

Keynote Speeches

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PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES

Keynote Speeches by
Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad

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Published by:
Perdana Leadership Foundation
(Co. No. 200301002222 (604642-u))
(Yayasan Kepimpinan Perdana)
No. 1, Jalan P8H, Precinct 8
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The articles in this book are edited transcripts of the keynote speeches
of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Foundation's Honorary President,
and the fourth and seventh Prime Minister of Malaysia. The transcripts
have been edited for clarity and grammatical correctness.

Design by:
MPH Group Publishing

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia Cataloguing in Publication Data

Mahathir Mohamad, Tun, 1925-
PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES : Keynote Speeches
by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. – Second edition.
ISBN 978-967-0821-38-2 (hardback)
1. Speeches, addresses, etc. 2. Malaysia—Politics and government.
3. Malaysia—Social conditions. 4. Malaysia—Economic conditions.
I. Judul.
808.85

Printed by:
Precision Offset Solutions

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FOREWORD

by **Tan Sri Azman Hashim**
Chairman, Board of Trustees
Perdana Leadership Foundation



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has thousands of speeches behind him, his long career in politics having nurtured his inborn ability to convey ideas and opinions. He is also someone with very clear views and insights on the world and, in particular, Malaysia.

It is thus the Foundation's good fortune to have had him as keynote speaker for the first 10 segments of the Perdana Discourse Series that took place from 2004 to 2009. Through the whole Series, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad enlightened us on various aspects of nation-building, among them: National Unity, Social Re-engineering, Political Stability, International Relations, National Sovereignty, Bangsa Malaysia, Economic Development and the role of Women and Youth.

As the country's fourth Prime Minister who has lived through many of the country's historic events, Tun has been privy to first-hand views of the changes that have taken place in this country. He grew up during the British occupation, survived the Second World War, studied medicine when Singapore was still part of Malaya, saw the country become independent, witnessed the 1969 riots that tore apart the nation, and helped to heal and rebuild the country in the decades after. He was the man who hauled Malaysia up to Industrial Nation status and steered the country through to the Information Age.

Tun brought this wealth of experience to the Discourse where in each keynote speech, he dissected past policy decisions, explained their rationales and related them with current events.

We are pleased to put together this collection of Tun's keynote speeches. We trust that these speeches will promote a deeper understanding of the complexities that have coloured the nation's policy decisions and shaped Malaysia's past and present.

Thank you to our Honorary President, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, for agreeing to be our keynote speaker for the first 10 Discourses. We hope he will still speak at future Discourses. Thank you also to UiTM for being the co-organiser of the Discourse since its inception in 2004. Our gratitude also to DRB-HICOM for agreeing to sponsor the second edition of this publication.

This editorial effort is one of the many initiatives of the Foundation to communicate the various ideas and issues that are addressed at our forums and discourses. I hope this publication will serve as a useful reference to those who wish to learn more about Malaysia's development.



Tan Sri Azman Hashim

INTRODUCTION

by **Tan Sri Nik Mohamed Nik Yaacob**

Executive Director

Perdana Leadership Foundation



Like travelling, a journey to the past becomes much more meaningful when there is a knowledgeable and articulate guide to elaborate on the sights and stops along the way. The Perdana Discourse Series is akin to travel. However, instead of travelling through physical space, the Series takes its audience through time to revisit significant milestones in history and to re-examine policies and events in light of current knowledge.

We have been fortunate in that we had a most qualified guide on this journey; someone who is not only a history buff but who has personally lived through many of Malaysia's significant events: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Tun has enlightened us on various aspects of nation-building throughout the discourses. In each lecture, he has explained past policy decisions, their motives, and impact. He juxtaposed these with comparisons to other countries and with current developments. In this way, parts of Malaysian history are brought to life and their relevance to current events are underscored for the benefit of the Discourse audience and this book's readers.

We are pleased to put together this collection of Tun's keynote speeches, most of which were delivered extemporaneously in Tun's inimitable style. Tun's keynotes were followed by lively question-and-answer sessions, and many of the Q & A are included in this publication.

We trust that the keynote speeches will deepen understanding and heighten awareness of our nation's past and present, and spur more interest in Malaysia's history. As our Honorary President, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said, "In order to go forward, you must know where you are coming from. You have to learn the lessons of history."

We thank Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for being the keynote speaker for the first series of our discourse. He set a good foundation of knowledge for the rest of the series to build on. We also thank our generous series sponsor, DRB-HICOM, without whom the series and this publication would not have been possible.

Here is to more interesting discourses and dialogues.



Tan Sri Nik Mohamed Nik Yaacob

PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES 1

NATIONAL UNITY

Summary of a Keynote Speech by Yang Amat Berbahagia Tun Dr
Mahathir Mohamad

23 August 2004

The Quest for National Unity: A Historical Perspective

The idea of a nation state began to crystallise around AD 1500 in Europe, which was not yet divided into separate countries. It was governed by powerful warlords who ruled over peasants on lands the former claimed as theirs. These peasants served the warlords as slaves and soldiers to fight for even more land. The European communities were also ruled by a number of Roman as well as German emperors. As a result of the different emperors and rulers, the European communities were a mixed group of societies that comprised, among others, the Romans, Germans, Latin, and Slavs. The European countries became as they are today only after the 18th century when they were divided into different states by different rulers.

