

SPEECH BY: Y.A.B Dato Seri Dr **Mahathir** Bin Mohamad
Prime Minister

EVENT: The Official Dinner In Honour Of H.E. Dr Kamal El Ganzouri

VENUE: Sri Perdana

DATE: 14 Apr 1997

TIME: 8.30 P.M.

It gives me great pleasure to warmly welcome Your Excellency and members of your delegation to Malaysia. I am confident that this visit is an important landmark in deepening and widening the close friendship that Malaysia and Egypt had established over the years.

2. In the spirit of Islamic solidarity and South-south cooperation, Malaysia and Egypt have also established the necessary legal framework to enhance our bilateral relations. Our two countries have signed trade, technical, scientific, cultural, economic, and air transport cooperation agreements. Currently, other new agreements are also being finalised in the areas of investment guarantee, wakaf and religious affairs, tourism, avoidance of double taxation, and science and technology.
3. However, in spite of all these avenues for co-operation, there is insufficient interaction in most of these areas between our two countries. Malaysia has always looked to Egypt as a leader of the West Asian/African bloc and we attach high priority to developing closer cooperation with Egypt. Yet we have not succeeded in realising the quantum and quality of cooperation that goes with such high regard.
4. It is peculiar that in spite of the long history of people-to-people relations, best exemplified by the thousands of Malaysians who have graduated from Al-Azhar and other Egyptian universities, this relationship is still stronger in spirit than in substance. Even today there are some 5,500 Malaysian students who make up the largest group of foreign students in Egypt. It is noted that many of these Malaysian students, instead of mixing with and learning from their Egyptian friends and counterparts, tend to keep to themselves, Malaysia has not fully benefited from them because of this tendency. It is also noted that among them there are those who, instead of studying and working have tended to opt for politicking, often with unwholesome consequences. These Malaysians are a blot on the good name of the graduates of Egyptian universities.
5. Still many graduates of Egyptian universities play an important role in Malaysia's development process. They inspire much respect and are a positive force in Malaysia's economic progress. While they should pursue Islamic studies they should acquire skill in other fields as well in the tradition of the great Islamic thinkers and scientists of old. With knowledge in other fields they would be able to achieve a much more balanced approach to religion and life.
6. Undoubtedly a great deal needs to be done in order to tap the full

potential of trade, economic and investment opportunities which have now taken centre stage in our national development plans. I trust that the members of the private sector in your delegation will establish linkages with their Malaysian counterparts.

7. Trade between our two countries has increased steadily over the years but the value of trade is still small and confined to only a few products. Malaysia views Egypt as the ideal trading partner and as an excellent channel for reaching other Arab and African states.

8. In view of the above considerations, Malaysia would encourage its private sector to explore opportunities for trade in Egypt.

9. The Malaysian Government's view positively the chamber-to-chamber cooperation and the MOU concluded between the National Chambers of Commerce and Industry Malaysia and the Egyptian Businessmen's Association in 1993.

10. I am encouraged that Egypt has already embarked on economic reform and structural adjustment with encouraging results in recent years. The call for greater foreign investments, moves towards privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation affecting various industries, services, banking, manufacturing and information technology are in consonance with the worldwide trend towards globalisation. The inauguration of several Egyptian national projects lately, including the Toshka Southern Valley and Sinai Technology Valley indeed offer opportunities for cooperation from abroad.

11. As members of various international organisations, including the non-aligned movement, the OIC, and, more recently, the Development Group of Eight Islamic countries, Egypt and Malaysia have worked closely together on many issues of mutual concern.

12. Our countries have recognised that Islamic countries have the capacity to play a crucial role in creating conditions for global peace and stability. This cannot be achieved unless Muslims truly believe in Islamic brotherhood and cease to use Islam as an excuse for lulling other Muslims and undermining the political stability of Islamic nations.

13. In the Middle East region, the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict escapes solution because of Israeli duplicity and its high-handed ways. It is sad and most regrettable that Israel's actions which deserve the strongest condemnation are being condoned by certain countries. Israel deserves every kind of sanction and yet we see sanction being applied to weak countries for minor breaches of human rights.

14. Malaysia appreciates the active role that has been played by Egypt in the Middle East peace process. President Mubarak's untiring efforts to bring an end to the conflict in spite of Israel's intransigence deserve the whole-hearted support of all of us. Malaysia will not have any meaningful relation with Israel until that country learns to honour agreements entered into by its legitimate Government.

15. Our two countries have always enjoyed close and brotherly relations. We are optimistic that we can work closely with you to further

strengthen our political, trade and economic relations. I must reiterate, Mr. Prime Minister, that your visit will open a new era of cooperation that will contribute significantly to the strengthening of our bilateral relations in the years to come.

16. May I now invite you to join me in a toast to H. E. Dr. Kamal El Ganzouri, the Government and People of the United Arab Republic of Egypt and to friendship between Malaysia and Egypt.

FILE NAME: SP1404