

Oleh : DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB TUN ABD RAZAK
Tempat: JW MARRIOTT KUALA LUMPUR
Tarikh: 14-05-2004
Tajuk : LAUNCH OF PROMUDA EMBASSY SERIES II

I am delighted to have been invited to address PROMUDA this evening. I would like to express my appreciation to Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, the Organising Committee and the SAPURA for your kind invitation and hospitality. If my memory serves me correctly, this is the second occasion I am meeting with PROMUDA members. The fact that I have been invited to speak to you again must mean that I had something good to say the first time. And the fact that we have progressed from a poolside barbeque to a 5 star hotel must mean that either PROMUDA has secured richer sponsors, or that this relationship is growing warmer. I hope both are true. All things going well this evening, perhaps we can expect a weekend retreat in Langkawi or Pangkor for our next meeting.

The theme suggested to me for this discussion was "Malaysia's Place in the New World Order". As I pondered on the points I wanted to share with you this evening, I was struck by the fact that as young Malaysians, you thought not so much of our nation's role but rather our place in global affairs. You have chosen a noun that is often used to describe constitutional, figurehead monarchs and one that is often part of the grand diplomatic language of great powers. Whether deliberate or by chance, I wonder whether this theme is in fact, a reflection of the cold, hard reality of international politics, that Malaysia being a small developing country, can do precious little in the face of the New World Order. Our world today has become one where side agreements are struck quietly among the privileged and powerful few, and where superpower states are no longer embarrassed by their unilateralist tendencies. Rather their actions are justified as part of some higher, moral crusade against evil, repression and rogue governments.

I doubt very much whether this was the New World Order former President George Bush imagined when he addressed the US Congress back in 1990, on the brink of the first Gulf War. He spoke of QUOTE "a new era freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the

world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak." UNQUOTE. The reality today, after September 11, after the rise of Osama Bin Laden, after Afghanistan, after the liberation of Iraq, is that we are a long, long way from this New World Order.

The world was not always like this. In political and security affairs, there was a time when the United Nations could and did act in the interests of the majority of its members. The international community's constant reference to Resolution 242 of the UN Security Council, calling for the unconditional withdrawal of Israel from occupied Palestinian land, stands as a stark reminder of the moral clarity and political courage the UN once possessed. The work of UN peacekeepers in places like Somalia, Bosnia and East Timor has been vital to regional peace and security in those parts of the world, and is testimony to the deep humanitarian instincts of UN members.

However, the sad fact is that the UN today is enfeebled, marginalized and dominated by a few powerful members. Resolution 242 remains ignored nearly four decades on. There is no longer any embarrassment in the repeated use of the veto to prevent further censure and action against Israel. From the unheeded resolutions on Iraq that led to the coalition forces' occupation of the country, it is clear that the UN was ignored by both Saddam Hussein and the Governments that later chose to wage war against him. The UN is, for the time being, a broken system.

What then are the alternatives? For Malaysia, our best interests lie in an international order that is characterized by the following key elements: firstly, a political and security order that rests upon the scrupulous observance of international law and recognized norms of international conduct and secondly, an economic order that brings prosperity to the many and not the few.

In short, we believe that there is no alternative to a reinvigorated, if not reformed, United Nations. We need to restore the centrality of the UN in matters of peace and war among nations. This is an absolute must for Malaysia and the global community, because despite all its weaknesses and shortcomings, the UN remains our final hope and sanctuary. No other body can provide the all-important

legitimacy for military actions in the international arena. No other body gives as much voice for the weak and the poor. Indeed, the UN is even more important today, to restore some balance to the prevailing unilateral, hegemonic order of the world. The Security Council, flawed as it may be in its structure and processes, remains the only workable forum that forces the developed and developing world to consider collective action on matters of global concern, or face condemnation for failing in doing so.

