

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

EVENT: THE OFFICIAL DINNER IN HONOUR OF THE RT.HONOURABLE
MARGARET THATCHER PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
OF GREAT BRITAIN & NORTHERN IRELAND

VENUE: SRI PERDANA

DATE: 05 APR 1985

TIME:

Madame Prime Minister;
Mr. Denis Thatcher;
Distinguished Members of
the British Delegation;
Excellencies;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have much pleasure in once again welcoming you to Malaysia. I hope you will find your stay here fruitful and enjoyable. You will certainly find a number of things in Malaysia which are familiar to you even though you have never been here before. That is because of our past association. We also have historical associations with the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Arabs, the Indians, the Chinese and others. They too have left evidence of their presence here.

2. Malaysians do not deny history. Indeed we have taken pains to preserve the relics of history. In the heart of Kuala Lumpur, for example, we have preserved that typically English scene consisting of a cricket ground, a club (in mock Tudor) and a church.

3. We preserve all these not because of our sentimentality. The world is now not very much moved by sentiments. We preserve them as reminders of our past, so that Malaysians will not forget that they were once colonised by various European powers. If they do not wish to be colonised again, in whatever form, they must learn to manage their affairs better.

4. Although our past has been linked with many countries in the East and the West, it is with Britain that the association is longest. Britain gave us a Malaysian identity where once there was identification only with the little states where we lived. Britain also inspired our system of Government and left the rudiments of an administration which we have built up with great enthusiasm, although perhaps un wisely.

5. I can go on listing British contributions to Malaysia in various fields but I think what I have said will suffice

to indicate the strong links between Malaysia and your country.

Madame Prime Minister,

6. Malaysians are by nature sentimental, and they value friendship and common history even though some episodes may not be palatable to them. But almost 28 years of independence has also taught Malaysians a great deal. The lesson that they have been forced to take to heart is that the world really cares very little for sentiments. Over and over again this lesson has been hammered into our heads. Indeed even now we are being taught that sentiments, friendship, past associations and the rest have very little to do with the relationship between nations or groups of nation. In other words we live in a pragmatic and rather calculating world and Malaysians, like everyone else, must appreciate and apply pragmatism if they are to prosper or, at least, to survive.

7. Malaysia became a member of the Commonwealth on achieving independence. The word Commonwealth implies a certain sharing of wealth between members. We took it quite literally at first. But we have since found out that the Commonwealth has nothing to do with wealth commonly owned. If any member wants anything he has to pay for it, one way or another. If non-members are prepared to pay more, then they have priority. The fact that the poor cannot pay as much, has nothing whatsoever to do with the wealth available in the Commonwealth.

8. It is because of this that Malaysia has relegated the Commonwealth to fourth place in order of priority in our foreign relations. We appreciate the ambience created by the knowledge of a common language. We do feel comfortable in surroundings which are often familiar. But beyond that there is really very little.

9. I am not saying this as an appeal to resuscitate the Commonwealth and its ideal. The Commonwealth as originally conceived is a creature of the past. We will, however, continue our membership if there is no objection. But let us not pretend that there will be a sharing of our common wealth. Each member has its own wealth or poverty, as the case may be, and it is absolutely free to do what it likes with either.

10. These things apart, I am glad to observe that your country, Madame Prime Minister, and mine get along very well, indeed. There are occasional hitches and glitches, of course, but these are no more than the usual ones found in the relationship between two sovereign independent countries. We have the usual machinery for negotiations and Malaysia will not resurrect past associations in order to influence the results of any negotiation.

11. Your visit here has afforded us an opportunity to know you better. As a Malaysian conservative I have admired you from a distance. Your tenacity and singleness of purpose are qualities that we need for ourselves here. We are a developing country and to develop we must face many challenges within and outside our country.

12. Learning from you we will persevere. We will not be deterred by adverse criticisms of our industrialisation programme, or of our political system or of our economic policies. In the final analysis it is the hard headed executives who make the decisions, not the self-appointed experts. We have found that despite unfavourable reports about us, there is no dearth of foreign entrepreneurs to invest or bankers to lend. Indeed the banks are forever asking us to borrow. There are not too many good borrowers these days. We run a tight economy here and we intend to live within our means. We do not want to be obliged to anyone. In the world of today no one owes anyone a living. We do not think the world owes us a living, underdeveloped though we are. By the same token we do not owe anyone a living. What we do for ourselves, including the cultivation of friends, will in the final analysis, be in the interest of our nation.

Madame Prime Minister,

13. I note that positive efforts have been made in the last few years to improve trade between our two countries. I refer in particular to the mission to Malaysia led by Lord Jellicoe, and the visits by Mr. Kenneth Baker and Lord Bellwin. In time there should be increased trade and more British investments in this country.

