

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

EVENT: THE 44TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF FEI SAN MALAYSIA

VENUE: THE DEWAN NIRWANA, HOTEL HILTON,

DATE: 10 MAR 1982

TIME:

Datuk Lim Chong,
President Fei San Malaysia;
The Honourable Dato' Lee San Choon,
The President of MCA and Advisor of Fei San;
Leaders of Guilds and Associations;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to thank Fei San Malaysia for inviting my wife and I to this dinner. This is the second time I have been given the opportunity to attend the anniversary dinner of this association. I also wish to thank you for giving me the honour and opportunity to address this gathering tonight.

2. I am very honoured to be invited to your function this evening and to be amongst important and distinguished leaders of well over two hundred guilds and associations. Guilds and associations have very important roles to play. They have made their useful contributions in the past twenty five years since we achieve independence and I am sure that with dedicated and responsible leadership you will continue to render positive contributions to the community, society at large and the nation.

3. We are presently on a threshold of a new era in our development. Older Malaysians, including those present here proper and strong footing and foundation so as to ensure a viable future for all.

4. We agreed then on certain specific and basic premises for building this country and this nation. We incorporated these basic ingredients in the Constitution and later enshrined them in the Rukunegara and the New Economic Policy. Our main concern is unity and we have agreed on the instruments for unity through a national language and culture whereby the indigenous norms and values will form the basis of our Malaysian and national way of life. Unlike many other countries where alien cultural influences have to be discarded, we in Malaysia are fortunate that within the limits of our Constitution and policies, our people are free to learn and practice their beliefs and cultures.

5. Malaysians who have travelled widely abroad will come

to appreciate the value of being the people of this country. And I believe that it is because we place a high value on the sensitivities of our people and our national ideals that we have managed to sustain our development, stability and prosperity which in the final analysis are for the benefit of all.

6. As a multiracial society we have to expect certain grievances from certain quarters with regard to the implementation of our policies. For that matter there is no country where everything is all fine and no one has any our country some noises here and there over some issues are to be expected. But there is this tendency of some people who like to capitalise on an issue to ignite "mob psychology" for mobilising the people, or segment of people, against the Government. I hope, responsible citizens of this country will not take the good and beautiful things that we have for granted and dance to the tune of mischief-makers who are always out to disrupt the potentials of a viable future for all.

7. The 3R is a fine example of how a simple issue on the implementation of an agreed Government policy has been distorted by some people who are aimed at arousing racial sentiments and misunderstandings among the people. It was unfortunate that the so-called champions of the Chinese cause have managed to misinterpret and misrepresent the issue to such a proportion that even the Government supporters are charged with emotion. I say that this is unfortunate not because I would like to see that Malaysian Chinese should be passive but because I feel that before anyone makes an issue out of something there must be a clear understanding of what it is all about. We must realise that in many instances we are faced with the danger of racial conflict that can obstruct our national development.

8. I would like to stress here very categorically that the Government has no intention whatsoever of changing the character of Chinese Primary schools. The provisions in the Constitution that safeguard the rights of using the mother-tongue of the various communities in this country will be respected. There has been many comments in the local press over the years regarding Section 21(2) of the Education Act, 1961. This is only an enabling clause whereby the Minister of Education is empowered to convert National Type Chinese or Tamil primary schools to national primary schools when a request has been made. I have stated in the past that although this power is vested with the Government it has never been the intention of the Government to use this power to convert National Type Primary schools into national primary schools if the people do not wish it so. In fact, in 25 years there has been only one such occasion whereby this enabling clause was used to change a national type primary school into a national primary school. This was done on a specific request of the parents and community leaders concerned. The Government on its own will

not abuse this clause. This is my pledge on behalf of the Government. Therefore, I hope that with this statement of mine there will no longer be any doubts in the minds of the Chinese as well as Indian communities that this clause will be used at the whims and fancies of the Government. I hope there will be no more misinterpretation, intentionally or unintentionally, to breed anxiety and confusion on a matter which is not a controversial issue at all.

