We are not only the most visited city in the world. We are the number one city for tourists 16.9 million people last year pushing New York, pushing Paris off the top spot.

We also have a rapidly growing population. Since I have been mayor of London people both men and women are living roughly 18 months longer than when I got elected six years ago. You live longer under the Conservatives folks in London!

And last year we had more live births in our city. 136,000 or something that in any year since England won the World Cup in 1966, such was the general mood for reproduction of our city after the Olympics. So you've got people living longer, you've got more live births and we are also seeing London acting as a magnet for talent for people from around the world.

I am now mayor of the sixth biggest Italian city in the world, the twelfth biggest Russian city, I think the thirteenth biggest Australian city and I am mayor of the fourth biggest French city on Earth. Isn't that fantastic. Because in the last few years about 400,000 French *resistance* have fled the Hollande tyranny. We have now got more French people living in London than they have in Bordeaux, in Nantes, more than they have in Strasbourg we've got in London now and if it goes on like this we have to worry about a German invasion, quite frankly!

Our population is set to continue to grow. 9 million by 2020, perhaps 10 million by 2030, 11 million by the middle of the century and there are all sorts of reasons why the city is successful.

Someone asked me this afternoon at the Khazanah Conference on Cities. He said why is London so successful and he looked at me with a beady eye as he asked, "Is this actually really anything to do with you?" and I'm going to take credit obviously because if it wasn't successful, people would blame me.

I think it is a fantastic place to live at the moment. A wonderful place to live and I am delighted by the previous speaker who said that so many people in this room might be council tax payers and I just want to remind you that we have cut your taxes by 24% since I was elected!

And we have governed so effectively I would say. Crime is down very substantially. The murder rate has been more or less been cut in half. 50 percent down. Bus crime is down 40% or 45%. Obviously that's not crime committed by buses which is very rare indeed now in London but crime committed on buses!

We have the safest tube system anywhere in Europe and I think people quite possibly recognise some of the other improvements that we have seen.

We are making colossal investments, as indeed you are here in Kuala Lumpur, we are making colossal investments in transport infrastructure. Crossrail the biggest engineering project anywhere in Europe, if not the world. Putting air-conditioning on the tube. It may sound very basic to you but believe me we have got a 150 year old system and it has been extremely difficult to make air-conditioning work. We've cracked it even in the deep tube lines. We are extending the tube for first time in 25 years and we are doing all sorts of things to improve the quality of life for people in our city. The quality of life for everyone in our city.

And that is I think in the end what is going to distinguish the successful cities of the future. What's it like for everyone? The people in the lowest income group. What's it like to live there? What's it like to smell the air? Do you get the chance to see your kids in the evening?

And so we have been working on these quality of life issues and we are encouraging all sorts of environmentally friendly ways of getting around. Walking, cycling. We have got a huge strategy to clean up the air.

A wonderful new, clean, green bus, the cleanest in Europe with The Hop On Hop Off Fall Over open platform that was so wrongly taken away by the health and safety fanatics. That is now back on the streets as the video earlier on showed.

We are encouraging low carbon vehicles of all kinds. Planting tens of thousands of trees. We have, as I say, not just a Communist style cycle hire scheme. We are putting in many, many cycle lanes not all of which are popular with motorists. And of course we need to go further

In the next few years as London grows we are going to have to ensure that people are able to live near their place of work and we are going to have to put in the transport links that would enable those new homes to be built. So we are going ahead with Cross Rail 2 the gigantic new cross rail going from the Southwest to the Northeast. We are extending the Bakerloo line. We are building three bridges east of Tower Bridge. And a new tunnel as well.

And of course we need to think about the lives of our people. What do they need in addition to low crime and better transport and hundreds of thousands more what else do they need? We need to make sure they have the skills, that they have the education. We need to make sure they have the confidence that goes with being in a place of work. Particularly young people. We still have 25% of 18-24 year olds who are not in education, employment or trade. The rates are low, something we haven't seen in many years.

But we still have a problem and that is why we need jobs, we need jobs for those people to do. It's not just a question of creating communities and neighbourhoods. It's about getting those people into jobs.

And that's why I am here today.

We are ceaselessly looking for markets for new British goods and I have to say in the last 48 hours it has become clear to me that there are absolutely amazing opportunities for our firms here in Malaysia

We have just seen Nottingham University, incredible export effort. Yesterday I opened a school. Epsom College has got a new outlet, a new campus 45 minutes away from where we are now and it was very moving to open a British school here in Malaysia. You can see British firms doing well in insurance, in supermarkets, in aerospace, in pharmaceuticals, you name it.

As Prime Minister Najib said yesterday and I think I am quoting you correctly Prime Minister, you said this is an unparalleled moment for trade and cooperation between the two countries or something like that, I may have got that down slightly wrong, but that is the gist of what you said. I don't think the Prime Minister is going to deny it.

And I believe it to be true by the way.

After a long period what I think you once said benign neglect we are going through a fantastic time now between Britain and Malaysia and if we are to exploit that moment to the full and I think we need to get some things right and it's vital we stay open to each other and indeed that we increase our mutual openness and to explain what I mean by openness I think we should never forget the lesson of rubber. In the substance.

And how the trees, how the trees that produce rubber were originally discovered in Brazil as you would recall. And they were runty and sickly and prone to disease and then a Brit took some of those seeds from Brazil, apparently without asking permission (the Brazilians are still raw about it I'm told) and then he brought them to Kew Gardens where they germinated in a hothouse and then from Kew, 22 were taken to the Botanical Gardens in Singapore and coddled and nurtured until they were pretty robust. And then a botanist called H.N. Ridley or "Mad Ridley" as he was known took those seedlings and he showed them to the planters of Malaysia and said that was a much more promising crop than the coffee they were trying to grow, I think I'm getting this roughly right., and that was the beginning of Malaysia's rise to global rubber supremacy wasn't it? Now the number one maker of washing up gloves and many other useful domestic items, as you know.

