

**SPEECH BY TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
AT WASEDA UNIVERSITY, JAPAN
ON 3 DECEMBER 2005**

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly I would like to thank Waseda University for the honour conferred on me by this award of an Honorary Doctorate. I had heard of Waseda University when I was a schoolboy. Those were the days when universities were not very many, and Malaysia had none at all.

2. The best known universities in those days were Cambridge and Oxford in England and Harvard and Yale in America. Then we got to now of Keio and Waseda in Japan. Somehow famous universities seemed to come in pairs.

3. I never dreamt as a schoolboy that I would make it to the university, certainly not the famous universities. And of course I did not. The university I went to is not famous. I graduated from the University of Malaya which today is considered one of the 200 best universities in the world but not famous like Waseda University.

4. But today I am here to receive this Honorary Degree from Waseda University. It is not of course a degree I earn through academic accomplishment. I would probably never pass the examinations here even if I master the Japanese language. But I feel as if I have earned it as much as graduates of the university. Perhaps I had done something to deserve it. So, thank you once again for this singular honour.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. I must admit having an abiding fascination for Japan and the Japanese. I grew up at the time when Malaysia, or rather Malaya was a British colony. We had been virtually colonised ever since Alfonso D'Albuquerque conquered Malacca in 1511. Made up of small, weak and divided Malay states, Malaya had never been able to ward off European occupation or hegemony. Even before that we were always vassals to some overlord.

6. Unlike Japan, Italy, Germany, China and other countries which were once divided into small fiefs, the Malay states did not come together to become a nation until in 1957 when, upon independence, we became a federation and had a central Government.

7. The Europeans succeeded in also colonising our minds. We believed that the Europeans were invincible, that they were superior beings who knew what we did not know. We believed that Asians, all Asians were inferior.

8. And this belief was amplified by what we learnt in the English Medium Schools that we went to during the colonial period. We learnt not the history of our own country but the history of Britain and of the glorious British Empire. I actually felt proud that my country was a part of the British Empire on which the sun never sets. I could not imagine an end to this great empire.

9. There were a few Japanese in British Malaya, before the Pacific War, mostly selling toys or running photograph shops. Once my father brought a Japanese geologist to the house. He was investigating some peculiar rocks found in our small fruit farm. He was not a very impressive man, short, wearing ill-fitting plus fours and thick round glasses – in fact the typical Japanese of the British cartoonists.

10. Overall my impression of the Japanese was that they were copycats, producing inferior goods, poor imitations of the goods produced by the British. The chrome on the handle of my Japanese bicycle peeled off and the exposed handle-bar rusted.

11. I did not realise that some of the good products I bought were actually Japanese. I thought Pilot and Eversharp pens were British made. They were very good but they did not have Japanese names. And the “Made in Japan” inscribed were tiny and hidden.

12. Still inferior though the Japanese products may be I felt proud that an Asian people could manage to manufacture products which I had associated with Europeans. I had of course not heard that the Japanese had actually defeated a European nation, Russia, in a sea battle involving modern warships.

13. By 1940 there were rumblings of war approaching Malaya. We read of Japan’s invasion of China. Not much was reported in the Malayan papers. But we did know that the Chinese were bitter enemies of the Japanese. And in Malaya there had always been a big Chinese community. They collected funds to help the Chinese war effort and they boycotted Japanese goods. But as a Malay I was not too interested in this Chinese sentiments. The British had successfully divided us so that the Malays and the Chinese lived in different compartments, barely aware of each other and certainly not too interested in each others affairs.

14. In December 1941 the rumours about a Japanese invasion of Malaya became a reality when Japanese troops appeared in my hometown of Alor Star. It was a traumatic experience for me. A platoon of British troops was seen retreating in the rain near my house. My faith in British invincibility was shattered. And that faith never returned even though in the end the British and their allies won the war. The Japanese invasion decolonised our minds. That is the greatest contributions that Japan made to us Malays, and to many people in Southeast Asia.

15. I pictured Japan after the war as being totally shattered, destroyed by American bombings. I thought of the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the massive bombing of Tokyo. And I believed Japan would not

recover, at least not for a long time. If it did, it would be the same cheap inferior goods producing Japan, always copying and always second-class.

