

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON
WORLD POLITICAL SITUATION AND TRENDS
AT THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF STATE
CONFERENCE, IN SINGAPORE ON 15TH
JANUARY, 1971

I have come to this meeting with the sober reminder still fresh in my mind of the terrible devastation that can be brought by natural forces. Floods, earthquakes, typhoons and avalanches continue to form an inevitable pattern in the earth cycle although commendable efforts have been made to tame the whirlwinds, divert the rivers and fortify the points of weakness. At this time, I am also strongly reminded that these terrible and inevitable trends in the natural order of things need not find expression in the relations among States.

Whether or not we like it, whether or not we sometimes wish it were otherwise, each of our countries is inevitably involved in the affairs of the world. Like other countries, we in Malaysia view developments in international relations sometimes with hope and relief, but more often perhaps with concern and anxiety.

This gathering of ours at the level of Heads of Governments representing countries from all regions of the world, developed and less developed, large and small, of all races, of all colours, of different political persuasions, meeting in comparative informality and privacy, and discussing matters in a spirit of mutual respect and tolerance, provides an extraordinarily valuable opportunity for a frank and fruitful exchange of views, from which we may all hope to profit. We may each claim, perhaps, to have a particular expertise—a specialist point of view if you like—about the problems of the particular region from which we come.

I have listened with great care and interest to the views of my colleagues who have spoken before me just as I look forward to the views of those who have not yet spoken. It is useful to see the world as others see it, viewing it from their own vantage point, their own pre-occupations and concerns, so that we will obtain "the whole picture", as it were, pieced together from the perspective of each area of the world. I am hopeful that this additional

perspective which we shall gain will contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of the situation as it affects each one of us in a particular region, and, if necessary, will exercise a beneficial influence on our policies affecting that region.

Mr Chairman, before dealing with the region of South East Asia, which is cursed, as the Chinese sages put it, to live in interesting times, I would like, if I may, to take a look first of all at the broad canvas of world affairs.

I should like to begin by noting with some relief that the thermometer shows warmer conditions in the relations between the two super powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, which coldly confronted each other for many years and gave the world many anxious moments. Surveying the world from a background of greater flexibility they both appear eager to reach a detente with each other. The SALT talks, the Soviet call for a European Security Conference, the apparent willingness to accommodate on the Berlin question, the thaw in relations in Central Europe, the decrease in verbal belligerency, all these stand testimony to the general thaw in the rigid intransigence which has characterised much of the relations between East and West.

We have all, of course, seen such hopeful signs before, which have, however, all too quickly receded. But I believe there are forces and factors today which can lead us to hope that this new trend is genuine and will be permanent. The cold war with the constant threat of a global conflagration appears to be abating. Now in less inclement climate, the two protagonists settle down to a different game with the rules and procedures still to be defined. Malaysia has made it known at home and abroad, at the U.N., at the recent Non-Aligned Conference in Lusaka and elsewhere, that she has no wish to be made a pawn in any game the Big Powers play. The Non-Aligned group was formed in the heat of the cold war to play a role as a group in preventing a disastrous collision of the two giants. Now this Group in the period of thaw in the seventies reaffirmed in Lusaka its commitment to continue in its role of mediation and conciliation, and to remain steadfast and positive in the face of big power pressure. Indeed, it may well be that the emergence of this grouping of States contributed in no small measure to the present East/West detente.

However, while there may have been a softening in the relations between the U.S. and U.S.S.R., it is regrettable that this softening has not extended to their respective positions on the Middle East. An uneasy peace hangs over the Middle East. The suffering and despondency of the people there should surely be on the conscience of those who manoeuvre the controls. Over the years Malaysia has reiterated her belief in the principle of self-determination and accordingly calls for the restoration of the rights of the people of Palestine. We believe that in the clash of inter-State interests, this factor is sometimes forgotten. Perhaps as a comparatively young State, whose people have not so long ago exercised their own right of self-determination, we in Malaysia are particularly conscious of this factor. Furthermore, we are anxious that the world should reaffirm that aggression cannot be committed with impunity. Hence, our emphasis that Israeli forces should be withdrawn from Arab territories to the position existing before the June '67 war.

Mr Chairman,

Having said that, let me say that Malaysia continues to support efforts at the United Nations to find a settlement to the Middle East dispute in accordance with Resolution 242 of the Security Council. The people of Palestine have been subjected too long to a hopeless existence constantly dependent on the moves in the big power game. We are anxious they should not become permanent pawns in a game not of their own choice or creation.

Mr Chairman, as we in Malaysia look at the world, another dark cloud confronts our vision. This darkness hangs over Southern Africa. This is the darkness of despair, of bondage and of the threat of ever-widening conflict. The last decade saw the emergence of many independent African States. The metropolitan powers deserve credit for recognising the incompatibility of colonialism with the modern age. But there are some who refuse to give up, who still want to cling to all that is objectionable in the colonial system—the subjection of a people and the deprivation of their basic rights to freedom. There will be opportunity for us to discuss this further under another item on our agenda. For the present, I should only like to say that what is of grave concern to Malaysia is the encouragement in various forms, whether blatant or implied, given to these racist regimes in Southern Africa which has the effect of boosting the morale of the racists in the pursuance of

their apartheid and colonialist policies. The recent invasion of Guinea is a case in point of the latitude still allowed to hard-core imperialists on the continent of Africa. It is my earnest hope that the major powers, while they are still in a position to bring about a peaceful change in Southern Africa, will exercise their option to bring an end to this unhappy situation when in this enlightened age in which we live there still exists subjugation of man by man.

