

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT A  
DINNER GIVEN IN HIS HONOUR BY  
MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS  
AT MERLIN HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR ON  
17TH JUNE, 1972

Your Excellency the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,<sup>1</sup> The Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister,<sup>2</sup> Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives my wife and myself a rare pleasure to be present on what we regard as a unique occasion for both of us.

I would like, Mr. Ambassador, to thank you and your colleagues for your kind invitation to this enjoyable and pleasant evening. I would also like to thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for the gracious remarks that you made about me and about our country. They say praise is like smoking. It is alright so long as you don't inhale. However, after the very pleasant and charming way in which you expressed yourself, I find it very hard not to inhale.

Your Excellencies,

In the odd moments when I contemplate and compare our respective professions, I have wondered whether I envy you or not. Sometimes I think I do, for your profession combines in a very happy way the advantages of many professions. You are part-politician, concerned with the exciting issues of war and peace, of development and of progress—but without the hurly-burly of the political arena, so that you can have, as President Kennedy once put it, the lofty appearance of statesmen who realise that they will never have to plead their cause before the people.

You are also part-scholar, but without the boring necessities of footnotes, and part journalist without the need to meet artificial dead-lines, and part-lawyer without quite having to deal with the more extravagant of human foibles.

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<sup>2</sup> Y.A.B. Tun Dr. Ismail bin Dato Abdul Rahman.

Then there are the many coloured balloons of your profession—the distinctions, the honours, the exemptions and the immunities which, I must say, are very nice things to have and which make you such mysterious and romantic figures in the popular imagination.

And so, perhaps, Your Excellencies, I do envy you, and yet I sometimes think that whereas my profession—politics—has been called the art of the possible; yours, diplomacy—can be said to be the art of the impossible. Not only do you have to practise the gentle art of painting truth in different colours—that, perhaps, is not an art exclusive to your profession—but it is often your business to do and say the nastiest things but in the nicest way, and having proved your adversary completely wrong, seek to secure his forgiveness for it.

So, Your Excellencies, perhaps we are better as we are and that I should stick to my profession while congratulating you on yours. And, in any case, there are common grounds between us. If I may take an analogy from the dinner we have just had, we should both be good makers of salad for the problem we face is entirely the same—namely, to know exactly how much oil we must put with our vinegar.

Mr. Ambassador, as you rightly said, diplomacy is a very ancient craft and you, its practitioners, are the heirs to a proud tradition. Of course, things are very different from the days of Genoa, Venice and Milan. And yet, if this occasion is anything to go by, certainly the art and practice of diplomacy has not changed in the manner you have observed it.

The Venetian Ambassadors may have left their wives behind but I cannot help harbouring the suspicion that it was not so much that they were forbidden but that they forbade their wives to accompany them lest their freedom and their affairs be somewhat curtailed. If the real reason was that wives would gossip, how do we explain the presence of wives now? Are we to understand that over these last five hundred years the probability that wives would gossip has lessened nowadays? This is a delightful thought. However, it still appears to be a very unlikely possibility. A more probable reason is that these last five hundred years have seen a definite shift in the balance of power from the male to the female.

Your Excellencies,

It is difficult for anyone to talk on diplomacy without getting around to quoting Sir Henry Wotton's celebrated, or notorious, definition of a diplomat as "an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country" and it would be a pity tonight to violate a tradition so firmly established. And yet it was the same Sir Henry who gave the advice, for which unfortunately he received no publicity, that "An Ambassador to be serviceable to his country should always speak the truth". To be truthful, reliable, calm, patient—these and other characteristics which have been held as the essential qualities of a good diplomat—remain as important today as there have ever been, despite the enormous changes which have taken place in the arena of international relations in which you play your part.

It is inevitable, however, that today when the skies are so crowded with Foreign Ministers, not to mention Prime Ministers and Presidents, flying here and there to meet their counter-parts, there should be some misgivings about the relevance and significance of the profession of diplomacy.

For my part, I believe that these misgivings are entirely misplaced. As a Foreign Minister, let me assure you that the order you represent will not become obsolete simply because nothing can ever replace the value of having a competent man right on the spot who lives and breathes the air of the country to which he has been sent. Marvellous as modern technology is in making the world a much smaller place than was once thought to be, it is a very far removed, and unlikely ever to rival, the miracle of man. Machines, after all, will not wine; certainly they do not dine and most certainly they cannot replace the application of intelligence, foresight and sensitivity to human affairs, which is at the heart of your craft.

Your Excellencies,

The Foreign Ministership, being but one of my responsibilities, I am quite aware of the fact that I may not be as easily accessible to you as I would like to be. However, I take comfort in the knowledge that you are able in reaching me to reach these areas of interests all at once for which I am responsible, killing three birds with one stone, which in my view, is not an unreasonably bad bargain.

Your Excellencies, you can rest assured that officers of my Ministry will continue to extend every possible assistance and courtesies to you and your Missions. We accept you as our friends and offer you whatever assistance we can in the performance of your duties. We are as much concerned that the Governments you represent should be as well informed as possible of our policies, our intentions, our pre-occupations, our hopes and our aspirations. We look to you to be Malaysian Ambassadors of goodwill to your Governments as indeed you are the Ambassadors of your Governments to us. I believe our dealings with each other have been characterised over the years by harmony, good-will and mutual understanding. May this state of affairs long continue to be so.

So, Your Excellencies, as Malaysia's Ambassadors of Goodwill and your countries' Ambassadors to us, as our very good friends, my wife and I thank you and your good ladies for your gracious hospitality this evening and for honouring us so kindly in this way.

And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, may I invite honoured guests present to join me in a toast to the Dean and Members of the Diplomatic Corps and their ladies.



Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein kelihatan sedang melancarkan dengan rasminya Rancangan Pendidikan melalui televisyen di Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kuala Lumpur pada 19hb Jun, 1972.

(Gambar Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia)