

MALAYSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

More emphasis on bilateral relations

Bus 7. 16 Jul 1982

QUESTION: *Datuk, do you think we could move on to foreign policy before we come to domestic politics. First general question, Datuk, are you satisfied after one year at the helm that Malaysia is on the right path in her foreign policy. Does this scheme that you introduced of concentric circles of interests still obtain. You know, first Asean, then Islamic nations, and so on. What is your general feeling about the direction of our foreign policy?*

ANSWER: I think by and large the foreign policy that we have followed is good for us because it is a much more positive policy, apart from arranging a system of priorities for Malaysia. We are now putting greater emphasis on bilateral relations. Hence, our definite effort to establish contact with Fiji for example, among South Pacific countries. We find that bilateral relations, enables us to know people more intimately; know what are their problems and how we can work with them. Multi-lateral relations had not been yielding that kind of intimacy and understanding. So I think, by and large, we have formulated a foreign policy that is bringing some results.

Q: *Won't it be right to say that foreign policy under your leadership has changed in the sense*

that there's greater emphasis to real relationship, you know to trade, to investment, to the real things in relations rather than conceptualised things about interests, spheres of influence and affinity with blocs or movement and so on?

A: We have not forgotten the need to subscribe to certain ideals. Like the concept of neutrality and all that. And at the same time we find that we have to get down to the nitty-gritty as well. This has yielded a little bit more positive results.

Q: *What about our relationship with Britain at this juncture.*

A: It's prim and proper as among sovereign nations.

Q: *But there are complaints from some British officials that your department does not even consider British goods even though they are good and competitive?*

A: This is not true because I look at these tenders myself. We still buy a long list of British goods whose prices are competitive and quality good.

Q: *Some people say that you tend to group say countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand in the same category as Britain, considering them part of the empire. Is it true?*

A: No, I think it is not

true. Our relationship with other countries is based on our experience with them. It is not based on our experience with Britain.

Q: *Datuk, how much change are you getting out of the US relationship. I think probably our relations with the US are the worst amongst those with so-called Western countries, particularly over tin, the release of GSA stockpile, and the unwillingness to consider the impact of such releases on our own economy and in turn on perhaps even the national security of our country. The sector involved may be a predominantly Chinese sector and this may give rise to problems. Have we tried to communicate effectively with the US; tell them, show them the consequences of their actions which are actually contrary to their expressed interest in us.*

A: I think individual Americans are very sympathetic. I have met a number of them and some of them claimed that they have direct access to the powers that be in Washington, but I have yet to see any results and I get this feeling that there is a great deal of insensitivity, or even a great deal of ignorance, about Malaysia in Washington. I think for some

officials maybe Malaysia doesn't exist at all. That

is the feeling that I got. I may be wrong.

Q: *You have said that Malaysia will not provide weapons to any Kampuchean faction but statements have also been made often on behalf of Malaysia urging that non-communist faction should be given the big stick. Isn't there a contradiction here? Can you please tell us here what is really our policy?*

A: We are not going to give them arms and we are not going to stand in the way of other people who want to give arms. That is their business.

Q: *Turning to our relationship with the Philippines at the moment, Datuk, they have been pressing for an Asean Summit which Malaysia is not keen on. They have not finally dropped their claim to Sabah which*

they said they would do. Also, occasionally Philippines continues to make allegations that Malaysia trains Moros. So there is a general situation of discord with the Philippines in a generalised way though it does not manifest itself in specific terms.

A: I think there is no discord but it is also true that there are differences on certain matters, certainly on the matter of summit. We do not see a great and urgent need for it because we would like a summit to achieve something. But a summit that is just a meeting or becomes a social gathering will not, I think, achieve very much.

Q: *Datuk, foreign reports put us as being responsible for placing our armed forces on a so-called disputed island of Indonesia. Will you as a Prime Minister and Minister of Defence tell us what is the real situation.*

A: I think there are some differences of opinions with regard to this particular island. That is being resolved in the spirit of Asean brotherliness.

Q: *How long have we had these differences?*

A: Well, as you know we published our (maritime) boundaries some time ago. We invited all our neighbours to make whatever comments they wished, and to negotiate the boundary if they disputed our claim.

Q: *Is there a presence of armed personnel on the island? Admiral Sudomo, I think, said there was in a report carried yesterday.*

A: There's none, but it may be possible that a patrol boat might have landed some people there just for a while in order to look around, after which they got back on their boat.