Mr Chairman, the Non-Alignment principles to which Malaysia whole-heartedly subscribes, not only calls for an end to colonial bondage and racism, but also for restraint and consideration from the big powers in their actions and decisions which affect the smaller countries. In keeping with the latter, the Non-Aligned countries at Lusaka looked to the neutralisation of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Malaysia for its part has taken this a step further and called for the neutralisation of Southeast Asia—a neutralisation which necessarily requires the endorsement of the U.S., U.S.S.R. and China. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia cannot really be considered in isolation. They are very much a part of Southeast Asia which has all the potentialities of becoming an arena of conflict for the super powers intent on the extension of their spheres of influence. In our view, therefore, peace and stability in this region can only be a reality if the neutralisation, which should cover the entire area, is guaranteed by the U.S., U.S.S.R. and China.

In this connection, I should like to turn to the question of China, which is the major foreign policy pre-occupation of the countries of Southeast Asia.

As is known, Malaysia does not have diplomatic relations with China and our perspective on China is perhaps to that extent limited. There are some countries around this table who enjoy particularly good relations with China and there are others who have had various ups and downs in their relations with her. There is also Canada whose recent establishment of diplomatic relations with China has opened up interesting possibilities. They could, perhaps, round up the picture, if necessary. But let me first of all sketch the situation as we, in Malaysia, see it.

It is a fact that China for the most part has been excluded from the main-stream of international affairs for more than two decades. I do not think it is profitable, as this point of time, to go into the

whys and wherefores of this. What is of more immediate relevance is that as a result, a natural result some might say, China does not accept the international order as it exists today and seeks to upset it because, in her view, she has been deliberately excluded. The countries of Southeast Asia are her immediate neighbours and are the first to live with the consequences of her policies. As an example, I might add, insofar as Malaysia is concerned, that there is a constant barrage of radio broadcasts from China called "Suara Revolusi Malaysia": or Malaysian Voice of Revolution, which contains not merely virulent propaganda attacks on my Government but also detailed instructions on lines of action that subversive elements should take.

Mr Chairman, the countries of Southeast Asia are, after all, independent countries who form a part of the existing order and who cannot accept its overthrow. The question, therefore, is this: Is there room for adjustment and accommodation so that there can emerge in time an international order—I refer specially to an order in Southeast Asia—which is acceptable to all and which is compatible with the legitimate national interest of all countries concerned? Surely there must be. Malaysia for its part accepts the fact that China has a right to play her part in international forums and to have interest in the affairs of Asia. Our support for China's membership to the United Nations and, in particular, our proposal for the neutralisation of Southeast Asia are clear manifestations of this belief. But we cannot accept or tolerate any form of interference in our internal affairs, which we shall resist to the best of our ability. In the interest of our own survival, we have a right to call on the assistance of anyone wishing to assist us. This surely cannot be denied. For our part, therefore, we await to see China's response, whether she, for her part, recognises and respects our independence and integrity and our legitimate interests in Southeast Asia.

We are aware that persuading China to accept the credibility of the proposal for the neutralisation of this area, or indeed even perhaps to view the concept of neutralisation favourably, will not be an easy task. Obviously, verbal eloquence alone is not enough. We in this region will have to demonstrate by positive words and deeds that neutralisation is the only answer in the otherwise grim and certain prospect of conflict that confront Southeast Asia. Malaysia is convinced that the countries in this region can by a

discernable consistency of policy and action reassure China that peace, stability and neutrality are what Southeast Asian Nations are truly striving for. But China too has to reassure us of her intention and her policies. Of course, the accumulation of years of bitterness, frustrations and fear cannot be overcome overnight. We will require much patience. We will need to move step by step, feeling our way carefully in a matter which, so far as the countries of Southeast Asia are concerned, involves our very survival. It is here that countries who enjoy close and friendly relations with China can play an extremely constructive role.

Mr Chairman, insofar as matters within the region are concerned there have been constructive and encouraging developments. The continuing growth of ASEAN is a particular case in point. Regional co-operation also continues to grow apace within the framework of other regional associations. For more than a decade, Malaysia has been a firm and consistent supporter of regional co-operation among the countries of Southeast Asia.

We believe that such co-operation as manifested in particular in ASEAN can have a two-fold effect. Firstly, outside powers can see for themselves our continuing desire to give practical expression to our aim of self-reliance. Secondly, a network of bilateral links arising inevitably out of the basis of multi-lateral links provided by ASEAN and other regional associations can promote regional understanding and harmony. There are of course a number of countries in Southeast Asia which, for a number of reasons, are not as intimately involved in the activities of the various regional organisations. Malaysia is therefore anxious that, simultaneous with programmes and projects on the regional level, countries of the region should develop the closest possible bilateral sense of regional understanding, solidarity and cohesion.

We are confident that in the atmosphere of such a closely inter-woven entity, countries in Southeast Asia can, with greater confidence, face the coming years and clear away the dark clouds of possible conflicts and instability. What is more, if we show sufficient agility, courage and resourcefulness, we can usher an era for Southeast Asia when progress and development can proceed unhampered by threat of conflict or tensions ignited by disagreements among the super powers in an ever widening game of prestige and influence.