

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

EVENT: DINNER IN HONOUR OF THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER THE HONOURABLE  
MR. JOHN MAJOR

VENUE: SRI PERDANA, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 21 SEP 1993

TIME:

On behalf of the Malaysian government, and on my wife's and my own behalf, I bid you and Mrs Major as well as members of your delegation a very warm welcome to Malaysia. I hope your presence here today brings pleasant memories of your previous visits to Kuala Lumpur.

2. I am pleased that bilateral relations between Malaysia and Britain have remained close and cordial. Links that were established since the colonial days have over the years, been nurtured and expanded into a network of interaction between our countries, encompassing cooperation in the fields of education, trade and investment, tourism as well as defence.

3. As for trade and investment, I am happy that two-way trade between Malaysia and Britain had registered a 10 percent increase in 1992 despite prolonged economic recession globally. In Malaysia we still enjoy economic growth and this is achieved not only through pragmatic economic policies and hard work, but because of free trade and the still largely unrestricted access to world markets for our exports. The importance and value of the early conclusion of the Uruguay Round is therefore all the more compelling, not only for Malaysia, but also for Britain and other trading nations. Britain is a leading member of the European Community (EC) and I hope that you will influence the EC towards a successful and early conclusion of those negotiations before the end of this year.

4. The British private sector has always been active in Malaysia. I believe that their interest and participation in the Malaysian economy will be a catalyst for the continued expansion of our bilateral cooperation. Moreover, as Malaysia undertakes further industrialisation, new opportunities will also be created for economic cooperation between us. Lower Malaysian cost will contribute towards the competitiveness of British products, as of course it has contributed towards the products of other countries.

5. I understand that tomorrow, you will be visiting our national car factory. I am told that our Proton cars are popular in Britain and with the introduction of our new

Proton models we hope to secure a bigger slice of the British car market. We will be producing more new models and new makes and we hope the British market will accept them. I would also like to invite British companies to avail themselves of the facilities in our offshore financial centre in Labuan. I am gratified to know that when this facility was launched in London in February this year, the response was very encouraging.

6. As you are aware, we have just commemorated our 36th year of independence. Being a young nation, Malaysia's future lies with its youth and children. We cannot over-emphasise the importance of education to maintain and sustain the country's growth and development. Education has always been a strong component in our bilateral relations with Britain and there are currently more than 10,000 Malaysian students pursuing their studies in your country. Malaysia is grateful that British institutes of higher learning have been able to accommodate this large number of Malaysian students but the progressively higher cost of education in Britain requires new initiatives. In this context, the 'twinning' of British universities and colleges with Malaysian counterparts is indeed a partial way out. We look to other ways to continue our educational cooperation without too high a cost for Malaysia.

7. Given the healthy state of relations, let us focus our attention on issues and problems elsewhere; where we can individually as well as collectively, contribute to international peace and stability. Both our countries have deployed soldiers as well as civilians to various troubled parts of the world in support of United Nations peace-keeping activities. We have also jointly, through the Commonwealth in particular, encouraged the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa and its transition to a democratic, united and non-racial state. Britain is in a unique position to play a positive role in influencing events in the rapidly changing international political environment today.

8. In this context let me turn to an urgent issue that weighs heavily on our minds. I refer to the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bosnia-Herzegovina is at Europe's very own doorstep. This brutal conflict and crisis in the post Cold War period expose the limitations of European political cooperation as well as shame the vaunted Western advocacy of democracy, justice and human rights. I sometimes wonder if I can ever adequately express the extent of Malaysia's anguish and distress at the continued genocide and ethnic-cleansing conducted by the Serbs against the Bosnian Muslims. One story is worth recounting. It is the story that caused a staff member of the U.S. State Department to resign in protest over the passivity of U.S. policy in Bosnia. It is the story of how a six year old child was repeatedly raped by Serbs in front of her mother, and the mother was not allowed to help her child for two days until she died. What kind of people are we to accept

this kind of behaviour without raising a finger to prevent its recurrence. Yet this is not the sole instance. This is being repeated hundreds of times as Serbs, and now Croats, expand their territories by force of arms.

9. While Malaysia can understand Britain's concern that recourse to large-scale air strikes might jeopardise the United Nations humanitarian efforts and could escalate the fighting in Bosnia as well as precipitate retaliation upon British and other U.N. soldiers, our heart cries out to the tragedy of an entire race being wiped out in total disregard for even elementary decency. Malaysians may be once again over-reacting. But we cannot accept that it is right and just and democratic to sit by and watch while such brutish acts are committed.

10. May I take this opportunity to appeal to you, Mr. Prime Minister, to reconsider Britain's position before the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina is forever cemented in history as the blackest catastrophe of the modern world and a dark page in the annals of Europe and European civilisation. Given the British tradition of upholding respect for the rule of law and principles of international relations as well as its decisiveness, we hope and trust that your leadership in Britain and among the EC would bring influence to bear in meeting the challenge and putting an end to this ongoing holocaust. Eloquent speeches, noble declarations and appeals are not enough. There must be political will translated into resolute and credible action. Already there have been several threats made against the Serbs, but when they arrogantly ignored the threats, the Europeans backed down. Only action now will correct this loss of credibility. You are sending the wrong signals to certain countries east of Yugoslavia, countries with a past history of violent acquisition of other peoples' territories.

11. Before concluding, I wish to register my observation of the flurry of activities involving significant visits from Britain to Malaysia in the last couple of months. The momentum in both directions will continue till the end of the year and culminate with the state visit of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to Britain in November. They are indeed a reflection of the healthy and positive state of our relations. It is my sincere hope that the existing strong framework of cooperation would be continuously developed between our two countries.