Even as we campaign for the centrality of a reformed UN, we must also defend international law and champion international norms. Without either, we descend into anarchy, and the weak will be even more at the mercy of the strong. There are those who believe that it is acceptable to work around or outside international law and conventions, as long as their actions are guided by good leaders and underpinned by good intentions. Delivering freedom and promoting democracy to oppressed peoples are also justified as valid reasons for extra-legal intervention.

Such views have been used to support the actions of a number of powerful states. However, ignoring the rule of law in favor of some higher claim, some greater good, is a dangerous thing. The rule of law - like a man's integrity - is not subject to partial diminution or selective application. It is for this precise reason that Iraq remains ungovernable to this day, even when its people have been freed from Saddam's tyranny. The previous regime did not practice the rule of law. The current occupation forces did not appeal to it as a basis for entering Iraq. We now know that US military personnel in Abu Gharib demonstrated a criminal disregard for the rule of law and the Geneva Convention. The rest of the world is shocked but perhaps not surprised. Responsibility is acknowledged and apologies are made at the highest levels of the US Government, but business continues as usual.

Having already forsaken the blanket of international law long before Iraq, the US is in danger of losing its moral authority as the only remaining cover for its unilateral actions around the world. Today America stands dangerously naked in the eyes of the world, and it is not a pretty sight. I believe this is a time for deep introspection in America. I hope the US will eventually return to the fold

of the United Nations and make the UN once again the rightful guardian of world peace and security.

In a limited way, Malaysia can help to bring about a return to the golden age of a world community brought together by shared responsibilities and interests. We must work tirelessly, both on our own and in concert with others, to foster a return to such an order. In this regard, we are only too mindful of the fact that as a small developing country, Malaysia has limited capacity to influence, much less reform, the global political, economic and social order. In an international order where economic and military might have always been the primary determinants of power and influence, Malaysia can achieve little by itself.

While we recognize our limitations and place in the world, I believe Malaysia has a pivotal role to play. We can accomplish much by working with others who share our interests, values and goals. We must therefore continue to rely heavily upon the political and diplomatic instrument, and embrace, in particular, regionalism and multilateralism. We empower ourselves and make our voices heard and heeded by working in concert with others. In numbers we multiply our influence and balance the weight of larger powers.

It follows then that we must continue to strengthen and develop regional and multilateral organizations such as ASEAN, the East Asian process, APEC, the ARF, OIC and NAM. Few countries share Malaysia's strategic position at the intersection of all these organizations. Fewer still have the political strength and economic resilience to bring about systemic change. ASEAN should remain our core regional grouping, and our springboard for wider engagement on the global scene. The debate around the efficacy of ASEAN should be made sharper and more focused around what goals we can achieve with concerted effort and political will, and how will we go about achieving them in a timely manner.

East Asian cooperation is a recent initiative, and there is much to do especially in the economic sphere to make it a regional grouping on par with Europe and North America. Malaysia has traditionally enjoyed close ties with Japan, with Tun Dr Mahathir being one of the most recognized non-Japanese leaders in that country. We must continue building on this relationship in years to come. We have a long and

historic relationship with China dating back to the late Tun Razak - under Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah, we are focused on expanding this relationship, not only by deepening our trade and investment links, but also by bringing personal relationships between our leaders to an ASEAN level of intimacy and understanding.

We must strengthen our ties with the rest of Asia as well, beginning with India. With a roti canai eating population that vastly outnumbers Malaysians of Indian origin, and an enduring interest in Hindi films and sound tracks, Malaysia can and should be one of India's closest partners in economic growth, cultural exchange and social development.

Along these same lines, it is equally opportune for Malaysia to renew our friendships with our western counterparts with whom we share close social, historical and educational ties - the UK, Australia, New Zealand, France, Canada and the United States. But we must do so without abandoning our principled positions. Malaysia's relationships with these countries run strong and deep. They continue to be important trading partners as well as a major source of investments and technology. Because we know each other well, we have our ups and downs. Sometime we have major differences. At other times we are in complete agreement. Over time we could become stronger friends. Strangers and mere acquaintances on the other hand, are too polite to have arguments.

