

REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
and the PACIFIC
COMMUNITY

Selected Speeches by
DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD
Prime Minister of Malaysia

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Volume 1

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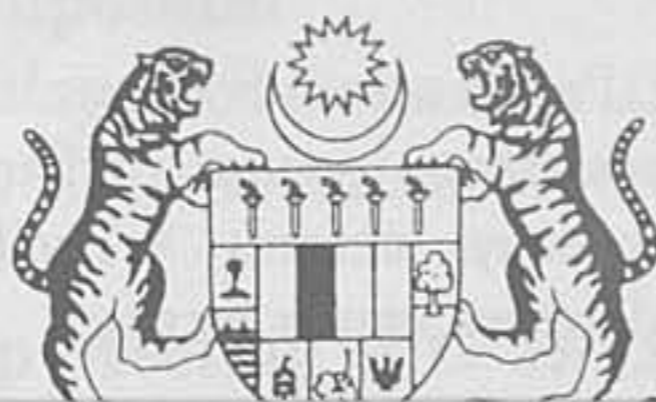
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PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA

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The United Nations World Summit For Social Development

(Contradictions in Development)

Copenhagen, Denmark, 11 March 1995

Although the 50-year-old Charter of the United Nations begins with the words “We the peoples of the United Nations...”, this is, arguably, the first time that we meet at this level to discuss the common people and their problems; their social development. That it has taken us 50 years to do this is a measure of our commitment to the lot of the common people and an illustration of the failure of multilateral efforts, derailed for over five decades by the ideological battles of the Cold War. That confrontation, usually on someone else’s soil, has undermined most of the social action plans of the UN agencies. International development efforts became predicated on the degree of support that developing countries gave to either of the two superpowers. Our regions became cockpits for superpower manipulations and their fields of battle. The developing countries and their people become mere marionettes.

The wreckages, the pain suffered and the injustices inflicted, have left many of these countries crippled, incapable of making the necessary adjustments to meet present and future challenges.

Afghanistan, Somalia and many others are among the countries that have been pulverised; their infrastructure obliterated, their people in total disarray. The marginalisation process continues even now, despite strides in science and technology.

As for the peoples of the world, the vast majority have suffered not only deprivation, but more importantly, loss of human dignity. We are looking at over one billion people caught in a spiral of abject poverty that relegates them permanently to the status of sub-species. The United Nations is faced with an enormous outflow of some 19.7 million international refugees. Admittedly, migration is a nightmare for the developed countries, but migrations also cause severe dislocations and drain the developing countries of essential human resources. It does not help that the developed countries discriminatingly welcome the skilled and the educated.

Even as the international community takes the first fateful steps into the next millennium, we cannot but be troubled by the emergence of "failed states" in the wake of the break-up and breakdown of nations. The magic of the midnight hour at the moment of independence cannot be sustained. Countries stumble and retrogress, and the people's expectations remain largely unfulfilled; paradoxically, at a time of qualitative scientific and technological advances which should have benefitted the needy the most.

Even among the developed countries, elements of a failed state can be detected. Contradictions and polarisations have surfaced which reflect possible flaws in the national direction. We see serious poverty, homelessness and joblessness, and rampant crime and drugs in pockets of these societies, even in the most advanced countries. For these countries, lessons too need to be learnt; change and adjustments should apply to them as well, especially those relating to unbridled and unsustainable high incomes and consumption, and the breakdown and decline in the moral values of their society. These countries, supposedly locomotives of world growth and paragons of standards, would do well to effect these changes instead of seeking to hold the high ground and preach to others.