

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE OFFICIAL DINNER HOSTED BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE
REPUBLIC OF ITALY HIS EXCELLENCY BETTINO CRAXI,

VENUE: ROME, ITALY

DATE: 24 SEP 1984

TIME:

Your Excellency the Prime Minister of the
Republic of Italy and Madame Craxi;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of my wife and members of my delegation, I
wish to thank you for the warm welcome and generous
hospitality extended to us during our visit to your
beautiful country. We are indeed honoured and pleased to be
here this evening at this splendid dinner.

2. Malaysia and Italy have for some time shared cordial
relations. I am happy to observe that the development of
our relations have been unmarred by any serious
disagreement. The friendly relations between our two
countries have further been augmented by our commitment to
the ideals and aspirations of the United Nations through
closer cooperation between Member States in all fields. We
share similar views on many
international issues, and in our respective regions we are
each committed to a policy of close regional cooperation
between neighbouring states. Moreover, both Malaysia and
Italy are firm adherents of the free enterprise system, as
well as of cooperation between developed and developing
nations.

3. While all the above factors should form the ingredients
for active bilateral cooperation, it is also true to state
that until quite recently our relations have lacked impetus.
I can honestly say that our ties have been steady, but
unremarkable. This is still well reflected in our bilateral
trade figures, which I feel is lower in volume and narrower
in scope than its real potential. Italy, with more than 57
million people and a highly industrialised economy, should
present a large market for Malaysian products, especially
our primary commodities. On the other hand, Malaysia needs
Italian machinery and materials, as well as your expertise
in certain specialised fields. This complementarity extends
also to other economic fields. However, up to now our
interest in Italy has primarily been as a tourist
destination, aided also by a keen awareness of your
contributions to modern Western civilisation. On your part,
Italy has perhaps had a longer history of links with
countries in Africa and other regions, and not with

Southeast Asia.

4. I am happy to note that we are at last realising that there is great potential and many possibilities for increases in volume and diversity in bilateral trade, as well as in economic, industrial and development cooperation. A step in this direction was taken in July last year, when both our countries signed an Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation. It is a sign of the common desire of both Malaysia and Italy to foster closer economic cooperation that the Malaysian-Italian Joint Commission, established in accordance with the provisions of the above Agreement, met six months later for its inaugural session. The meeting had addressed itself to the whole spectrum of cooperation that we can undertake for the mutual benefit of our two countries and peoples.

5. The Malaysian and Italian private sectors have not been slow to welcome increased cooperation either, as I observe. One of our investment companies will be finalising an agreement with Italian companies to form joint-venture companies to seek opportunities for cooperation in trade and investment, and to jointly expand trade and other ventures in other developing countries. Such cooperation forms the basis of strong and meaningful ties of friendship. Our cooperation in the recent past underlines my earlier observation that the real potential of our economic cooperation has not been fully realised.

6. I am therefore undertaking this visit to your country with the conviction that through the establishment of personal contacts and consultations, such as the meeting we have had today, the bonds of our friendship will be cemented further for our mutual benefit. I look forward to a future when Malaysians will regard Italy and Italians not just as friends but also as economic partners, over and above our interest in you as a country and a people with a long and fascinating history.

7. Malaysia is a developing country striving to achieve economic well-being for its people. We have a long way to go to achieve prosperity and development, and we do not have the luxury of time in order to arrive at our objectives. We therefore need understanding and cooperation from developed countries such as Italy, while we try to help ourselves and accelerate our economic development.

8. In this context, Malaysia is fully committed to regional cooperation with our partners in ASEAN, in line with our perception that economic development can be maintained only if there is peace and stability in our region of Southeast Asia. However, the unresolved problem of Kampuchea continues to be the source of potential instability, with little prospects of an early solution. Malaysia and her partners in ASEAN will continue to strive for a durable solution to the Kampuchean problem through a comprehensive political solution. We are convinced that the

issue must be resolved peacefully in accordance with the declaration of the International Conference on Kampuchea and other relevant United Nations resolutions that have been endorsed by the international community.

9. The countries in ASEAN will continue to look towards countries which have given their support to our initiatives for peace and stability in Indochina. I am happy that Italy shares our effort in the search for a solution in Kampuchea and hope that it will continue to do so in the forthcoming General Assembly of the United Nations.

Your Excellency,

10. The question of peace and security is important to us in Southeast Asia, just as it is important to you in the Mediterranean region. The countries of the ASEAN group are aware of the dangers of our region being turned into an area of rivalry and conflict between the major powers. We are anxious to prevent such dangerous competition between the major powers, which could very well be brought about by problems such as that in Kampuchea. Malaysia, with her ASEAN partners, has therefore been striving to establish a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality in Southeast Asia, free from any form of foreign interference.

11. We in Malaysia are aware that Italy plays an important role in many international issues, and has made important contributions towards peace in the Mediterranean region and in West Asia. Your policy of maintaining close relations with all countries in your region has earned the respect of many countries and has made your country an important member of the region. At the same time Italy also assumes a significant role in the EEC and the Atlantic Alliance. This, together with the fact that Italy is one of the major industrial countries in the world assures you of an important voice in world affairs. Malaysia looks forward to working closely with you in the future on various economic and other issues, either in the bilateral context, or in the wider context of our respective regional organisations, ASEAN and EEC.

12. I am confident that the future will witness the growth of active and meaningful bilateral relations between our two countries for our mutual benefit. I am certain that the positive developments that we have witnessed in the recent past underscores my conviction that there is tremendous potential for further cooperation between Malaysia and Italy.

13. Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, may I invite you to join me in a toast to the good health of His Excellency President Sandro Pertini and to the close friendship between Malaysia and the Republic of Italy.