We must continue to fulfill the APEC and ARF agendas, but with a balanced orientation that gives due weight to the economic concerns of developing countries and the non-military security challenges that confront the Asia Pacific region. APEC needs to find its true calling beyond just being a convenient excuse to bring together political and business leaders from both sides of the Pacific. The ARF must find ways to enhance security cooperation without impacting the sovereignty of its members. We must also seek mechanisms to address broader and perhaps more basic economic and social challenges that, if left unattended, could seriously impact our collective security in sudden and unexpected ways.

The OIC and NAM movements need to be made more credible and influential in world affairs. Our recent agreement in NAM to engage civil society institutions in the Palestinian cause is an important step to galvanise world public

opinion against this dangerous slide towards anarchy. At the same time we should also direct more of our interest towards the internal challenges facing the Muslim and developing worlds. We must tend to our own houses more, and heal the rifts and tensions amongst us. We ought to be bound together by a tighter economic agenda, pooling our resources, expanding our trade and sharing our experiences. Malaysia's chairmanship of both organisations allows us to do much more, but only if member states agree that there is much more to be done.

If global politics and security have strayed away from the spirit of multilateralism and now require urgent corrective action, the global economy has perhaps suffered less from this shift. Countries large and small, developed and developing, with minor exceptions, appear to recognize that the forces of globalization and liberalization are here to stay, and if properly harnessed can bring much benefit. However, these forces will impact different countries differently.

Regardless, we must strive in earnest to build a fairer and more equitable global economic order. Though Malaysia itself is not doing too badly in terms of income distribution and growth, global inequities are growing, not declining. According to the UNDP, more than 50 nations have become poorer over the last decade. Many have seen life expectancy plummet due to HIV/AIDS. Some of the worst performers - often torn by conflict - are seeing school enrolment shrink and worsening access to health care. And nearly everywhere, the environment is deteriorating. For many parts of the world, it has been a losing battle. We must reverse the trend, or face mounting human, political and security catastrophes.

New rules are being continually devised and refined to manage global flows of trade, investment and funds. It is absolutely vital for the survival and well being of the developing economies that our interests are safeguarded and that we secure a fair deal. Already we have lost critical ground in the setting of agendas and rules, particularly in the WTO. We can and should come together to mount credible responses to some of these challenges, but ultimately, it is incumbent on political leaders to chart a path that will ensure the widest group of its citizens are able to make the most of an increasingly open and interconnected global economy.

I have shared with you my perspectives on Malaysia's role in world affairs. However, our ability to function effectively and contribute towards the emergence of a better world order will ultimately depend upon the resilience and strength of our domestic political, economic and social order. We will not have the capacity to act if we are politically unstable, economically weak, and socially fragile. Our first priority must therefore always be our domestic agenda. Many countries envy the political stability we have achieved without sacrifice to our democratic principles.

The results of the last General Election has made it abundantly clear to the world that Malaysia's democracy is vibrant and her Government remains rock solid. We have also shown that militancy and radical Islam can be defeated through the ballot box without resorting to the use of force. We must value and nourish this stability, for only with stability can we give our undivided attention to the enormous economic and social challenges before us. Chief among them are the need to manage an return to fiscal balance while encouraging higher levels of capital formation by the private sector; charting a plan for long term and sustainable growth opportunities in specific sub-sectors of the economy; revitalizing the education sector to meet the twin objectives of national unity and human resource development; and instilling a higher level of performance, accountability and service in the public sector and in areas of the economy where the government has influence.

In the words of Winston Churchill, I have delivered a long speech this evening, because I have not had the time to prepare a short one. The issues are complex and the solutions are not straightforward. In the final analysis, Malaysia occupies a unique place in this new world order. Our role is onerous and yet one that we have shouldered well in the past. I am confident we will be equal to the task before us. Let me end by saying that I look forward to discussing some of these thoughts with you during the question and answer session.

I thank you.

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
PUTRAJAYA