

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

EVENT: THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY (MALAYSIAN BRANCH) LUNCHEON,
AT THE COMMONWEALTH HOUSE

VENUE: BUKIT DAMANSARA, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 12 MAR 1990

TIME:

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to thank the Royal Commonwealth Society, Malaysian Branch for inviting me to this luncheon to commemorate Commonwealth Day. I must say that it is indeed a pleasure to be here amongst members of this society, many of whom are luminaries in their own right and have over the years made various contributions towards the progress and well-being of our society.

2. Unlike some societies, whose propensity to engage in activities is very much dependent upon the prospect of their receiving some amount of publicity, this society, has over the years, been carrying out its tasks quietly but effectively. This is in no small measure, a positive reflection of the commitment and dedication of its office-bearers and members alike.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. This being Commonwealth Day, I think it would be quite appropriate if I were to touch briefly on this family of nations. It is indeed gratifying to note that the Commonwealth of today has shed many of the negative traits of its former self. Today, this grouping has initiated and adopted many programmes of action which reflect the aspirations of member countries, particularly the developing ones. We are beginning to share many of the things that we collectively possess. I also believe that perhaps it may not be long before we may be able to probably share the "common wealth" that the Commonwealth has.

4. Though it is true that in the past the Commonwealth had initiated various forms of cooperation for the benefit of its members, most notably the Colombo Plan and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, nevertheless over major international economic and political issues, the Commonwealth views were divergent and consequently ineffective. And more lamentable, was the indifference on the part of some senior Commonwealth members to the pleas and cries for understanding by the less fortunate members regarding their problems.

5. Fortunately, this rather sad commentary on the then state of the Commonwealth is no longer valid. Owing to changing circumstances and attitudes including the growing assertiveness amongst member countries, the grouping's more prosperous partners have come to realise that they have a moral responsibility to assist the less developed member nations which, in case we forget, they once depended upon for their wealth and power.

6. Malaysia is glad to note that due to this change in attitude, the Commonwealth has been transformed into a more cohesive and dynamic grouping. When in its early days, the Commonwealth was basically a forum in which the former colonial master held discussions with its ex-colonies, today it is an undeniable fact that the Commonwealth meeting is a gathering of equals sharing common ideals and aspirations over various matters. If I may say so, the decisions of the Commonwealth are now of some importance outside the organisation itself. And several countries even seem keen to join it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. The present day Commonwealth is now acknowledged as one of the more successful international groupings. Malaysia will continue to contribute to the Commonwealth and will work closely with member countries for the common good. Despite being a small developing nation, Malaysia is prepared to share her expertise and experience with member countries of the Commonwealth as well as with those outside the grouping.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. I am confident that the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society will continue to carry out its activities aimed at a more effective role in fostering better understanding. I wish the society and its members every success in their endeavours.

Thank you.