14. In 1961, 16 years after the war ended I came to Japan for the first time. And I was amazed. Japan had practically recovered fully. Tokyo was being rebuilt at a furious pace. The elevated highway to Haneda was being built in preparation for the Tokyo Olympics. In Osaka, Matsushita had factories even in the rice fields. And Japanese products were no longer cheap imitations. They were of high quality and original. Still they were relatively cheap.

17. The whole impression was not of a defeated Japan, sulking and licking its wounds. It was of a dynamic Japan rising from the ashes like a phoenix. It was of a Japan shaking off its recent disastrous experience, determined to rebuild and to recapture its greatness.

18. As an Asian I was proud. As I said the defeat of the British forces in 1941 – 42 had shattered my belief in the White Men. What I saw in Japan in 1961 completely erased my sense of inferiority as an Asian. I told myself if Japan could do it, other Asian countries could also do it.

19. When I became Prime Minister of Malaysia in 1981 the first thing that leaped into my mind was the picture of Japan reconstructing which I witnessed in 1961. Could Malaysia emulate Japan? Could Malaysia learn from Japan how to develop the country, to industrialise, to give its people a good life? And to regain our honour, after 450 years of foreign rule and domination.

20. And so the Look East policy was formulated and adopted and it became a major part of Malaysia's strategy for development and industrialisation. I am glad to say that Japan responded to Malaysia's policy and provided scholarships and places in the universities and in the industrial establishments. My one regret is that I had almost deliberately forgotten the Japanese language which I learnt during the Japanese occupation. I thought it was of no use to me. How wrong I was. So I had three of my children studying and working in Japan and learning the Japanese language. I believe in leading by example. I cannot ask other people to get a Japanese education if I do not begin with my own children. When I introduced the Look East policy, Malaysians were still oriented toward the West, in particular Britain. I had to change this mindset. The Look East Policy was designed to do this.

21. I have a belief that if we help others we will reap rich benefits for ourselves. It came from the observation that after Japanese companies invested and set up industries in Malaysia, they helped to solve our unemployment problem and in many other ways they enriched our country. And when we became rich we became a good market for their Japanese goods. Clearly by prospering us you prosper yourself twice, once from investment profits and then from selling your products to us. A poor Malaysia would not make a good market for you.

22. On the other hand when a country is poor and is full of problems, its neighbours and other countries will suffer from the fallout of its misfortunes. Thus

when Vietnam was impoverished by the war, its victory against the US resulted in a huge number of refugees landing on Malaysia's shores. We had our hands full trying to deal with this fallout from a neighbouring country. When many other countries in the region are troubled with all sorts of problem; including unemployment, Malaysia feels the impact of their misfortunes. Conversely when they are stable and prosperous, Malaysia is not only free from undesirable fall-out problems, but we are able to trade with them, to benefit from their markets.

23. Out of this experience we developed a philosophy which has served us well. We now believe in and we promote the policy to prosper our neighbours. The common English saying is "Beggars Thy Neighbour" i.e. to benefit from making your neighbour poor or beggars. You win if the other loses. It was a zero sum game. Our slogan, our national creed is "Prosper Thy Neighbour". We do this through training facilities for personnel from neighbouring and other third world countries and by investing there. We cannot afford to give financial aid. By adopting this as a policy we find our own country prospering and we get less fallouts from the problems of our neighbours. Additionally these countries are always supportive of us when we need their support – as in the United Nations for example. Prosper Thy Neighbour is not altruistic. It is enlightened self-interest. I commend this to Japan.

24. But unfortunately, the world today is led and dominated largely by rich and powerful countries who do not subscribe to the "Prosper Thy Neighbour" philosophy. They are still bent on begging other countries, on impoverishing them, and undermining their stability in order to prosper and secure themselves.

25. These powers claim that their intention is to help these poor countries by getting them to adopt the systems and the philosophy which they themselves use with success. They want all countries to be democratic overnight. They want these countries to open up to their capital and their powerful conglomerates and banks.

