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SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE  
DATO SERI DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD  
THE PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA  
AT THE BREAKFAST MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF  
THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS IN NEW YORK  
ON FRIDAY, 30TH. SEPTEMBER, 1988  
AT 8.00 A.M.

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"The Challenges Ahead for Regional and  
International Cooperation: A Malaysian Perspective"

I am delighted to accept your invitation to this breakfast meeting today and to meet and exchange views with the distinguished members of the Council on Foreign Relations. Your corporate views and policies have an important bearing on world affairs. It is, therefore, with pleasure that I take this opportunity to exchange views with you and to share with you my perception of the challenges and prospects for international and regional cooperation and the challenges that lie ahead as we move into the last decade of this century. These are exciting and challenging

times which offer us many opportunities to surge ahead into the twenty-first century.

7. The decade of the 1980's began with much pessimism and gloom. Detente and international political cooperation seemed a phenomena of the past. Invading armies were already entrenched in Afghanistan and Cambodia. In both countries, the situation was seemingly irreversible. Relations between the superpowers were openly antagonistic.

8. On the economic front, trade tensions were on the rise within the free trading system. US-Japan trade disputes and their consequent impact on the economies of other East Asian and Pacific states posed a significant threat to Pacific stability. The inability of the industrial democracies to forge workable and practical solutions had serious consequences for us in the developing countries. For example, the forced appreciation of the Yen against the US dollar rapidly increased the size of the debt-burden of those of us who had Yen-denominated loans. At the same time, falling commodity prices, increasing protectionism and unmanageable debt burden threatened to plunge the global economy into total anarchy.

9. The mood of pessimism, at least on the political level, appears now to be lifting. Several important new developments have occurred. One of the most fundamental of these are the changes now underway in the Soviet Union. It.

Gorbachev's "perestroika" and "glasnost" have already yielded positive changes both within the Soviet Union and in the wider international arena. Some, of course, will argue that Mr Gorbachev is simply trying to improve the efficiency of the Soviet system in order to more successfully pursue longer term Soviet objectives. Whether this is true or not only time will tell. However, if events in China are anything to go by, glasnost and perestroika cannot but have a moderating influence on Soviet behaviour. Once the spirit of democracy and freedom is kindled, it develops a life and momentum of its own. Even the Russians accustomed as they may be to the rigidities of 70 years of 'controlled and unchanging environment' will not be able to stop completely the changes that will follow.

4. Already some of these changes have influenced the Soviet approach to super-power relations where a sense of realism seems apparent. The historic treaty abolishing intermediate range nuclear missiles is the first major advance in disarmament in recent years and holds out hope for a more positive attitude toward future disarmament proposals. Imagine what can be done to alleviate poverty and hunger throughout the world if only a fraction of the 2.5 billion US dollars a day spent on weapons are diverted to pressing social problems?

5. In Afghanistan, the Soviets are now in the process of withdrawing their occupation forces following the Geneva

records. This was unimaginable only some months back. The Afghan people, who have never really given in to foreign occupation, will once again be able to take their place among the free and independent nations of the world. In Cambodia, there are now strong indications that the Vietnamese are also ready to discuss withdrawal. While we need to keep vigilant, I think there are now good prospects for peace in Cambodia. In both cases, it will be a triumph for sanity in international relations. Interventionism, as a tool of state policy for extending control and influence, has now been discredited. This will have a sobering effect on other would-be aggressors and will be conducive to greater respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter.

7. All these developments, and particularly the emergence of better relations between the superpowers, will continue to impact positively on other as yet unresolved conflicts such as the Iran - Iraq war, the Palestinian issue and southern Africa. Already there are encouraging signs in the Persian Gulf and in Angola. Big power rivalry and interference in regional conflicts have always tended to escalate and prolong such conflicts. Now that the Big Powers appear to be moderating their behaviour, we can look forward to progress in resolving regional conflicts. To hasten this process, it will be necessary to bring China into the discussions either formally or informally. Increasingly we are entering a tripolar world and China's

new found armaments capabilities must be included in any considerations.

8. In Southeast Asia, the new Soviet stance has manifested itself in a new multisided effort to resolve the festering Cambodian problem. Once peace returns to Cambodia the whole of Southeast Asia will see a return to sound and mutually beneficial relations between the communist and non-communist nations of the region. The economic progress of ASEAN cannot but be impressive to the Governments of the Communist states of Indochina. They must realise that if they wish to taste the fruits of independence they will have to discard the rigid state controls of their socialist system. With that the last barriers against regional cooperation will disappear and a new era will dawn in Southeast Asia.

9. Of course, there is still the problem of Indochinese refugees. Malaysia and Thailand have been the countries of first asylum. Some 250,000 refugees passed through Malaysia alone. Still they keep on coming. Recently Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister visited Hanoi and negotiated the return of the refugees and stoppage of illegal departures from Vietnam. The Hanoi Government was most cooperative and we see a bright possibility that the refugee problem will be resolved.