Many countries around the world had evolved much in the same way as Europe. There were no well-defined boundaries. The mixed groups of people lived wherever there were lands, or came and conquered lands for themselves. The Muslim Empire, known as the Land of the Ummah, was not divided into different states. The followers of the faith lived as one religious group. The Chinese once ruled up to as far north as Siberia, while princes and maharajahs ruled India until the British colonials came and divided it into many states. Malaya was also once ruled by chieftains and sultans until the Portuguese, Dutch, and the British came, took over the local government and separated the Malay Peninsula into different states.

The Essence of National Unity

The movements and settlements of people led to the formation of multiracial countries all over the world. They are made up of people of different origins, cultures, and languages. These societies of different communities usually experience problems like identification with the host country because of their complex social backgrounds. When different races and cultures merge, there will be three kinds of integration among society:

- One culture will dominate and force other cultures to assimilate with it.
- A single culture will result from a total integration of many cultures.
- Different cultures will maintain their differences, and will not assimilate with other cultures.

National Unity – The Case of Malaysia

Malaysia has a distinct mix of different ethnic groups. People from different races live together in harmony and over time have blended and adopted some aspects of each other's cultures. For example, the hot and spicy Malay and Indian food are also favoured by the Chinese. The Malays have taken to using chopsticks when eating, and people from different races enjoy *teh tarik* and *roti canai* at the *mamak* stalls. The differences are further diminished with mixed marriages among the races. The Malays, Chinese, and Indians who have their own ethnic characteristics have somehow blended their cultures, with the resulting mix uniquely Malaysian.

Political leaders (UMNO, MCA, MIC) have consented and agreed that Bahasa Malaysia be spoken for ease of doing business among the various races. This is because the Chinese speak different dialects that are not understood even among the Chinese, and the Indians also speak in different dialects.

Most Malaysians accept the need for sacrifice to achieve successful integration. The people should adhere to the philosophy introduced by Tun Razak of sharing an ever-growing economic cake among all communities, instead of one community keeping a shrinking cake to themselves.

Factors that Impede National Unity

There are extremists and purists who are bent on being “pure”, and who do not tolerate any “impurities” in their culture. Many Chinese have lived in this country for generations, yet they still act as if they are in their own motherland and not in a new country that is Malaysia. Then, there are the Malay purists who insist that only Malay is spoken to the point of denying access to knowledge in other languages. There are still many Malays who are neither economically strong nor competitive. They still work on the old mindset, namely *Ketuanan Melayu*, where they feel Malay Reserve Land is necessary. This mindset created by the British colonials works on the concept that if Malay Reserve Land is allowed to be bought by the non-Malays, eventually the Bumiputeras will not have any land at all. This fear will disappear if the Malays prosper and have the capacity to buy land. Finally, it is important to cultivate the culture of savings among Malays. To equalise the competition among the races in Malaysia, it is important that the Malays make some changes to their culture and value system by working hard, cultivating the savings habit, and acquiring knowledge.

A change of mindset is incumbent upon the Malays. This will allow them to better compete with other races. When the Malays are able to compete, uncertainties and fears like having to hold on to Malay Reserve Land, will disappear. In addition, more non-Malays need to join the government. When all these are achieved, social integration will take place faster and better.

Rapporteur: Masturah Alias

PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES 2

SOCIAL RE-ENGINEERING

Keynote Speech by Yang Amat Berbahagia Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad
25 May 2005

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk on a subject that concerns every one of us: social re-engineering. The phrase “social re-engineering” implies conscious efforts to influence social behaviours as a result of an awareness of the need for change.

Society normally goes through changes over time. It is never static; changes take place naturally, usually in response to the environment or events such as a foreign invasion or vast immigration of people. Today, our focus is on social re-engineering: the conscious effort to alter the structure of society. This implies an acknowledgement that there are deep inadequacies in our society that have to be corrected.

Malaysia is a unique country. It is not only multiracial, it is multireligious, multilingual, and multicultural. But the distribution of wealth among the different ethnic groups is not balanced, and this can cause our society to break into factions which may result in confrontations and violence.

In almost every multiracial country, we see this happening. Even minor differences in religion can bring about conflicts that destabilise the country. For example, the people of Northern Ireland are all white ethnic Europeans, but they have different interpretations of Christianity. One group is Protestant, while the other group is Catholic, and the conflict between these two groups disrupted Northern Ireland for a long time. It's the same situation in the Middle East, specifically Lebanon, where the Arabs are divided into Muslims and Christians. The difference in their religion has led to a destructive civil war in Lebanon. That civil war

From national unity to education; from political stability to international relations; from the economy to women and youth, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad gives his frank views and unique insights into these issues, mixing history with contemporary events in his customary forthright manner.

The keynote addresses contained in the volume were delivered at the Perdana Discourse Series from 2004 to 2009. Also included are selected questions and answers from the audience dialogues held after each keynote address.

In this second edition, bonus contents are included: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech on "Islam and Islamisation" at Perdana Discourse Series 19 (2015), Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Keynote Address "Malaysia Inc 2.0: Government and Business Driving Development and Growth" delivered at the Perdana Leadership Foundation CEO Forum 2019, and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Keynote Address "What Does the Future Hold for Malaysia", delivered at the Perdana Leadership Foundation CEO Forum 2022.

Each of these keynote speeches provides a valuable reference on issues of national concern as well as insights into the thinking of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's longest-serving and twice-elected Prime Minister.



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ISBN 978-967-0821-38-2
ISBN 967-0821-38-X



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