

**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD AT
PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES 4 “POLITICAL STABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY
AS KEY SUCCESS FACTORS IN DEVELOPING MALAYSIA” ON 12 APRIL 2006 AT
PERDANA LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION, PUTRAJAYA**

Political Stability is not just about stability, but it is also about sustainability. Sustainability is a key success factor to political stability. Nowadays we talk a lot about key success factors, for example, the key success indicators in developing Malaysia. I think we would all agree that political stability is good. Good in itself, and certainly good for the economy, and for developing a country. When there is instability, it is very difficult to focus on development. We have very many examples of these. It is very difficult to find stability in most multi-racial countries in the world. In fact it is very difficult to find them stable at all. There will always be conflict because of the differences among different parties.

I would like to make reference to Iraq. As you know, Iraq has three separate groups. There are the Sunni Muslims, the Syiahs and the Kurds. There was stability when they were all under a very strong ruler that prevented them from getting at each other's throats. Then again, there are those who think that the best way to run every country in the world is by depending on the will of the majority, in other words, through democracy. To them, democracy is the perfect solution for the world. In order to have democracy in this world, they are prepared to kill as many people so that they will be free to practice democracy. There is a contradiction here; in killing people in order to free them and enjoy democracy. As a result, Iraq is not the most stable country in the world and therefore it is very unlikely to develop.

Giving the freedom to the people to choose is a very noble thing. But whether it is practical or not is a different matter. Recently, as a result of much nudging and hints and forceful pressures, the Palestine authority had to have elections, democratic elections, in order to determine who should rule the country. Since democracy is about the will of the majority, the party that won was Hamas.

However, those who promote democracy through the killing of people do not like Hamas. When Hamas won, the promoters of democracy suddenly found that democracy is not good. They have refused to give Hamas even the tax that they have collected on

behalf of the Palestinians. To them, this denial of support for Hamas is totally democratic. There may be two million people in Palestine, but the millions of others in the so-called democratic countries have decided that they should not support this democratically elected government. We again see a problem that is created by this absolute faith in democracy. This situation will continue because some people want to promote and prove that democracy works for everyone.

Then there are other countries that are divided by religion. In North Ireland for example, although the people are all Christians, white and speak the same language, one group is however Catholic, while the other is Protestant. Due to this difference, they have been fighting and killing each other and instability reigns in the country.

In no way must one assume that if there is no racial conflict, or if there is no religious conflict, a country is stable. Today, a number of countries in South East Asia are not stable. There are street demonstrations, which are considered democratic, that happen at all times. These demonstrations can lead to instability. It is quite impossible to carry on life as usual during these street demonstrations. Shops will have to be closed, people will not be able to go to the shops, nor go to their offices, and they are not able to operate as usual. Their lives are disrupted. All very democratic, and on the contrary, very destabilizing.

Therefore, even if the people are of the same ethnic origin, even if they have the same religion, there is no guarantee that a country will be politically stable. The differences may be because of personal dislike for the current President or Prime Minister. It may be because of a dislike for the ideology of the party that is ruling the country. It may be a dislike for the lack of care shown by the government in power at the moment. Whatever the reasons may be, single ethnic countries with one religion can still become unstable. Malaysia has actually all the ingredients for instability. We are multi-racial, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural. Furthermore, we have tremendous disparities in terms of wealth distribution. And of course we are all followers of very different religions. All these factors would lead to instability. We know of course that Muslims in most countries do not seem to get along well with followers of other religion. Or if you want to look at it in another way; most people of other religions cannot get along with Muslims. As we all know most Muslim women cover their heads. To many people, it is a crime

wearing head covers. People cannot go to school in some countries if they wear head covers. This happens in very civilized countries.

Then of course, there are the economic disparities. The disparities can be found in the distribution of wealth. If we look into the history of socialism and communism, the reason why socialists and communists emerged was because of the extreme disparity in the wealth distribution. The capitalist entrepreneurs, owners of industries became extremely rich, while the workers were extremely poor. Karl Marx came along and told the workers that they were being exploited. That they are entitled to what they produced and therefore they should have more money. The only way to get more money is for them to take over the whole country and rule it. The socialists believe in nationalising the industries by the government, while the communists believe in killing the capitalists and taking over all that from them. But as we all know, the theory did not work. The socialists did not create heaven on earth for their workers, neither did the communists. In the end the whole ideology was given up.