26. Because they believe that democracy is so good these powers are prepared to kill people in order to make them democratic and free. Somehow this does not seem logical – to kill people so they can be free. But that exactly is what we are seeing today. Hundreds of thousands of people are being starved, deprived of medical help through sanctions, bombed and rocketed so as to free them. Even if they become democratic, the cost in human lives and physical destruction is far too high. There are other means to democratise Japan for example than to drop atom bombs on its cities.

27. Democracy advocates free choice. But there is going to be no free choice for people and countries of today as far as the ideology is concerned. Democratise or the democrats will come in and force a Regime Change. They will finance the opposition and train them. They will demonise the existing Government which they condemn as undemocratic, so that a friendly "democratic" Government is empowered. If the people object to this then they should be eliminated, liquidated, killed. This is democracy from the barrel of a gun. We are seeing this happening before our very eyes today. Yet if the

country has no wealth to be exploited, no regime change would be required. Millions die in poor African countries without anything being done.

28. In the early years after the last world war there was much talk of freedom and independence. And many former colonies of the Western powers gained independence. Malaysia is one of them. One of the elements that give meaning to independence is non-interference in the internal affairs of nations. The United Nations itself pledged to uphold this principle.

29. For a time the Western powers respected this principle. But not for long. Very quickly they invented ways of interfering in the internal affairs of independent countries.

30. First this was done through unofficial agencies. The Non-Government Organisation is a new phenomenon. Claiming that they had a responsibility to prevent human rights abuses, to guard against environmental degradation, to promote democracy etc. they gave themselves the right to ignore borders, ignore the independence of nations, to interfere in the domestic affairs of countries. Financed by unknown people, they used locals to harass independent Governments. They support the local NGOs with funds.

31. Impatient at not getting quick results they resorted to violence, accusing Governments of a whole list of misdemeanours. Their prime targets are those countries which appear to be developing well after achieving independence. These countries are accused of being undemocratic, of not respecting human rights and of polluting the environment. They are particularly supportive of labour rights and strikes which can paralyse industries which compete with their industries.

32. There may be some truth in what they say but their disrespect for the independence of nations has breached international norms of behaviour. Still their controlled press and their people make out that their breaches are justified. Soon the principle that the management of domestic affairs of independent states are the sovereign rights of nations is subjected to sustained attacks. The principle should be ignored and powerful countries should have the right to interfere. Effectively a new form of colonisation is being practiced by the former colonial powers. Neo-colonisation has now become a reality.

33. To cut a long story short, as a result of the NGOs ignoring borders and the principle of non-interference, today the big powers blatantly arrogate to themselves the right to interfere directly in the internal affairs of independent countries to the point of forcibly changing their Government.

34. Non-interference in the internal affairs of independent countries is a good principle. It gives meaning to independence. But it must be admitted that sometimes the Governments of some countries are so oppressive, and the people are so powerless to protect themselves that the only way to stop the abuses of power by the Government is to get outside help.

35. Cambodia is a case of point. When it was ruled by the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot, two million Cambodians were tortured and killed in the most brutal manner. News of this massacre of the people by their own Government leaked out slowly. The world would be justified in interfering. But the world ignored the news and did nothing.

36. In Bosnia Herzegovina the Serbs carried out ethnic cleansing in full view of the world through TV. Some 200,000 Bosniacs were killed. In Srebrenica Dutch soldiers did nothing as Serbs slaughtered some 7,000 Bosniacs practically in front of them. Perhaps it was due to respect for internal affairs. But what were the Dutch soldiers doing there if not to stop Serb atrocities on behalf of the United Nations.

37. In Rwanda and Burundi millions were killed due to tribal wars which the Governments were unable to stop. And many more cases of massacres by the Governments or because Governments are not strong enough to maintain law and order occur in many countries in recent times. Should the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of countries be respected in such cases? Obviously not. The world community has a duty to prevent these things from happening. It has a right to do so.

38. Who represents the world community? Obviously it is the United Nations. The United Nations has been authorised to interfere in the internal affairs of nations if there is no other way to stop Government abuses of power or when Governments are not strong enough to maintain law and order.

