

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
PRIZE-GIVING AND CLOSING CEREMONY OF
THE FIRST ASIAN CHESS TEAM CHAMPION-
SHIP AT THE DEWAN SRI PINANG, PENANG
ON 20TH DECEMBER, 1974

Mr Tan Chin Nam, President, Malaysian Chess Federation, Prof.
Dr Max Euwe, President, World Chess Federation, Honoured
Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am greatly honoured and happy to be present here this
morning, at this Prize-Giving and Closing Ceremony of the First
Asian Chess Team Championship.

It would have been happier still for me to be with you at the
Opening Day, but unfortunately my other duties kept me away
from witnessing the exciting contest. However, much I missed the
games, I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to the
winning team and to all those who participated in the tournament.
I believe the other teams too, must have benefitted immensely
from this tournament.

To the Organisers of the Tournament, I would like to congratulate
them for having successfully organised this Championship, and
I hope the Malaysian Chess Federation will mark out its plan
for the future in pursuit of attaining greater and higher standard
of the game in the country. And, I believe this Federation will
live up to the expectation we all have concerning the future of
this very patient taxing and highly intellectual game.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is said that chess is a game depicting war between two
countries. But, unlike modern warfare where tanks and missiles
predominate, it is a war of the old-order—where horses and
elephants were in their prime, where soldiers were still going
strong on their feet. In fact, it is a battle of the fittest—the triumph
of strength over weakness. In its ultimate analysis, it is a victory
of brains over brawns.

I mention this not because I would like to encourage war nor
do I condone it. Our country is a small country and we can

ill-afford to indulge in the luxuries of war with its catastrophic consequences.

However, I mention this to remind ourselves that in this game every person will still learn something of value. We learn to be patient but not complacent. We learn to be alert, to be always vigilant to the many pitfalls and challenges that face us. We learn to be disciplined, as chess is an exercise of self-discipline. And, above all, we learn to be friendly and tolerant. This is important both to the person as an individual and in the context of the nation.

Chess has come down to us through the ages so much so that even today there is still a dispute as to the real origin of Chess. The Chinese, I am told, do not agree that Chess—as is commonly known and accepted—originated from India. They do not, however, say that the game originated from China either, but, true to their philosophic mind, they say that the game must have originated from the same source.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Be that as it may, the earliest mention of Chess in Chinese literature known so far dates from the 8th century A.D. This tend to support the theory of the Indian origin. According to eminent Orientalists and others familiar with the classic history of Chess, the game originated during the Mogul period in India about 570 A.D. We know that the term “Checkmate” is actually the corruption of the original “Shahmat”.

Whatever it may be, it cannot be disputed that Chess started in Asia and we Asians should indeed be proud of that fact. We are proud that this game has caught up with the imagination of the Western world and in fact has spread to every country throughout the world without exception.

Unfortunately, due to lack of patronage and other factors, we Asians not only lose the game but had to be contented with the fact that supremacy in this game had to be decided between the two modern super-powers. The Fischer-Spassky contest brought home the point that we are left far behind and some urgent steps must be taken to redress the situation particularly for us in Malaysia.

It is, therefore, an honour and a source of pride for me and for Malaysia to donate this Trophy which we dedicate to every

Chess player in Asia and also to world peace. With this first contest, I hope there will be renewed interest and enthusiasm in the game and that Chess will be made popular to every man and woman of every age especially the young.

I strongly believe that the young will benefit much from playing this game. Although as I said earlier this game depicts war, it is most unlikely that the game will influence the young minds to warlike or violent activities. On the other hand, Chess will develop in them the habit of patience, dedication and sound judgement. It will teach our youth to be disciplined and to understand the nature of struggle and the true meaning of achievement.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

There was a time when Chess was played extensively in villages and the kampungs throughout the length and breadth of this country. I personally was acquainted with it during my early years in school. But until recently, this game has not quite caught the community at large as, for instance, Football or Badminton. The game is only played as a pastime or as simple recreation whilst perhaps waiting to fulfil some other activities more materialistically rewarding. It is not surprising therefore that Chess has been pushed to the background only to be indulged when time and fancy permit.

Perhaps, it is for this reason that as far as Malaysians are concerned, no one has emerged as a great player from this country. We heard of Chess Masters from the Philippines, from Indonesia, from India, from Australia and New Zealand, but Malaysia has yet to produce one.

It is hoped that with this Tournament the standard of Chess in Malaysia in particular and in Asia in general will find new impetus. I am also happy to note that the Ministry of Education, through the School Sports Council, has been organising Chess Tournaments among schools at State and National levels. Since the last three years, I understand that the response has been most encouraging. In fact, inter-state and open Championships for school children will take place in Kuala Lumpur from the 27th to the 31st of this month.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Chess has always been regarded as a serious game that can be played only by the genius or eccentric. But this is not true. Chess

can be simple or complicated depending on how the game is handled. It is in fact a game which everyone can enjoy, and enjoy it in an intelligent way. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated to us that the game can be played alone, like the game of patience. In fact, it is a game which can be regarded as a companion.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am certain, for a long time to come, the game of Chess will command our fascination. We will marvel at and admire in its beauty and subtlety. While the game is on, the audience will remain enraptured and not until the "check-mate" will we lift our head and then we will say with satisfaction that we have come, we have seen and we have conquered.

I hope our guests from other Asian countries while enjoying in displaying their skill in their exciting game have had a pleasant stay in our country. We hope to see them all again in our country not necessarily for a game of Chess for holiday and for relaxation with their families and friends.

With these words, Ladies and Gentlemen, I declare the First Asian Chess Team Championship officially closed.