

THE OFFICIAL DINNER IN SKOPJE

MACEDONIA, 21 APRIL 1996

On behalf of my wife and members of the Malaysian delegation, may I first of all thank you for your kind words of welcome and the generous hospitality that has been accorded to us since our arrival today in your beautiful country. We are indeed delighted and honoured to be here this evening.

2. Following Macedonia's emergence as a free and independent state, Malaysia was the first among Asia Pacific countries to recognise Macedonia in 1992. With the establishment of diplomatic relations, a cordial and warm bilateral relationship has developed. My official visit here today reflects our keen desire to deepen our friendship and co-operation with Macedonia.

3. At present, interaction between our two countries is rather minimal. This is basically due to lack of historical and traditional linkages between Malaysia and Macedonia. Many Malaysians do not know much about Macedonia and are not fully aware of the opportunities for co-operation and investments that your country can offer. Similarly, Macedonians are also unaware of the numerous advantages and opportunities available for trade with Malaysia. However, I am confident that this will soon change.

4. In Malaysia, the Government has adopted a pro-business attitude and implemented a privatisation policy to encourage private investments, including those by foreigners. Being business friendly has become a part of the national culture. Malaysia's privatisation strategy, incorporating new and innovative ideas, has resulted in greater efficiency of services and accelerated its economic development. This is a winning formula and Malaysia is ready to share its experience and expertise with your Government in its privatisation efforts.

5. In the Balkans, we are relieved that the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina has ended and the process of peace implementation and reconstruction has begun. Efforts to ensure a durable peace require political support and determination. We hope that the restoration of peace and normalcy in Bosnia-Herzegovina will create the conditions for overall regional stability so vital for development and economic growth.

6. The restoration of peace in the Balkans, will surely generate confidence and encourage wider trade and economic relations. In this respect, I would like to urge the private sectors of our two countries to explore the hitherto untapped

potential for co-operation especially in trade, tourism and investment, both bilaterally as well as in third countries.

7. The private sectors of our two countries have an important role to play in our joint efforts for trade and economic co-operation. For this reason a number of prominent Malaysian businessmen are included in my delegation to Macedonia. I am confident that our economic relations could be expanded and deepened for mutual benefit.

8. Transportation, especially air transport, between our two countries is one area which we should take a closer look. The problem of transportation has undeniably hampered the healthy growth of direct trade and the tourism industry. I believe we should jointly take a more positive approach to this and promote direct airlinks between our two countries as well as the Southeast Asian and the Balkan region. It is therefore most gratifying that cooperation between our respective national airlines has been initiated and this could be formalised with the conclusion of a bilateral air services agreement in the near future.

9. While it is important that relations between two countries are premised on healthy economic interaction, it is also equally essential that political links are established and nurtured at the highest possible level. My visit reflects the importance which we attach in strengthening the bond of friendship between Malaysia and Macedonia, and I hope it will pave the way for regular contacts between our two countries. Indeed, I look forward to receiving Your Excellency in Malaysia in the near future.

10. On behalf of my wife and my delegation, I once again wish to express my deep appreciation for all the many courtesies so graciously extended to us. We shall bring back to Malaysia many pleasant memories of our brief sojourn in your enchanting country.