What I would like to stress here is that economic disparities can cause instability and can result in ideas like socialism and communism. There will be ideas about expropriation of the wealth of the rich, which can lead to the nationalisation of the means of production. And as the communists are fond of saying, the means of production should be nationalised so that the wealth generated would belong to the government that would in turn distribute it fairly to everyone. That is the theory, but it does not work that way.

Racial feeling is also a very strong reason that can cause instability in a country. You feel an affinity for people of your own race and you identify yourself with them. Therefore, we can come to a certain conclusion that religion, economy, wealth distribution, race and of course, language and culture all tend to create a confrontational situation and tension amongst people. Malaysia has all these elements that can lead to political instability. The country has three different races, i.e. the Indians, the Malays and the Chinese who in turn practise different religions. Of course the cultures of these three different races are different, the languages are different and finally of course in terms of economic wealth, they are sometimes poles apart.

In Malaysia, despite the extreme differences, there has been no major political conflict. Why is there no conflict? When the British decided to create the Malayan Union, the Malays would have been deprived of their special position as the definitive people of this country. Definitive here means that this country was named after them and the Malays were given the definition to the land. It was then called Tanah Melayu, the Malay Land. However, the British proposed the Malayan Union where anybody who wanted to be a Malayan citizen could become a Malayan citizen. Because of this, and other reasons such as the demotion of their *Sultans*, the Malays rose against the Malayan Union. The Malays are very loyal people as you know; "*Melayu tak akan derhaka kepada Raja*", said Hang Tuah and they didn't like the idea of their Sultans being demoted to chief Kadis. That was what would happen had there been a Malayan Union.

However, the Chinese and the Indians were not against the Malayan Union. Undercurrents and sentiments among various races at that time were very bad. During the war the Chinese formed a guerrilla group; the MPAJA, the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army, which immediately upon the Japanese surrender, came out of the jungle and occupied several police stations and told the Malays in the rural areas that they at this point rule the country. They took over police stations and there were fights between the Malays and the Chinese and a lot of Malays and Chinese were killed.

The Malays fought against the Malayan Union, they insisted that this was a Malay land and nobody should become the subject or citizen of this country except themselves. Before this time, there was no citizenship in Malaya. There were only subjects of the rulers. Who were the subjects of the rulers? The Malays were considered as the subjects of the rulers. The Chinese and the Indians came to Malaya to work and they did not consider themselves as the subjects of the rulers either. Most Chinese in those days would fly the Chinese flag during their national days because they felt that they were still Chinese, from Mainland China. The Malays wanted a status quo where the Sultans will remain the rulers of this country and that the only people who would have citizenship privileges would be the Malays. So thereby began the Malay politics in those days and the foundations of UMNO.

The British then agreed to the Federation of Malaya, in which very few Chinese and Indians were given citizenship. The number was so few that in 1955, during the first election in Malaysia, only 11% of the electorate voters were made up of Chinese,

although at that time the percentage of the Chinese population in Malaysia was about 36%. That was why in the 1955 elections, 15 Chinese MCA candidates stood in the Malay constituencies, because there were practically no Chinese constituencies.

Tunku Abdul Rahman decided that confrontation between the Chinese, the Malays and the Indians was not proper and was not going to result in independence for Malaya. He came out with the idea of a coalition. The British may not give independence to a Malay-dominated Malaya or to a country where the Malays might be oppressive against the Indians and Chinese. In the 1952 municipal election, for the first time, MCA and UMNO joined together to contest municipal elections against Dato' Onn's IMP (Independence of Malaysia Party) and some socialist and independent groups. The coalition between UMNO and MCA worked so well that they defeated the other parties.

When you have one party that is open to many races, chances are that party will be dominated by one race. However, in a coalition, the identity and the representation of each part remains. A coalition was formed between UMNO and MCA and subsequently MIC where each party gets equal representation. There is no loss of identity, each party can speak for its own constituency, and because they can raise issues that affect their own supporters and their own race, they felt more contented.

