

THE WELCOMING BANQUET HOSTED BY H.E. ZHAO ZIYANG, PREMIER OF THE  
STATE COUNCIL OF THE PEOPLE  
BEIJING, CHINA

20 NOVEMBER 1985

Your Excellency Zhao Ziyang, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China; Your Excellency Wu Xueqian, Minister of Foreign Affairs and State Councillor; Your Excellency Minister of Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen.

At the outset let me express my sincere appreciation for your very warm words of welcome and for the gracious hospitality that you and the Government of China have accorded my delegation and I since our arrival in Beijing a few hours ago. Your warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements you have made for us provide the perfect setting for what I hope will be a fruitful and successful visit to your country.

2. I must confess that ever since my brief stopover in Beijing some 6 years ago, I had intended to return to China for a longer visit so that I could learn, firsthand, more about China and its people, its aspirations and concerns. I am delighted that I now have this opportunity to do so. It has been said many times that an important pre-requisite for mature and stable relations amongst states is better mutual understanding. I am determined to do my part towards this end. Bearing in mind that mutual understanding is a two-way process, I hope I could also share with you an update on Malaysia's views on several issues.

3. Excellency, Malaysia-China relations are now over eleven years old, at least in the formal sense. While we have undoubtedly made some progress in strengthening bilateral ties, I think we both agree that much more could have been done and needs to be done if we are to realise the high expectations we both had at the onset of our formal relations.

4. In analysing the reasons behind the lack of sustained progress in our bilateral relations, we must face squarely the inescapable conclusion that our inability to completely resolve certain core bilateral issues to mutual satisfaction have had the effect of impeding the overall growth of relations. Your Excellency and other leaders of China have assured us on many occasions that some of these issues are 'left-overs from history and that time will resolve them'. While admittedly time is a great healer, I hope we will not allow history to hold the progress of our relations to hostage. As history marches on, so must we. I realise that in a country where time and

history go back hundreds of years, it is quite natural to take a longer perspective. However, I believe that given contemporary compulsions and needs, a country cannot afford to be mired and shackled to historical legacies and fidelities.

5. In the absence of satisfactory solutions to these issues, close scrutiny appears to be given to our relations only during high-level visits such as this. Instead of becoming a continuous process, the development of our relations has hinged upon the visits that we make. These irregular inputs have, not surprisingly, been insufficient to sustain qualitative movement in our relations. We must therefore resolve to change this pattern in favour of a more dynamic mechanism for on-going improvements in our relations. In working out the framework for such a mechanism, I hope we could give priority to resolving the core issues which have retarded growth.

6. We must not however be content to merely seek to resolve our differences. The absence of differences in itself will be insufficient to create an enduring and stable relationship. In fact, it could lead to indifference. Rather even as we move to resolve existing problems, our thoughts should be on the future and on how we can add substance to our relations.

7. To my mind, economic cooperation and trade offer exciting possibilities. It is my hope that just as politics dominated the first decade of our relations, economics will come to dominate the next decade. This task is all the more important when one considers that trade barriers are going up in many parts of the world. As part of the wider international trend to seek more equitable trading relationships, Malaysia and China need to address themselves not only to such issues as a more balanced trade and greater direct trade but to the very fact that our bilateral trade has been declining since 1980. We must ensure that pious statements followed by inaction or indifference, which have characterised other bilateral trade relationships, do not also come to characterise Malaysia-China trade.

8. I am happy to note that some steps, albeit tentative at this stage, are being taken to expand our bilateral economic relations. Malaysian and Chinese companies are exploring new areas for mutual cooperation while both sides increasingly value our bilateral trade. In a sense I hope my visit will add stronger momentum to this process. I am sure you will not have failed to notice the rather large private sector delegation I brought with me. They are the captains of Malaysian industry and commerce. They bring with them vast experience and technical know-how in specific areas where Malaysia is internationally recognised as a leader. They are

keen to play their part in giving more substance to our bilateral relations and they have the full support of my government. It is my hope that in the days ahead they will have the opportunity to seriously explore every avenue for economic cooperation and establish ties and contacts for on going mutually beneficial economic activities that would serve to enhance the relationship between our two countries.

9. Excellency, Malaysia and China share a common desire for peace and stability within the region so that all members of the region, collectively and individually, could get on with the more urgent task of socio-economic development. Unfortunately, the complicated regional situation, in particular the situation in Kampuchea, represents a serious distraction. Those of us who genuinely desire peace and stability must renew our efforts to find solutions to these vexing regional political problems on the basis of adherence to the principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Our objectives should be security and stability for all. However, at the same time, we should also make clear that we will not allow any country to hold the region's prosperity to ransom because of its own self-centred ambitions. We should make clear that regional prosperity will march on, with or without them.

10. Over the next few days, I hope we could use the opportunity of this visit to seriously take stock of our relations and, in a frank and dispassionate manner, exchange views on all these bilateral and regional issues. I am convinced that if we can hold this course of dialogue and consultation, and act in a positive manner, much can be achieved in the years ahead. I wish to reassure Your Excellency that Malaysia is committed to seek good relations with China as with all countries, on the basis of the principles of peaceful coexistence. Though the task ahead may not be easy, it is a worthy endeavour not only for our respective peoples but also for the peace and stability of our region.

11. Excellency, before I conclude, may I once again express my sincere appreciation for your warm hospitality in welcoming us to China and for the excellent arrangements you have made for our visit. I also fully reciprocate your hope that my visit will further enhance the development of good and stable relations between our two countries.

12. May I now invite you all to join me in a toast to:

- the good health of His Excellency President Li Xiannian.
- the good health of His Excellency Premier Zhao Ziyang.
- and to the friendship between Malaysia and China.

Thank you.