

**SPEECH BY THE HON TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
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“Asian Leadership”

Firstly I would like to thank the organizers for the invitation to deliver a lecture of the Ho Rih Hwa Public Lecture Series on Asia Leadership. I hope I can do justice to this prestigious lecture series and also I hope not to offend anyone.

2. There can be no disputing the crucial role played by a leader in any organisation or effort. This is general knowledge. In today's world there is a belief that the potential followers would know whom to choose as a leader or leaders. This is the presumption on which democracy is based.

3. In theory, democracy allows the people to choose their leaders. And when they choose it must be because they know the qualities of the leaders chosen. And because they, the people choose them the leaders must feel obliged to them, and would strive to do what is good for them.

4. And so today democracy is the only system that is endorsed by the all powerful democrats. No other system is to be allowed. Failure to adopt the democratic system may result in punishment not just of the parties refusing to adopt democracy but of all the people, innocent or otherwise. Women, children, old people, the sick and the incapacitated, none are to be spared. They all have to be punished even though they have no means of choosing their leaders democratically.

5. And so we see today sanctions being imposed, blockades, invasion and occupation of countries which are not democratic. It does not matter if all these actions do not touch the actual people resisting democracy. The ordinary people must pay, must suffer because they are not able to overthrow their undemocratic Governments.

6. It does not strike the democrats as odd that democracy should be imposed by force from outside and not brought about democratically from inside. Killing men, women, children, the old and the infirm is justified, starving and depriving them of medical treatment is justified because their death would bring about democracy. Murder, assassination, destruction of dwellings, are all justified if the objective is to install democratic Governments. If all these fail to do so, it is still justified because the intention is to achieve democracy.

7. Look at Japan. Two nuclear bombs and they have become fully democratic. So why not starve a nation, deny them medicine, bomb and rocket them if the end result is democracy, Government of the people, by the people and for the people. The people here refer to the approved people, certified by the promoters of democracy.

8. But is it true that the right to choose your leaders will create heaven on earth for your society or country?

9. There is evidence that many Asians have not understood what democracy is all about and what can result from the democratic process.

10. In the sophisticated old democracies of the ethnic Europeans, the fact that anyone can become a leader has not resulted in everyone trying to become a leader. Their people are quite restrained. They form two or three parties and there is a chance that one party would get majority support and form a Government that has credibility and authority.

11. But Asians tend to present dozens of parties because there are hundreds who would like to become leaders. What happens is that the people who will vote become divided into dozens of factions, perhaps because of ideologies, but more often because of race or religion or constituent states or regions, or because the potential leaders have the wherewithal to finance the setting up of a party.

12. Elections may not result in the best candidates winning. Bribery, thuggery, bad-mouthing, religious trickery, nepotism and numerous other unsavoury ways can bring victory to the candidates least suitable to lead a nation. On the other hand the voters are not averse to using threats and demanding bribes either. They make ridiculous demands especially from the candidate on the Government side. Their constituency or their village or their local leaders or they themselves would demand for prestige or unnecessary projects. They demand for money to defray the cost of campaigning which too often goes into their own pockets. The party machinery may suddenly shut down in the middle of the campaign. Then lots of time, money, promises have to be made to get the machinery going again. Local leaders with influence or candidates who are not selected would threaten to withdraw the support of their personal followers. And more money will be needed.

13. In a close contest every vote counts. Candidates and their parties just cannot afford to alienate anyone. Losing one supporter must be replaced with two, one for not getting his vote and one for his vote being given to the opposition. It does not matter if personally the other candidate is totally unsuitable to lead, he would be supported to spite the candidate who failed to cater to the demands and threats by a few voters. It is not the majority who wins. It is the cunning few who determine the victor in a closely contested fight. That is democracy.

14. In Malaysia political campaigns never stop. It goes on from the announcement of the result of the current elections to the time when the campaign for the next elections begins. One party campaigns during communal prayers on Friday and every time there is a communal daily prayer. It goes on from dawn to midnight and beyond, where the party rules. The loudspeakers blare out hatred for the Government it is opposed to.