And today the country has a coalition of 14 parties. Any party can walk out at any time, but the government will still remain and during the election campaigns, two thirds of the majority should belong to the governing party. If any party leaves the coalition, it will not be able to join another party to form a government. Therefore a coalition is a better formula than the single multi-racial party. This coalition was the result of the work of Tunku Abdul Rahman.

Hence, the one person most responsible for political stability in this country was Tunku Abdul Rahman. He promoted the idea of the coalition. He also spelt out the sharing power and wealth in this country. The Chinese are represented by the MCA, the (terms of) Indians by the MIC and we also have parties from Sabah and Sarawak.

There are also several Sabah and Sarawak parties which joined the coalition and what could have been called the grand alliance. Each ethnic group, whether Ibans or

Kadazans, can be in the main council to speak up for its constituency and supporters. They are in the main council of the party that is Barisan Nasional. Every party has three representatives. And at meetings they are free to voice their opinion and to speak up for their own particular group. Clearly every party has its own problems. There is no one group that is very happy with what it has. One of the essences of sharing is that you don't get one hundred percent. You clearly have to share the economic cake. You have to give slices of the cake to everyone. And to give slices of the cake to somebody else means you have to make some sacrifices.

So, when you have a coalition you have to share. Otherwise it will not work. However, the sharing is not always equal. Some will get more, some will get less but nobody will get one hundred percent. This is a very important principle. You can only share if you are prepared to give something up. And this principle of sharing is what has enabled us to remain politically stable. Without political stability there will be no development, no economic growth of the country and we will become poor. So what will the person who gets one hundred percent of the cake get? In the end he will get a shrinking cake. In the end of course he gets nothing. So the choice is between sacrificing slices of the cake so that the cake would grow and each slice can be as big as the original cake or to take one hundred percent for yourself and find that the cake gradually shrinks and becomes nothing.

This political stability was engineered, shaped by Tunku Abdul Rahman and continues to grow under the different Prime Ministers, Tun Razak, Tun Hussein and myself. Most people are moderate but there are extremists to the right and the extremists to the left. And these people do not understand why there is stability in this country. They think that they can continue to make demands. There are some Malays who do not welcome the use of English for teaching Math and Science claiming that Malaysia is entirely a Malay country. That is the extremist among the Malays. We also have extremists among the Chinese who forget that this is Malaysia and not China. These are the people who want one hundred percent of the cake and they are not going to get it, fortunately for us. A majority of the people in Malaysia have accepted that in order to remain stable we have to share and to sustain that stability, we have to continue sharing. We will have to reject extremists in each racial group in each party that we have in Malaysia.

When you talk about political stability, you have to try and eliminate the differences as much as possible. We would like to create a Malaysian nationality where we can forget our racial origins. When asked who are you? (The answer will be) I'm a Malaysian. However, this will take a long time. Effort has been made. Firstly, of course we wanted everyone to go to the same schools. But the idea of a vision school has not taken off really. I hope that one day it will take off, because if we don't meet each other you cannot really love each other. Like the Malays say, "*tak kenal maka tak cinta*".

You won't lose your own identity. You'll still remain what you are. Because when you go home, you go home to almost a different country. But I'm happy to say that today Malays handle chopsticks with great skill. They could even lift mushrooms, very slippery, with chopstick. That shows that how far they have gone to integrate. But I would like to see more Chinese eating with their fingers. In Kedah, they did that all the time before. But nowadays they have gone the other way. They use chopsticks. In Kedah, Chinese used to eat with their fingers. It is because Malays ate with their fingers. So, once in a while perhaps you will have a party where the Chinese and the Indians will sit together and eat with their fingers on *daun pisang*.

But we are sensitive and therefore we can still live together and achieve political stability. Now I think I have said enough about why we have political stability in this country. Mainly, it is the realization that when we live in any place, we have a need to share and when we share and make sacrifices, we will have stability. If you think that you want to take everything for yourself there will be no stability. So that is the main factor, the key success factor for developing Malaysia.