

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

EVENT: THE DINNER IN HONOUR OF H.E. RAFIC HARIRI, PRIME MINISTER
OF THE REPUBLIC OF LEBANON

VENUE: SRI PERDANA, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 23 MAR 1995

TIME:

It is with great pleasure that my wife and I welcome Your Excellency, Madame Nazek Hariri and the distinguished members of your delegation to Malaysia. I am delighted that Your Excellency is able to visit us as it was only a few months ago that we had the opportunity of meeting in Casablanca, during the 7th Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit.

2. I am confident that your presence here today will be an important beginning in our mutual desire to enhance the links in our bilateral cooperation which have been disrupted following the difficult years in Lebanon's political development.

3. Lebanon to our knowledge was very well developed and among the wealthiest countries in the Middle East in the days before the civil war. It was the region's financial centre and its playground, sophisticated and the epitome of sectarian tolerance. Its Airline was the pride of the region.

4. Then some segments of the population wanted more for themselves at the expense of the others. There was resistance to this and before anyone realised what was happening there was a full scale civil war with everyone pitted against everyone else.

5. Beirut was destroyed. Lebanon's rich economy was in shambles. People were killed and wounded. There was no security for anyone. Fear stalked the streets of Beirut and other parts of Lebanon.

6. When the Taif Peace Agreement was finally signed five years ago Lebanon was not even a shadow of its former self. We here were saddened by the tragedy that had fallen your country. And I am sure the Lebanese people must have wept tears of sorrow over the fate that had befallen their country.

7. But the most tragic thing of all is that, for the heavy price that was paid by all the Lebanese people from all segments of society, the Muslims of various sects, the Christians and the Palestinian refugees, no one had gained

anything more than they had before the war. Indeed everyone lost almost everything. The fighting, the killings, the hardship and the sacrifices were all in vain.

8. We hope, Your Excellency, that others in the Middle East and the rest of the Muslim world will understand the futility of violent conflicts and terrorism as instruments for correcting the ills of society, be they social, political or religious. Unfortunately, the lessons of Lebanon have taught the selfish, the fanatics and the terrorists nothing. There are still conflicts everywhere. Religious fanatics and extremists are still trying to bring down Governments by violence, while Governments, as expected, react with equal violence. People suffer. Economies stagnate or regress. Foreign powers take advantage. Muslims everywhere are derided and made the butt of cynical jokes. It would seem that Islam is the religion of chaos and backwardness, of intolerance and needless violence.

9. And in the end, if there is an end, the sufferings would have all been in vain. Violence, fanaticism and terror bring gain to no one. The massive losses of lives and property would all have been wasted.

10. Malaysia experienced a little of what Lebanon went through. We had to fight Communist terrorists for many long years. In 1969 there were rioting and violence in Kuala Lumpur, with many deaths and loss of property. The World Press reported that Malaysia was finished. Democracy had again failed in this Muslim-dominated country. Fortunately, Malaysians came to their senses quickly. Since then they have eschewed confrontations and violence. Together they built up the country which you see today. They now share much more wealth, peace and stability than anything that would have been gained if any in their community had won through violent confrontations.

11. Our experiences, yours and ours, have been good lessons for us. Would that they serve as good lessons also for other Muslim and non-Muslim countries which are now facing civil wars, violence and terrorism simply because some people think they can create a better world or better Governments if they can bring down the Governments of the day regardless of the law.

12. We are very happy indeed that your country's trials and tribulations are over. The process of reconstruction has now begun. I am sure that Lebanon, and in particular Beirut, will regain the former glory. We have heard of your plans for Beirut. As we have some experience in urban and rural development, we will be happy to exchange information and to participate in your reconstruction programmes.

13. As members of the OIC, Malaysia believes that the time has come for us to correct the image of Islam and the Muslims. Because of a variety of unfortunate actions on the part of extremists and deviationists who have been lumped as

Islamic fundamentalists, and the failures of some Islamic countries to achieve stability, peace and progress, our image at the moment is very much wanting. This is not the image of Islam at all. Lebanon and Malaysia are in very good positions to correct this image by showing true Islamic tolerance and justice for others not of our faith, and our capacity to govern and govern well a pluralistic society. We hope that we can work together on the task of revealing the true face of Islam and Muslims.

14. Your visit to Malaysia will, I am sure, provide you and your delegation with an opportunity to see for yourself the possibilities that exist for us to cooperate and work together for mutual benefit. At present, the level of economic interaction between our two countries is still minimal but the potentials are enormous. During our meeting this morning, we had together explored new ideas and new thoughts, particularly in the area of bilateral economic cooperation, to provide for a more substantive interaction between Malaysia and Lebanon. We have agreed that our interactions should not be confined only to the government but more so among our peoples and the private sector. Malaysia believes that the private sector can play a pivotal role in helping to transform the character of our economic and trade relations.

15. Lebanon and Malaysia share similar views on many international issues, in particular the struggle of the Palestinian people and the attainment of a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Many momentous developments have taken place in the West Asian region since the end of the Cold War. In Lebanon itself, we have witnessed the end of the civil war. But the issue of Israeli intransigence and continued occupation of Arab lands, including southern Lebanon, remains. Some 20 months ago, many believed that the signing of the Declaration of Principles between the PLO and Israel marked a fresh beginning in the efforts to resolve the conflict. Regrettably, the international community has yet to see peace take root in the region, in particular in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories. While recognising that there have been progress in some areas, the situation on the ground remains far from satisfactory.

16. Malaysia believes that progress of the peace process very much depends on the commitment and willingness of both parties in implementing all the provisions that they had agreed. The continuing expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied territories is certainly against the spirit of the agreement.

17. Malaysia, as I have mentioned, is opposed to all forms of extremism, violence and terrorism. We believe that violence will not solve problems. Violence only begets violence. We would urge Israel to demonstrate its sincerity and commitment to implement the remaining central issues, including the return of Golan Heights and withdrawal from

Southern Lebanon in order to maintain the momentum of the peace process.

18. I trust Mr. Prime Minister, that you, Madame and your delegation will have a fruitful and enjoyable stay in our country. The programme we have laid out for you will give a glimpse of what the Government and the people of Malaysia are striving to achieve in our quest for progress and prosperity. I hope Your Excellency and your delegation will bring with you fond memories of your short stay with us.