

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD  
( PRIME MINISTER )

EVENT: A DINNER ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT TO SINGAPORE

VENUE: SINGAPORE

DATE: 17 DEC 1981

TIME:

I wish to thank my good colleague, His Excellency Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, for the warm hospitality and friendly reception accorded to me, my wife and members of my delegation on the occasion of my first visit to Singapore as Prime Minister of Malaysia.

2. I am happy to be in this busy and bustling city again. Every time I am here I am amazed at the rapid pace of development and transformation taking place. Like other visitors, I am particularly impressed by the cleanliness and the abundance of greenery which has softened the hardness of the concrete skyscrapers. I am confident, under the able leadership of Prime Minister Lee, Singapore will continue to grow and prosper in the coming years.

3. Malaysia and Singapore have many things in common due to a large extent to our geographical proximity and historical experience. We also share a convergence of priorities and values, particularly our preoccupation with uplifting the socio-economic well-being of our peoples, our concern to see that democratic ideals and principles are preserved and our vigilance in the eradication of subversive threats aimed at undermining our security and resilience. While I acknowledge that in the broad sense our objectives converge, nevertheless because of the peculiarities of our respective settings, emphasis and style differ somewhat. Malaysian society, for example, is heterogeneous as compared to Singapore's which is almost homogeneous. Our population is largely rural whilst Singapore's is almost entirely urban. Because of these and other peculiarities, the government machinery, its administrative and implementational style and scope must also differ. An appreciation of these differences is as important as the acknowledgement of the common historical and geo-political backgrounds in the fostering of understanding between our two countries.

4. I am happy to note that Malaysia-Singapore relations have improved tremendously during the last few years. This is a gratifying development. It would, therefore, be to our mutual advantage to endeavour to further develop and continue the rapport and understanding that have been nurtured between our two countries. It is partly with this

in view that my predecessor, Tun Hussein Onn, had agreed to the setting up of the Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) of the two Governments. May I reiterate my firm support and confidence in the IGC in fulfilling its tasks and thus further enhancing our bilateral relations.

5. I have had a long association with this country, even before it became independent. As a student in Singapore some 30 years ago I made a lot of friends among Singaporeans who are now very prominent citizens of this Republic. I can say that this experience is not unique to myself alone. There are many Malaysians who have shared similar experiences and have long-standing friends in Singapore, among them are some members of my delegation. So I cannot see any reason why what we do in Malaysia need earn the mistrust and suspicion of Singapore, and vice versa. We can always call up each other, and frankly discuss our mutual problems when they arise. Unfortunately, this connection of the old days in schools or universities is no longer possible among the new generations of Malaysians and Singaporeans. While it prevails, however, we should do our utmost to strengthen the foundation of good relations for the benefit of future generations of our two countries.

6. I rejoice over the rapid progress and prosperity of Singapore because it also means that Malaysia will continue to have a happy and stable neighbour. An unhappy Singapore can be destabilising to Malaysia, likewise discontent in Malaysia can affect Singapore. Singapore leaders have spared no effort in developing the Republic into a country with a united citizenry and similarly, we in Malaysia, have been moulding the country into a united and disciplined nation. Singapore's success story in the economic and social fields cannot but be a model for Malaysians rather than an object of envy. What we do within our own country is, therefore, contributory and complementary towards each other's progress. For example, I cannot see why Singapore has to bolster its defences except to complement the defence capability and greater resilience of this region against any external threat to the security of this area. And of course the security of the region is the security of Malaysia. In fact, such is the link between our national defences that we have agreed and cooperated within the Five Power Defence Arrangement. Neither have we even once ceased to cooperate in matters relating to the threat of subversion against our society. The security apparatus of our two nations continue to cooperate closely against any subversive and criminal elements that could affect our stability even when political leaders are openly squabbling. All these go to prove that we share common objectives and we are likeminded in endeavouring to continue with our close bilateral cooperation and to resolve issues before they become problems. This common interest which links our nations' respective destiny, I believe, should not only be preserved but further enhanced.

7. May I draw attention to one of the hazards of modern

international relations. We live in a world of instant communication which has spawned instant events, instant interviews and instant comments. There is not much time to think before commenting on events of grave international significance during a long distance instant interview telecast. Consequently, comments are made unthinkingly almost literally from the gut. The result is disaster for the relationship between nations. We hope that the good relations we are trying to build up between our two countries will not have this latest spanner thrown into the works.

8. Under the present Malaysian leadership, ASEAN will continue to feature prominently in Malaysia's foreign policy considerations. Since its inception in 1967 ASEAN has gained tremendous momentum and respect so much so it is recognised today as a regional entity and force in all matters pertaining to the region and indeed the world. Despite early scepticisms, ASEAN has proven to the world to be a viable and cohesive grouping. This credibility has to be sustained and we, who are its members, must collectively work to preserve this image, to preserve the recognition and respect that ASEAN has achieved.

9. Let us always bear in mind that ASEAN is unique in that it is not only a grouping of five sovereign nations each with a mind of its own but there exists a warmth of feeling for each other which transcends the basic contractual obligations that we have enshrined in the Bangkok Declaration of 1967. Nowhere else have we seen a group of nations deliberating on the future of each other's well-being with so much sincerity and goodwill. ASEAN's commitment transcends limited and localised national outlooks, and so renders possible a more daring programme for the future based on a peaceful and stable Southeast Asia. Clearly, in certain matters regional interest supercedes those of the narrower national objectives. The ASEAN spirit that we have nurtured enables the conference table and peaceful negotiation to replace threats and armed conflicts in the settlement of disputes. Hence, we deplore the foreign armed intervention in Kampuchea as contrary to our belief in the conduct of inter-state relations and a violation of our common programme for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality. We are together in advocating these principles and more, in strengthening our common stability and national resilience.

10. Singapore and Malaysia are not new in resisting internal communist subversion. The events in the Indochina states has brought communism closer to our door step. But, so long as the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states is recognised, and for so long as the sanctity of sovereign states is respected, then we are willing to co-exist. We do not believe in double standards in the conduct of international relations. We cannot accept commitment to pursue friendly relations on the one plane, and on another indulge in acts of subversion and terrorism

to weaken our national resilience. Relations, if it is to be durable, must be based on the mutually accepted norms of equality and respect. There cannot be any compromise on this.

11. Southeast Asia with its abundant wealth and strategic location has been a constant target of big-power rivalry. We have gone through many trials and tribulations during the colonial era. We have experienced the bitterness of military conquest during the Japanese occupation. In other words, we have known confrontations, external threats and catastrophic wars and seen our efforts at nation building hampered by outside interference. For us to opt for super-power collusion would be submitting ourselves to be pawns in their conflicts and rivalries. It is because of the danger of this bleak prospect that ASEAN had advocated the concept of ZOPFAN which will ensure the survival of the small nations of Southeast Asia.

12. The development of Singapore and of Malaysia is a task not only of the leaders but the peoples of our two countries. Similarly the development of good relationship between our two countries is also a task for the leaders as well as of the people. I will try, for my part, to ensure good people to people relations and I am sure this will be reciprocated.

13. Finally, may I ask you to join me in a toast to His Excellency the President of Singapore, to His Excellency Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, to the progress, prosperity and well-being of Singapore and its people and last, but not least, to the continued friendship between Singapore and Malaysia.