15. It should be ignored, some believe. But the hatred preached and the fear of retribution in the afterlife affects the deeply religious among the audience. They become so convinced of the punishment that they would get, that no explanation that this is just politics and vote fishing, would make any impression on their minds. And so at elections they would vote in not the people who can lead but the people unscrupulous enough to mislead. And so the Government and the Government party must also campaign every day during the years in between elections. There is no end to political campaigns. It saps the energy and occupies the time of everyone, energy and time that should be spent on governing and developing the nation.

16. With so many parties contesting in some countries and with bribery, bad-mouthing, fear etc the democratic election is unlikely to result in a strong Government of good leaders.

17. When Governments are weak, even good leaders cannot produce results. They are perpetually worried whether they would get support or not for whatever they are doing, whether they would be re-elected to finish their work. Weak Government may be overthrown by street riots, strikes etc. The result is democratic anarchy. The people suffer from too much democracy.

18. On the other hand some Asian countries are so fearful that leaders might become dictators that they provide constitutionally one term for each leader. Only a miracle worker of a leader can produce results in one term. It is impossible for a developing country to develop if, every five years, a new policy and plan is launched by a new leader to make a mark for himself. Merely learning about leading a nation, knowing the routines and the procedures would take a year. It would take two years more to formulate and get parliamentary support for the policy, if at all. And the two years that are left are not even enough to launch the plan or policy, much less to see results.

19. Some Asian countries of course allow an unlimited number of years for the leaders to lead. And the people give the party and the leader good majorities to form Governments at each election. Some suspect that these Governments are not democratic because the Government party remains in power for so long. But if the people choose to return the same party and the same leader, is it not a democratic right of the people to do so, provided proper elections are held? No leader or party which is absolutely rotten will be returned again and again by the electorate.

20. Democracy is perhaps the best system to throw up good leaders. But as has been pointed out there is no guarantee that it will do that.

21. In Asia there are countries which are undemocratic but have managed to throw up leaders who provide good leadership. These countries are or were stable and achieve encouraging growth. There can be no gain saying that their people enjoy a continuously better life materially speaking. But today these countries have come under tremendous pressure to democratise. They must allow their people to choose the leader.

22. Unfortunately because of poor understanding of the democratic system, the people and the leaders of these new democracies only succeed in producing anarchies. In Iraq for example the state of affairs today cannot truly be said to be better than when it was not democratic. There is literally a civil war going on. Between the anarchy and the military campaigns of the invaders more innocent people are being killed and maimed. Life is much more miserable now as everything is in short supply, the utilities are not working properly and the economy is regressing. It will take several decades of stability to rebuild Iraq. And there is no way of ascertaining when stability would be achieved.

23. The invaders have foisted an undemocratic Government on Iraq despite all their talk that they want to achieve a regime change so that Iraq will become democratic and

trigger off a wave of change in the Middle East, a part of Asia. Seeing what is happening in Iraq, it is not likely that the other countries would adopt democracy. If there are free elections the likelihood is that violently anti-American factions or parties would gain power. And the Americans would not like this. And new attempts will be made to effect regime change.

24. The great liberal democratic leaders of the ethnic Europeans have as usual missed the objective of the ideology and consider the ideology as the objective. Thus the wars and the killings of millions because they forgot that socialism and communism were invented for the good of the people and not that the people must be sacrificed for the good of these ideologies. It took the ethnic Europeans 70 years to realise that they had reversed their priorities.

25. Now they are doing the same. People are being sacrificed so democracy can be practised. Even when an undemocratic system delivers a good life it has to be destroyed to give way to democracy, whose workings are not understood properly, whose results may be worse than the system it displaced.

26. Undemocratic Asian leaders in the distant and the recent past have actually been instrumental in dragging their countries and their people kicking and screaming into the modern world. The Meiji Emperor of Japan, the Kings of Siam, Chiang Kai Shek of Taiwan, Deng Xiao Peng of China, Park Chung Hee of South Korea have all been authoritarian rulers of their countries. It is doubtful if they would have achieved the changes in their countries had they been elected leaders precariously clinging to power. But for these autocratic leaders, there would not be today any talk about democracy. Their countries would be wallowing in poverty and ignorance.