Ladies and gentlemen.

9. One of the things that the new Government did was to lift the ban on my book "The Malay Dilemma". This is necessary because it is important that the people in this country know what was written in the book rather than hear about it from people whose intentions may not be very healthy. The book will be translated into Chinese, Tamil and Bahasa Malaysia so as to enable everyone to read it if they wish. I am not trying to advertise my book nor am I seeking monetary gains. But I would like to explain that the book was written in 1969-70 and the views reflect the situation prevailing at that time. Today much of the things I describe no longer hold true. After 10 years of the New Economic Policy a lot of the wrongs have been rectified. The harsh words used in the book may no longer be justified. Indeed the harsh words used in 1969 and 1970 by everyone would seem out of place now.

10. I am not making an apology for what I had written then, as I expect no apology for the things other people said about me and about racial issues in those days. But it is important to know how close we came to disaster and how, by the grace of God, we avoided it. We must not forget 1969 because it was a lesson to us of the dangers of racial inequality and race politics.

11. As I have often stressed we are on the threshold of an era of great achievements in the various fields. We are looking towards those countries which are scientifically and technologically advanced. I have stressed the need to emulate certain aspects of work ethics of the Japanese and the Koreans and we are sending our people for training in the Republic of Korea and Japan. Our people will have to acquire new languages for this purpose and it is my sincere hope that all Malaysians will look at the new approach to learning positively so that we can look forward to reaping the fruits of progress and development instead of being used by those who would like to cause mischief and retard our progress and disrupt the unity and stability that we have.

12. We are part of a bigger international community and our development will be part of the total development. We will have to pick what is good from the experience of others and build a future that all Malaysians will be proud of and benefit from.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

13. The Chinese guilds have played a very important part in the social and economic life of Malaysia. Now that we have reached a stage for an economic take-off it is imperative that you organise yourself to play a greater role. The racial exclusiveness of the guilds should be minimised slowly so that everyone in the same field of economic activity would be able to participate. This will not only help strengthen the economy but it will improve the racial harmony in this country. With greater inter-racial harmony the march to prosperity would be enhanced. I am not forcing this view on you but I do hope you will give it your earnest consideration.

14. Malaysia is a fairly big country. There is opportunity for everyone. You may not get everything that you want but you can get something equally good. Recently a foreigner wrote a novel about Malaysia in which, Meng, a Chinese boy, could not get a place in the Faculty of Medicine in the university. He was offered a place in the science faculty. According to the book Meng became very angry and decided on a life of crime. This is a gross misrepresentation of the Chinese. Surely a slight set-back like that would not make a Chinese a criminal. Chinese are a pragmatic people. They have survived and prospered in worse conditions. To say that they would become criminals easily is to insult the Chinese and their culture.

15. In Malaysia you are more likely to get what you want no reason for the Chinese in Malaysia to be bitter. Indeed with the rapid industrialization you cannot help but prosper along with everybody else. With everyone doing well, Malaysia would prosper and be a better place to live in.

16. The present Government is determined to rule this country justly and fairly. Everything that is guaranteed in the Constitution will be strictly adhered to. In addition the gentleman's agreement that was formulated by the founding fathers of the country will be honoured. The Constitution and the original understanding between the leaders of the different races in Malaysia will ensure a stable and harmonious state.

17. It now remains for the people to give their support to the policy this Government has adopted. The guilds can play a big role here. They are very influential and they can reach the people on the ground easily. They should therefore help explain the attitude of the Government to their members and the general public, particularly the Chinese. They should understand the spirit of collaboration that motivated the different races in the struggle for independence. They should not react emotionally without first approaching the Government or at least a component party of the Barisan Nasional should there be any issue which involves them or the Chinese community. They should

do all these not just because they themselves can gain through living in a country that is well governed, but because they are Malaysians and as Malaysians they must be proud of the stability, prosperity and greatness of their own country.

18. Finally, let me once again thank you all for inviting me and my wife to this dinner. We both wish you all and your guilds every success.
Thank you.