

**SPEECH BY TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD  
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**“Envisioning a New World Order and its Implications on the Digital Age”**

1. Firstly I would like to thank the Seoul Digital Forum for this invitation to speak on Envisioning a New World Order and its implication on the Digital Age.

2. In my view envisioning is not about wishful thinking, or planning about what the future should look like.

3. Envisioning is about guessing or trying to foretell what the future is likely to be like, about predicting the future based on what we know from our observation of the happenings in the past and at present and upon the trends and where they are likely to lead us. No crystal ball will be needed for this but long experience may help.

4. For centuries now we have been living in a Eurocentric world. Our thoughts and our ideas, our values, systems and ideologies, our overall behaviour are largely due to European influence if not of European origins. The way we conduct our lives and we dress are basically European. The way we manage our economy and our Governments are European, including of course the belief that Democracy is the only form of Government that everyone must have.

5. And when the Europeans went to war with each other the whole world was dragged in. Like them we have come to believe that war is a way to settle dispute between nations. And like them we expend huge sums of money on armaments. This must have a bearing on any New World Order.

6. But not all the influence of the Europeans is bad. The greatest contribution of the Europeans to the world is the introduction of systematic and universal education. Prior to this education in even the most advanced non-European civilizations was about religion and philosophy. They were important but they did not directly lead us to progress and development. It is the Europeans who introduced what we may call secular education in which the focus is on facts and scientific truth together with mathematical accuracy rather than on spiritual and social values. True much of this knowledge originated in Asia but the separation between truth and fantasy was made by the Europeans.

7. As secular education spread throughout the world the mystery of progress and development was resolved and it became possible for the rest of the world to develop. To succeed in life one no longer had to rely on omens and fate but one can largely design the route by accessing the knowledge of the properties and the character of the resources around us.

8. Secular education is a great leveller and soon the rest of the world was able to catch up with the Europeans. Very quickly the East Asians in particular became able to do almost everything that the Europeans can do. Mastery of science, technology and mathematics enabled East Asians in particular to grow their industries and develop their countries until the gap between them and the Europeans was largely reduced. As we shall see this equalisation between the capacities of the countries of East Asia and Europe will affect the shape and character of the new world, and the New World Order.

9. When Japan was defeated in the last Great War the condition imposed by the Europeans on Japan was that it may not spend more than 1% of its GDP on its defence forces. That was 1946 when Japan was bankrupt because of the war. 1% of Japan's GDP was practically nil. Today 1% of Japan's GDP is probably bigger than what most European countries spend on defence. Japanese military power would therefore match its economic power and by extension its influence over the world.

10. There is no such restriction on other countries. Thus if China for example spends just 1% of its GDP on defence it would already become a great military power. The likelihood is that China would spend more than 1% on defence. Again this means that China's influence on the world and its future would be very considerable.

11. Japan, China, South Korea, India have all become richer than in the heyday of European domination and their wealth and thus their military strength and international influence would be able to match those of the West. A military confrontation between East and West can literally destroy the whole world. This is no longer an option.

12. The European powers, in particular the United States, presently the greatest military power in the world must accept that things have changed. The old equation no longer holds true. Western hegemony cannot be sustained. Like it or not the ethnic Europeans must accept that if there is to be a New World Order, the emergence of the new powers in Asia must be given due consideration.

13. There must clearly be a sharing of power between East and West, between Europeans and non-Europeans. There is now much talk about this among the Europeans and also the Asians.

14. Ideally the world would like to see a smooth devolution into a new world order without need for confrontation and violence.

15. There has been some talk about a 2-G world, a world dominated by the United States and China. If our experience of the Cold War confrontations

between the United States and the Soviet Union is anything to go by, a smooth sharing of power by the two is not likely to happen.

16. The third world had only recently gained their independence. I do not think they would relish the idea of a world dominated by two great powers any more than they did a world dominated by one great power.

17. During the Cold War they had to seek protection from one or the other of the two superpowers. Will they now have to align themselves with one or the other of the 2-G powers?

18. Besides there is still Russia, a resuscitated world power. It is not going to stand on the sidelines and watch the United States and China shape the New World Order. It will want to play a major role and be one of those whose opinions must be sought as the new World Order is shaped.