14. But in the meantime, there has been little change in Malaysia's share of the British market for several years. In 1983 Britain ranked as the eighth largest trading partner accounting for 3.1% of Malaysia's global trade. Britain accounted for 2.7% of Malaysia's total exports while Malaysia's imports from Britain constituted 3.5%. There is obviously a need to redress this imbalance.

15. Another matter of concern to us is the question of invisible trade. In July last year I had the occasion to address a seminar on invisible trade organised by the British Invisible Exports Council together with the Council on Malaysian Invisible Trade. I dwelt at length on that occasion on the importance of invisible trade to the Malaysian economy. In the face of rising deficits in the services account, serious and sincere efforts must be made by both countries so that the trade deficit should not be worsened by the invisibles for Malaysia. We do not expect trade to be balanced between every country but continuous and substantial imbalances should be corrected.

16. Recently the Malaysia-British Society was inaugurated in Malaysia and the British-Malaysia Society in Britain.

These organisations formed on the initiative of the businessmen of the two countries should contribute not only to greater business interaction, but also to a better understanding between Malaysians and the British. Hopefully the organisations would play a role in overcoming the glitches and the hiccups that may occur, indeed to prevent them.

17. In the sphere of education, I am happy to note that some British universities have responded favourably to our scheme to lessen the number of Malaysian students seeking places in their institutions. They are receptive to the idea of recognising courses for the early years of university education to be conducted in Malaysia. This way the students will need to study for a lesser period of time in Britain, thereby lessening the burden both to the British and Malaysian tax payers. This cooperation by British universities is much appreciated.

Madame Prime Minister,

18. We have had useful discussions this afternoon and clearly there is a substantial commonality of views between our two countries. In particular, your support and endorsement of our position on the issue of Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea is deeply appreciated. If Vietnam can invade, subjugate and occupy a weak neighbour with impunity, and retain the prize of its aggression, then the security of countries in the region will be greatly threatened. Such actions will establish an ominous precedent, as do the present dangerous situation along the Thai-Kampuchean border and within the Thai territory itself. The declaration of the International Conference on Kampuchea addresses itself comprehensively to a concrete programme which will permit the Kampuchean people to choose their own government. Malaysia will continue to support vigorously all efforts to restore peace and stability in our region—a prerequisite of which is the recognition of the rights and aspirations of the Kampuchean people. We look forward to your continuing support in this regard.

19. The situation in Afghanistan remains unchanged. Time and time again the United Nations General Assembly has called for the withdrawal of the Soviet forces, respect for Afghanistan's right of self-determination, restoration of Afghan independence and non-alignment and the return of the Afghan refugees to their homeland in safety and honour. Malaysia has firmly endorsed successive UN resolutions for a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan and will continue to do so. As in Kampuchea, we cannot accept the invasion of a weak neighbour in order to install a puppet regime in Afghanistan.

20. In West Asia the intransigence and increasing brutality of Israel is a cause of much concern to us. Despite the repeated killing of innocent people, and recently of two

newsmen, by Israeli soldiers, the Palestinians are still being pictured as the villains of the piece. It is this biased view of the West Asia situation that had made it an intractable problem. The West needs to understand that the Palestinian problem is not of their own making. It was not their choice to be made refugees over and over again. It was because their plight was ignored that they were forced to take to arms and violence. The West should understand that justice and fair play would do more for peace than the desire to atone for past anti-semitism.

21. We are seeing today an unprecedented arms race involving nuclear weapons. Enormous sums of money and resources are channelled towards the development and production of horror weapons. Having polluted the land and the sea, we see now an attempt to pollute outer space even before we have learned to use it for the progress of mankind. Against this backdrop, we are somewhat relieved that the strategic arms reduction talks are underway once again in Geneva.

Madame Prime Minister,

22. Another area of concern to the Malaysian Government is the question of the future of Antarctica. It is our view that all Mankind has a legitimate interest in that continent. It is manifestly unjust that a small group of countries have arrogated to themselves the management and exploitation of that continent. Malaysia is ready to cooperate with the member states of the ATCP with a view to finding an acceptable manner in which all nations may join hands in the peaceful administration of Antarctica and in keeping it as a preserve for the good of one and all.

Madame Prime Minister,

23. Once again I would like to express our pleasure at having you and your delegation with us and I trust when you return home you will bring with you fond memories of Malaysia and the friendliness of the Malaysian people as well as their readiness to come to terms with the realities of modern diplomacy.

24. Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, may I invite you to rise and join me in a toast to the good health of the Right Honourable Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Mr. Denis Thatcher and to the close and friendly relations between our two countries.