27. Lest the ethnic Europeans smirk over this remark, they should look back to their own feudal days when they seized chunks of the world to enrich their countries without democratising their colonial territories. And they still believe that if democracy for other countries cannot be achieved through democratic means, then they are entitled to use force, to starve and kill people, to destroy whole nations so as to democratise these countries.

28. Admittedly some authoritarian Asian leaders are preventing their countries from making progress. But then many Asian countries are not developing because their leaders are too busy grabbing for power democratically or undemocratically, to be able to develop their countries. Their people might be free from Governmental oppression, free to change their Governments, but they are not free from poverty, from the dead weight of their under development. To compound this they are constantly being bullied and oppressed by the foreign liberal democrats who have made debt slaves of them.

29. Asian leaders and Asians in general have yet to achieve freedom of thought, freedom to look critically at the ideas and ideologies coming from outside Asia. They are still beholden to the ethnic Europeans. They are still Euro-centric. Many are apologetic because they believe they have fallen far short of the standards that the ethnic Europeans expect of them. They feel embarrassed if any in their midst refuse to conform, to accept the standards that they have accepted.

30. When the superiority of democracy is promoted they have nothing to say but that they will try. When globalisation, free trade and a borderless world were conceived they acquiesced. Yes, yes of course. Then came the rights of the powerful to interfere in the internal affairs of independent countries, to demand for weapons inspection, to insist on regime change, the right to impose sanctions, invasions and forcible democratisation. They have yet to differ, much less object. Some even lend support to undemocratic actions by the Europeans to democratise Asia.

31. Asian countries are now being classified as members of the Axis of Evil and that some sixty countries are being described as failed countries or rogue countries incapable of governing themselves. Presumably they should not be allowed to remain independent. They must undergo forced regime change.

32. None of these ideas, concepts, perceptions, ideologies, systems etc has originated from Asia or has been enunciated by Asian leaders. Perhaps the only one over the last half century was that of President Sukarno of Indonesia, who propounded the idea of Neo-colonialism. But, in recent times no one.

33. We are all busy trying to conform to ideas coming from outside, from the ethnic Europeans. As with Communism, we will wait until the ethnic European become disenchanted with their ideas about democracy etc and jettison them before we dare to think of doing so.

34. And yet we must know that civilisation began in Asia. When the ethnic Europeans were still clothed in animal skin, Asians were already ruling vast areas under complex Government systems. Asian leaders promoted knowledge acquisition and the arts, built and led great nations and empires. But today Asian leaders wait to be led. We ask permission from the ethnic Europeans whether we should talk to each other. When the East Asian Economic Caucus was proposed as a logical move following the setting up of the European Union and NAFTA, we meekly waited for the official approval of the Americans. Even now we dare not call ourselves East Asian Economic whatever. Instead we hide behind the ASEAN + 3.

35. Asian leadership, since the Portuguese galleons and the Black Ships made their appearance, have lost the initiative. I don't know for how long more we will remain apologetic and defensive. Actually we are all hegemonised. We are not independent. Certainly our minds have already been colonised. And when the minds are colonised physical colonisation is not necessary.

36. I believe that Asians are waiting for a leader, a credible leader from a credible nation. Those who kowtow too much to the ethnic-Europeans should not be surprised if their people will rise against them, will commit acts of terror, or whatever. Asian leaders must realise this. The initiative has passed to the irregulars because the duly constituted Governments have seemingly failed their nations and their people. And because irregulars by definition are not conventional, their ways will be unconventional too. They cannot be fought in the usual way with conventional weapons in conventional wars. They will not enter into peace treaties to end the war. For them only the resumption of sovereign power and true independence, the restoration of rights and justice will stop their activities.

37. Asian leaders have a choice. Assume and assert true leadership, seize the initiative in terms of ideas and thoughts, and restore self-respect or face the humiliation of foreign hegemony and the contempt of their own people.