

# DR M'S LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

NDY-14/10/2019 P3-51

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**T**UN Dr Mahathir Mohamad adopted "the language of the heart" diplomacy at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) from 1982 until today to express Malaysia's foreign policy focus and concerns.

He blended this diplomacy with his security management philosophy which emphasised political stability and economic prosperity based on the principles of non-alignment and neutrality.

I made this observation after analysing the prime minister's UNGA speeches in 1982, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1999 and 2003 delivered when he was Malaysia's fourth prime minister; and in 2018 and 2019 delivered in his current administration.

This is also based on my experience listening to his UNGA address in 1995 and witnessing how world leaders gave him a thunderous applause in the UNGA chamber and congratulated him outside the UN hall soon after he delivered his message.

"The language of the heart is the call of the soul which echoes in a faint whisper... (that) can be heard only when they come from another heart", said Ibrahim Kalin in "Speaking the language of the heart in an age of lost meaning" (2017).

To Dr Mahathir, this approach enabled his diplomacy at UNGA, expressed in outright sincerity, to touch the conscience of the listeners who also struggle for the betterment of the global society.

From strategic and security studies, Dr Mahathir's UNGA address encompassed military, political, identity, economic and environmental security sectors; as well as human security.

However, he articulated the global military, political and identity security sectors in a comprehensive manner due to the commonality and the interlinkages of the threats to these referent objects.

Hence, when he urged the UN to mitigate the Cambodian conflict, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War, he linked these issues with their implications on



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the sovereignty of the conflict-ridden states, and the identity and dignity of their people.

He strengthened his case on these issues by elaborating on the human misery resulting from ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, brutalities against the Palestinians, apartheid in South Africa, the use of nuclear weapons by big powers, and the impact of the global war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq.

He discussed global economic and environmental security threats, urging the UN to resolve problems of manipulated international commodity prices, economic sanctions and trade protectionism, and the implication of the new world order and globalisation on developing, small and poor nations.

He also raised the impact of international television networks which allegedly practise selective reporting, showing a 'television war' to create a distorted perception and image of Muslims, the Muslim world, and small nations.

On nuclear weapons, he noted that "while major powers advocate peace and condemn arms

by others, their industries aggressively develop and promote the sale of defence technologies and weapons of death".

However, there were two issues which persistently dominated Dr Mahathir's diplomacy at the UN throughout the years, namely the need for comprehensive UN reforms, and the plight of Muslims in Palestine.

He explained that the call for UN reforms "is made even more urgent when we consider the premises on which international relations are conducted today continue to perpetuate a grossly unjust system".

He added: "The systematic abuse of power by the major countries has continued, they apply selective sanctions and double standards on the developing world to promote their narrow national interests, (and) the North continues its vice-like grip on all spheres of international activity, including politics, international trade, development, the environment and the media, to name a few."

He also insisted on the UN reforms because for the majority of the small, developing nations, "a

world without the UN is almost unthinkable (and because) in the UN lies our hope for a better tomorrow, for justice, peace and stability and for prosperity for all mankind".

On the Palestinians, Dr Mahathir said, "it is another issue on which the UN has failed to make any impact, despite the fact that this subject has appeared regularly on the agenda almost since the founding of the organisation".

He also insisted on resolving this issue as due to "the failure to resolve this central issue, the whole of the Middle East region remains in a constant state of turmoil".

In summary, Dr Mahathir employed the above diplomacy at UNGA because of Malaysia's deep concern about the well-being of world citizens, especially some Muslims and small states, who live in endless misery and fear due to the UN's "complacency" in protecting them.

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