

**THE OFFICIAL DINNER IN HONOUR OF HIS EXCELLENCY RAFIC HARIRI  
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF LEBANON  
SRI PERDANA, KUALA LUMPUR, 9 FEBRUARY 1998**

Let me say how happy we are to receive you, dear brother, once again in Malaysia. I know and we Malaysians all know that you are here because you are our friend, you are concerned about us and desire to cooperate with us in good times and in bad times. For our part we have always looked upon you as a friend, sharing in your sorrows and your joys, despite the distance that separates us.

2. Last year I visited your great country, Lebanon, together with my wife and an entourage consisting of Government officials and businessmen. We were very keen then to participate in our small way in the reconstruction of your country. Our business people thought they could take up some of the projects you offered which would contribute to the rebuilding of Beirut and other parts of your country. Our businessmen had the experience and the means to invest in Lebanon, modestly no doubt, but hopefully not too insignificantly.

3. But today we regret very much that we have to withdraw. The carpet had been pulled from under our feet. We no longer have the wherewithal to invest abroad. In fact even in our own country our capacity to invest and develop has been diminished. Suddenly after years of prosperity created by our own system and efforts we have been made poor, along with the other countries of South East Asia. The process of impoverishment is very simple. It is just by devaluing our currency.

4. We of South East Asia are told that our Governments are corrupt, indulge in cronyism and nepotism. We are not transparent. Our system and our way of doing things were not only wrong but were thoroughly wicked and oppressive on our people.

5. You may have noticed during your last visit that the allegedly oppressive, despotic and corrupt Governments that we have in this region had built prosperous countries and prosperous people. In Malaysia, the growth averaged eight percent per annum and per capita grew from US\$300 at the time of independence in 1957 to US\$5,000 in June 1997.

6. There was no unemployment in Malaysia. Indeed we created so many jobs that workers from other countries flocked to Malaysia to share in our prosperity.

7. Our multiracial people lived in harmony and worked closely together. They helped make our affirmative action successful in creating a more equitable society despite our many different racial and religious affinities.

8. With our own money we built roads and ports, airports, waterworks and power plants, railways etc. We built up shipping lines and airlines which compare well even with those of developed countries. We built up trade to become the 19th biggest trading nation in the world, exporting not just commodities but mostly

sophisticated manufactured goods. We built no statues or useless monuments unless of course dams and roads, ports and airports and buildings are classified as monuments.

9. No segment of our society was ignored. Everyone rich and poor benefited and were enriched. Poverty was for practical purposes banished. If we had cronies and practised nepotism then we must consider all the people of Malaysia as cronies and family members for all of them gained from the administration and policies of the Malaysian Government and indeed from the Governments of the tiger economies of South East Asia.

10. Now, after so many years of profiting from our economic policy, we are told that our ways were wrong and have caused them to lose confidence. By pulling out their capital and by other ways at their disposal they have taken away the wealth that we had built up, leaving us practically destitute. Indeed some countries have been bankrupted by them, resulting in millions upon millions of workers becoming unemployed, causing social and political unrest where once there was prosperity and stability. All these we are told are the work of market forces in order to discipline the Governments.

11. But whereas our allegedly corrupt cronyism and nepotism had created prosperity for all our people, giving jobs and good income to everyone, we are seeing market forces doing just the opposite. Today all the prosperity of the countries of South East Asia is gone, the workers are unemployed by the millions, thousands of good companies have been bankrupted, the stock markets have collapsed, banks and finance companies forced to close and generally poverty and destitution has once again descended on our people. These once prosperous countries were forced to beg for loans to repay their debts which have become bloated due to the depreciation of their currency.

12. But now it is suggested that help should be withheld until these governments uphold human rights. What about the rights of the millions of workers who have lost their jobs and become destitute. Devaluation of their money has deprived them of their livelihood. It is not the national Governments which did this. It is the market forces let loose by certain Governments which did this. Shouldn't these Governments be accused of violating human rights also?

13. There is so much self-righteousness and hypocrisy that we have lost faith in those who preach human rights. Actually 'might is right' has come back with a vengeance. We have now decided to accept it and to bow to forces which we cannot resist. We know that if we don't our people will be punished by depriving them of whatever little that they have left.

14. I must admit to being confused. The countries of South East Asia had achieved prosperity to the extent that it was described as a miracle. The Governments and the administration were not perfect of course. But which Government in the world is or has been perfect? Every sin committed by the Governments of South East Asian countries has been committed by every country including those who talk incessantly of good Government and

governance. Indeed in many instances they are worse, being more corrupt, running bigger deficits etc. And yet they have not been punished, they have not had their books inspected, been told to mend their ways or else.

15. My brother, our two countries are in the process of reconstruction; you from the ravages of war and we from the ravages caused by an unprecedented assault on our economy. There is much that we have in common and therefore there is much that we can do together. Even weak countries working together can bolster each other' s strength. And we are not exactly the weakest economies in the world. I feel certain that through friendship and cooperation our two countries will be able to recover and develop, insya-Allah.