19. If the weak nations are to be asked their preference in a New World Order, I think they would prefer there being no world powers dictating to them. They would prefer a truly democratic world centred perhaps on the United Nations with no one having veto powers. They would opt for decisions based on majority interest rather than the might of the nations. Unfortunately this is not what we can envision. The weak will still have to submit to the strong.

20. From what I think is the present situation and the trends we can envision a world that is slightly less Eurocentric but with European influence moderated somewhat by the emergence of powerful economies, and therefore military clout in Asia. If common sense prevails the transition would be gradual and smooth. But common sense has no place in international relations. The rivalry would still go on as each one of the three super powers manoeuvre to promote their interest. That is the way of the world.

21. How would this less Eurocentric World Order affect the Digital Age. The Digital Age would mature whatever the shape of the New World Order. This is because this new age has been able to resist pressures from the politically or militarily powerful. But over the years it has been noticed that the brains which move the Digital Age are very mobile and much influenced by the compensation they receive. As a result there has been an increasingly massive brain drain from the poor countries to the rich. Without doubt this will result in the poor getting poorer and the rich richer. The Digital Age is thus going to see an even more lopsided development and greater disparity between rich and poor.

22. In the rich countries the digital age brains may be employed in developing new ideas for the general good. It may also be for the development of unhealthy ideas such as the financial markets or for inventing newer weapons to kill more people more efficiently. All these are already happening of course but as the digital age develops, we can expect more abuses of the digital age brains.

23. Currently we are facing a financial and economic crisis. Some of the best brains have used the computer to work out schemes for making money without producing any goods or creating any employment. By promoting freedom of the market place they have been able to abuse the financial systems and to make literally tons of money for themselves. Unless Governments restore their power to rule, the Digital Age will bring frequent disasters to the world.

24. But of greater consequence is the implication of the Digital Age on the New World Order itself. Obviously the rich and the powerful would be able to make greater use of the knowledge of the Digital Age. This is because money would be needed to do research in the applications of the Digital Age knowledge. Digitization has enabled greater precision to be achieved in every product or application. Thus it is possible for satellites to be located in a pre-designated location in outer space and for a shuttle to dock with it even as the earth from where the shuttle-bearing rocket is fired moves in space. The mathematics of the Digital Age is clearly very precise because finding the moving space station in the vastness of space is far harder than finding a needle in a haystack.

25. Just as miraculous is the digitisation of sound and colour so that their reproduction is perfect and does not fade even over very long periods of time.

26. Cameras are now carried by satellites which can take very high resolution pictures of earthly objects including human beings. Already data on everyone is carried on microchips and electronic records. With the ability to take clear pictures from satellites there will be no privacy for anyone. The data collected on any person can be incriminating. The Government or the agency which collects these data will be in a position to blackmail.

27. It could be like George Orwell's "1984" where everyone would be under scrutiny, where Big Brother controls everything through the information that he gets. Already we are being finger printed, undressed electronically and scanned by powerful machines, and tracked through GPS etc. Will the three big powers and the other rich nations collect and store data on people so as to control them? What we are seeing today about the war on terrorism is not very reassuring.

28. These are the implications of having a New World Order in the Digital Age or of a Digital Age affecting a New World Order.

29. Actually present day human civilizations are quite unable to cope even with the technological advances which we have already achieved. Certainly our superior knowledge of science and technology today has not created for us a world order worthy of the human race, a world order of peace and prosperity. Currently we are facing a financial and economic crisis of unprecedented proportion partly as a result of the abuse of the knowledge of the Digital Age. As

the Digital Age advances, as new knowledge becomes available to more and more people, our capacity to bring order in a New World may not be adequate. The Digital Age has outstripped our civilizational capacities.

30. In envisioning the New World Order I wish I can be optimistic. Unfortunately I cannot. We are really still a primitive people. We still believe in killing people in order to solve our problems. Right at this moment scientists are busy developing newer and more efficient ways of killing people. This is the sum total of our mastery of the digital age, the age of knowledge, the age of science and technology.

31. There must be a radical change in our values and culture if we are going to see a New World Order enhanced by the advances of the Digital Age or a digital age benefiting from a New World Order.