And of course this is the point. It wasn't just the seed that crossed the frontiers was it? Between Brazil and Britain and Singapore and Malaysia. It was the idea. Cutting the bark in a herringbone fashion to let the latex out without killing the tree. Am I not right?

And that idea, Ridley's I think it was, was transplanted or transported in the cranium of a human being and the perfect place for the germination of that idea wasn't Brazil because of the phyto sanitary problems that I have just mentioned. It wasn't London because it was too cold obviously. It wasn't even in Singapore because Singapore wasn't big enough for what they needed to do. No not at all.

So the perfect place, the perfect place was Malaysia and in the 21st century we need to recognise that ideas including great business ideas must be able to cross frontiers and the more cross fertilization and cross pollination and cross propagation, there's probably some other word that means the same thing that I could add at this point, but I think you're getting the message.

The more we have of that the better and I think that we can do even better than we are doing now though things have massively improved. And I think we on our side, on the British side could do some simple things. I think it is totally crazy that our visa regime seems to involve some our business people in Malaysia having to send their passports to the Philippines for a fortnight's holiday before they are able to get a visa to go to London.

We need to sort out our aviation, our air links with Malaysia so that there more direct flights between London and Kuala Lumpur I don't know if you agree with that, I certainly do. I was delighted to hear Tony Fernandes announce that he is going to be putting on more flights to Gatwick next year. Well done Tony!

I'm a great fan of Air Asia, by the way, having experienced, I think it was yesterday, their excellent service and chicken sandwiches which I want you to know that I paid for myself because I'm mindful of your council tax people of Kuala Lumpur!

And I was very pleased to hear from High Commissioner Vicky that BA is going to be running direct flights from next year as well though frankly the only long term answer is to give our country, I mean the UK, the Southeast of England the kind of 24 hour 4 runway hub airport east in the city preferably in the estuary that is being built in the whole of South East Asia. I am very envious of what is happening in this part of the world.

As to what could be perhaps done on the Malaysian side I respectfully suggest that more could be done to allow service companies to be established directly in this city and in this country so that for instance lawyers and accountants and consultants and banks and chartered surveyors and architects and what have you could establish themselves here directly without needing a local partner and the reason, I say, that is that is exactly what we have done in London have done for many years so that you have American law firms and German banks and French consultants and what have you and the result is not that they squeeze out local talent. They stimulate it and they employ tens of thousands if not actually hundreds of thousands of local people.

In London at any rate this presence of international services companies creates that ferment, that hub of competitive industries that makes up our modern city and I humbly suggest that you might want to consider it.

And I think if you work at it, if you work at the kinds of things that we are working on there is absolutely no limit to the flow of trade and ideas and investment between our two countries.

And I am absolutely thrilled that there will be soon be a Malaysia Square in Battersea, absolutely thrilled to see an extraordinary new space in our city modeled on the Mulu Caves of Sarawak. I don't know what goes on in the Mulu Caves of Sarawak but it will be pretty intense (the Battersea version anyway) and people will have a wonderful icon, an absolutely wonderful place with or without orangutans and the other attractions that there may be.

And it is fantastic to see Malaysian investment going into everything from cement companies to motor manufacturing - Lotus cars and so on - and obviously it is true that London has many more and many more better Malaysian restaurants than any other European city, I don't think you don't deny that.

I am also proud symmetrically British companies are exporting ever growing numbers of Jaguars and Land Rovers and a phenomenal number of second hand BMWs and Mercs by the way in the great British tradition of Arthur Daily. And every manner, every type of luxury goods (including I) was absolutely thrilled to see Aquascutum waterproof raincoats. And of course Aquascutum waterproof raincoats have the benefit of have the benefit of insulation provided by what? Have you been following this speech? What's the, what's the key thing that stops them getting wet when they put on an Aquascutum waterproof raincoat?

Rubber! Rubber from Malaysia grown from seeds originally from Brazil, nicked by Britain, sent back to Britain as rubber and then reexported to Malaysia as a fashion item!

And it is fantastic to see shops in Kuala Lumpur that actually stock, apparently 42 of them stock, biscuits made in London, all the way from the London borough of Brent where every chocolate Hobnob in the world is made.

What has really taken me by surprise and moved me in the last couple of days has been the friendliness and the warmth that has been shown to my team, all the business people I brought with me and the London delegation

Thank you very, very much indeed.

I see a real enthusiasm that I never expected for London and for the London brand and indeed I was browsing in a local supermarket when I came across this packet of mouth watering green cupcakes decorated with a dainty scene of English afternoon tea. Why have they got a scene of English afternoon tea on it? Can you see it? Can you read what the brand is? This is a London cupcake. And they have other varieties which have double decker buses and taxis. And all sorts.

This is what they say on the packet. It is a green tea flavoured London cupcake of the kind that has never been seen or indeed tasted in London. I hope, I hope, I hope my ambition is that trade between us will so intensify that soon the people of London too will be able to enjoy these cupcakes as much as the people of Kuala Lumpur and that there will be as many Malaysian made London cupcakes in London as there are London made Hobnobs in Malaysia.

And Your Royal Highness, Prime Minister I would like you, I would like you both to accept - I have taken the precaution of getting two packets - I would like you both to accept these cupcakes as a parting present from the British delegation and a symbol of what, I hope, will be the intensifying partnership between our two countries. I think you both have already got my book so this is for you.

Thank you very, very much everybody for listening. Here's to London and Kuala Lumpur and Here's to Britain and Malaysia!

Terima Kasih! Thank you very much!