

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

EVENT: THE STATE FEAST

VENUE: NUKUALOFA, TONGA

DATE: 07 JUN 1982

TIME:

Your Royal Highnesses Prince Tu'ipelehake and
Princess Melenaite Tupoumoheafa,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

May I thank you very much for your kind and generous words of welcome. It is truly an honour and privilege to have the opportunity to visit this enchanting Kingdom of Tonga. My wife and I and members of my delegation are overwhelmed by the warmth and friendship shown to us in the short time that we are here.

2. My visit here today is to renew the friendly ties between our two countries and to bring to the Government and People of Tonga the warmest greetings from the Government and people of Malaysia. I hope to get to know you better at first hand myself and to learn of your aspirations, problems and interests. As an island nation, no doubt you possess unique interests and special needs. I look forward to gaining a deeper understanding and learning more about them in our talks tomorrow.

3. Tonga and Malaysia are part of the wider Asia Pacific region. But because of poor communications, our two nations, have had only limited contacts. Occasionally we had the honour of receiving your leaders in our country. However, we do have a number of things in common. We share many similar hopes and ideals, and as small developing countries it is our cherished vision and goal to advance the socio-economic well-being of our people and to strive to promote peace and stability conducive for such efforts.

4. I am sure that there exists many possible areas of cooperation between Tonga and Malaysia and efforts must be made to explore them. In our interdependent world we have to help and stand by each other. Malaysia is committed to the promotion of economic and technical cooperation among developing countries. Each of us while at varying degree of economic development, do hold valuable assets whether in terms of resources, experience or know-how that could be shared around. For us, we are happy to participate in meaningful and practical programmes of economic and technical cooperation with others. May I say that my

government is ready to extend technical assistance in those fields which we have the experience and expertise and within

our resources to your country in areas appropriate to

Tonga's requirement. This is only a modest beginning; but Malaysians would certainly be enriched by a more active interaction with the people of Tonga and we welcome you to our shores.

5. In the current disquieting international environment where there is increased tension and the ready resort to use of force in the settlement of disputes, it is heartening that the South Pacific region remains relatively tranquil and crisis-free. Your national well being and political stability have indeed mirrored the pragmatism and wisdom of Tongan leaders and the resilience of your people.

6. Like Tonga, Malaysia wholeheartedly subscribes to regional cooperation. We realize that we have to face an increasing number of issues and challenges; and this we can do better as a region than as a lone nation. Through regional cooperation we can pool our resources and be in a better position to bargain at the conference table or to promote growth internally. In my part of the world, our approach to regionalism finds expression in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which was established some 15 years ago. ASEAN has grown over the years, infusing regional confidence and impetus towards economic and social cooperation amongst its members. ASEAN has also evolved as a cohesive political factor in Southeast Asia today, speaking with one voice on questions affecting the region's peace and stability.

7. Regionalism is also rapidly gaining momentum in the South Pacific. The role played by Tonga in this regard is most laudable. I am happy to note that the South Pacific Forum and the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation (SPEC) have contacts with ASEAN, thus enhancing on a regional basis the links that our two countries have.

Your Highness,

8. Today many traditional ways and customs of our forefathers seem to dissipate readily and be discarded. In the South Pacific region, you are blessed with diversity and an abundance of firm traditions. Here I am struck by the healthy habit which Tongans have retained, of consultation and consensus. In this way you have succeeded in dealing with issues, big or small, with true understanding and dialogue.

Your Highness,

9. I am deeply moved by the honour accorded to me, my wife and members of my delegation by your special welcome. It is

inevitable that the friendship between Tonga and Malaysia remain secure within the Commonwealth and our common Asia Pacific region. Stretches of ocean lie between our lands but it is never too far or too difficult for us to keep in touch. I am confident that we can develop a continuous and meaningful communication with each other.

10. Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, may I invite you to join me in a toast to His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou, His Royal Highness Prince Tu'ipelehake, and the government and people of the Kingdom of Tonga and to the further strengthening of friendship and cooperation between our two countries.