39. But what we are seeing is the unlawful seizure by a super power of the role and rights of the United Nations.

40. When one country seizes for itself the right to determine who is in breach of universal laws and to act without the approval of the international community then it is going to abuse the rights and the power. As the saying goes, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." We are seeing this in Iraq. To rid the country of one person, more than 500,000 children have died as a result of sanctions and more than a hundred thousand people have been killed during and after the invasion of Iraq. What is worse is that getting rid of the dictator has not brought about the results that were promised. If at all the situation has become worse than when the offending leader was in power. All these point to poor understanding and bad action by the country which had seized power that rightly belongs to the United Nations.

41. Separation of power is an important way to prevent abuses of power. The objection against authoritarian rule is because separations of power does not exist. There is therefore no checks and balance. The good thing about democracy, apart from the right of the people to choose the Government, is the separation between the executive, the legislative and the judiciary. Each would be in a position to check abuses by the other two.

42. When we have one super power as lawmaker, enforcer and executioner with no one, not even the international community to check it, there will be

abuses. Thus despite evidence to the contrary, that power decided to invade Iraq, killing its people and destroying its towns and cities in order to rid the country of its leader who was alleged to have weapons of mass destruction. Today it is manifestly clear that Iraq had no WMD. Worse still the leader of the super power is proven to have lied about the WMD. But we cannot bring back to life those who have been killed, including the soldiers of the super power. When power is vested in one country, this is what can happen and has happened. It is sad to see this blatant abuse of power being endorsed by some countries. The world will not be a safe place if unilateral seizure of power is supported.

43. Instead we should strive for a more democratic world where there would be checks and balance. For some time now we have been trying to promote an East Asia Economic Group. We need this even more now since we cannot bring back a bipolar world. The centers of power today are with (i) North America and (ii) the European Union. Both are ethnic Europeans. Only Asia can provide a check against absolute domination of this world by Europeans. And in Asia we look to Japan as one of the leaders.

44. Asia has the credibility and the economic and political clout to intervene when either North America or Europe try to arrogate power to themselves. In fact only East Asia can play a moderating role. No other region can at this point in time.

45. Unfortunately East Asia is in disarray. We are still living in the past, still being dragged down by the baggage of history. Japan still refuses to admit the wrongs that it committed in the past.

46. China too is living in the past. And in China's and Japan's past, there are a lot of things which instil anger and enmity, towards each other. It does not help if there are deliberate provocative acts, calculated to revive memories of past conflicts and enmity.

47. In Europe, France and Germany had been at war for more than a century. But they decided there was no merit in wars. They decided to bury the past, to forget their enmity and to be partners in the building of a new peaceful Europe. And we have seen the result – 60 years of European Peace among members of the European Union.

48. Cannot we do the same, we Asians, Japan and China in particular. Must we allow the mistakes of the past to determine our future forever? These baggages of history – must they shackle us to the past and destroy our future.

49. The key to East Asia unity lies with Japan and China. The key to East Asian stability is also with Japan and China. Alignment with non-Asian countries in the past had cost Japan much. If Japan aligns with non-Asian countries again it may result in other East Asian countries seeking non-Asian alliance. Then instead of cooperation and unity there would be confrontation. That could not be good for Japan, for East Asia or for the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

50. Never has the world been as rich and as advanced technologically as it is today. Yet 1/3 of the world live in poverty while one tenth live a life of overflowing wealth and luxury. And this one tenth is spending trillions of dollars on ways to kill people. The result is a world living in fear of terror. And the terror is getting worse because the rich use military might to suppress all opposition against them.

51. The sad state of the world today is due to adherence to the strategy of "Beggar thy Neighbour", of a zero sum game where one gets rich by impoverishing the other, where rich countries apply sanctions to starve people, to kill them; where the powerful consider war, that is the killing of people, as a way to settle disputes, to spread an ideology. We are not civilised. We are as primitive as the people of the stone age, perhaps more primitive.

52. In this messy situation, is there a role for universities, for Waseda University for example. I think you should seriously ponder your role. If intellectuals abdicate then the ungodly will rule this world. I need not add that when such people rule this world we will all suffer.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

53. May I once again thank Waseda University for conferring on me the honorary doctorate.

Thank you.