10. On the whole, I am optimistic that Southeast Asia will manage the transition to the 1990's successfully. We

already have in place the organisational infrastructures for regional cooperation in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN. Since its inception in 1967, ASEAN has been a major catalyst for turning regional and bilateral swords into ploughshares. ASEAN member states have witnessed an unparalleled period of political cooperation and good neighbourliness. We have also institutionalised dialogue mechanisms with key trading partners that are the envy of other regional groups. Following our successful Summit Meeting in Manila, intra-ASEAN trade and economic cooperation should increase significantly.

11. Much has been said about the Pacific era. We in Malaysia fully subscribe to the belief that the Pacific region will displace the Atlantic as the economic powerhouse of the future. America is fortunate in being both an Atlantic as well as a Pacific country. So there will be no regression for you. But for the countries of the Pacific west there are exciting times ahead. Already four countries in the region have gained the status of Newly Industrialising Countries. Others are obviously hard on their heels. Much still depends on their access to the markets of America and Europe. But as they prosper they will become good markets for their own goods. Then prosperity will have a more sound base in the form of mutually supportive intra-regional markets. It will take time but it will happen.

137. My views on international affairs are, as you see, not very original. I am sure you are more interested in my interpretations of the Malaysian political and economic policies. You must have read some reports on Malaysia which makes you wonder what is happening to the country now. But then, if you were to look at backcopies of many international magazines you will find that Malaysia has never done well in anything. It was described as oppressive to the Chinese and Indians from the time when Tunku Abdul Rahman was Prime Minister right until the present moment. Yet Chinese and Indians from other countries in the region are prepared to smuggle themselves in and pay money to become permanent residents or citizens. Malaysia has often been accused of undemocratic practices because since independence in 1957 the Government had power to detain citizens without trial. Yet today's Government is described as undemocratic although it has released more detainees and used the Internal Security Act less frequently than previous Governments. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the current Government must be worse than previous Governments whatever the records may show.

138. The fact is that Malaysia has always been fair to all its citizens of whatever ethnic groups. It has always been democratic. It has never been anti foreign. It has always managed its economy and finances well and it has always been moderate in its international postures.

4. Today's Malaysia is no different. If people care to study facts themselves rather than listen to the disgruntled few, they would see that everything is in place. Some Malaysians of Chinese and Indian origin have emigrated but as we all know the Chinese and the Indians emigrate all the time. Many Chinese have emigrated from Chinese-ruled Singapore. So do they from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan even during the best of times.

13. The magazine 'Economist' warned about Malaysian Chinese taking their money out of the country. But Hong Kong Chinese, Taiwan Chinese and Singapore Chinese are coming into Malaysia to invest millions more. There is plenty of money in Malaysia at the moment and interest rates are very low. The movements of Malaysian Chinese and their money have been going on all the time and they will continue to go on irrespective of who the Prime Minister is.

16. Of late, there has been much talk of a trend towards dictatorship in Malaysia. These talks were started by people who lost in a bid for leadership of the governing party. The losers have managed to paint a lurid picture of the Prime Minister as a dictator in order to win support for themselves. They succeeded and won a by-election recently.

17. What does this prove? Which dictatorship allows itself to be openly vilified and to lose elections? As far as it

known, dictators who bother to hold elections invariably win with 99.9% of the votes cast in their favour.

18. The latest supposed evidence cited as proof that Malaysia is coming towards a dictatorship is the dismissal by the King of the Lord President of the Malaysian Courts. Judges may not have been dismissed in Malaysia before. But many judges have been removed here in the US, in Canada, in Britain, in Sri Lanka and elsewhere -- some for involvement in politics.

19. The Malaysian Government has no power to remove a judge. Only judges sitting as a Tribunal can recommend the removal of a judge to the King. In the recent case, six judges, including two from outside Malaysia, made up the Tribunal. It is ridiculous to suggest that eminent judges, particularly from foreign countries, would allow their names to be besmirched in order to promote the interest of a Prime Minister of a foreign country.

20. In the meantime, Malaysia is booming. The first half of 1988 shows a GDP growth of 9%. The much maligned Minister of Finance is now described as the architect of this minor economic miracle. Of course, the Prime Minister is still described as a profligate dictator bent on bankrupting the country. I do not mind who gets the credit and the plaudits. What is important is that despite all the

nasty things said about Malaysia, it is stable, democratic and prosperous.

21. Malaysia has a long proven track record. Those who have been to Malaysia can vouch for its democratic principles and practices. Certainly we are not perfect but which country is? However, if one looks at Malaysia objectively you will find that Malaysia is forward looking, progressive and a vibrant democracy. And it is going to stay that way for a long, long time.

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