

PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES 7

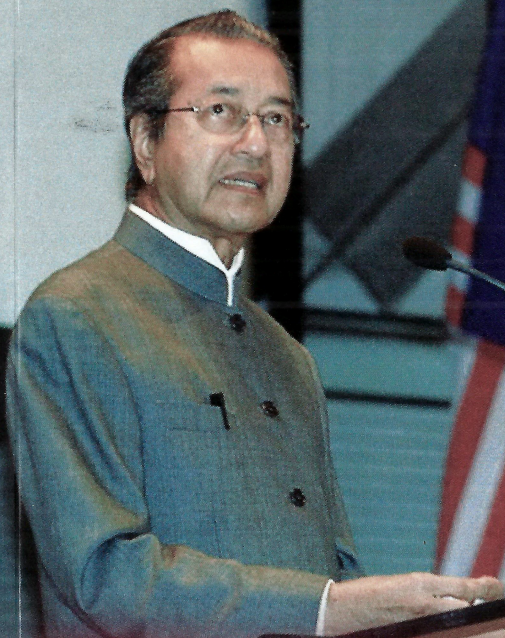
NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

WITH KEYNOTE SPEECH BY

TUN DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD

HONORARY PRESIDENT

PERDANA LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION



PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES NO. 7/2008



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NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY



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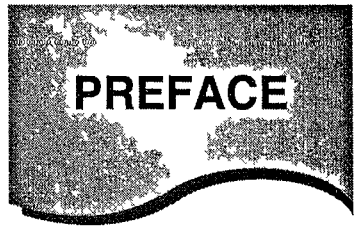
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Much has been said and shared about national sovereignty and its importance to nations during the seventh discourse series held on 7th May 2008, co-organised by the Perdana Leadership Foundation together with the Quality and Knowledge Advancement (InQKA), Universiti Teknologi MARA. The fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, shared his thoughts on issues related to national sovereignty. His view is that a nation cannot exist on its own, and has to depend on and work with other countries while safeguarding its sovereignty. Today's world has brought new challenges to nations, to maintain and sustain their sovereignty. The discourse was an interactive platform where participants who comprised of university students, academicians, senior civil servants, educators and members of youth associations, carried the debate on national sovereignty further in the breakout sessions.

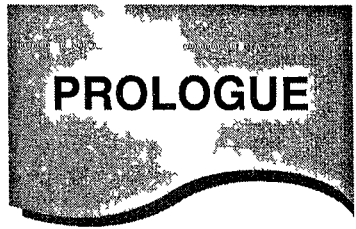
The discourse started with a keynote address by Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad. This was followed by a discussion on the keynote speech moderated by Professor Datuk Dr Qassim Ahmad of UiTM. The discussants comprised of Tan Sri Dato' Sri Sanjaya Junid, Professor Dr. Shad Saleem Faruqi and Cik Nurul Ikhlas Abdul Hadi. Each presenter utilised their allotted time to share their thoughts on the presented topic: 'National Sovereignty', illustrating examples of key decisions and contributions of the past four leaders as these pertain to the Malaysian context. During the

subsequent group discussions, other issues such as the threats from globalisation, technological change, economic erosion, etc. were deliberated. Students from various tertiary institutions played key roles as facilitators, scribes and presenters. The outcomes of the group discussions were then presented as a closing highlight of the discourse.

Editors



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PROLOGUE

Sovereignty is a notion which has come to dominate our understanding of national and international affairs. Its history parallels the evolution of the modern state. However, today, when nations are very much dependent on each other, the idea of national sovereignty has acquired a different meaning than before. Political scientists claim that the concept of national sovereignty is closely linked with legal sovereignty and practical sovereignty. They say that legal sovereignty encapsulates the right of a state to be the only law-making body of the population inhabiting a given territory. The state has the right to construct and impose law, free from any involvement by other states or bodies. However, in reality, nothing is so clear cut. This notion would remain a fiction without the other element of state sovereignty, that is, its practical ability to ensure that the laws of the state are obeyed throughout its territory. This element of sovereignty raises the prospect of the creation of a hierarchy of states as consequences of their power, as some nations are more powerful than others. Political scientists assert that the more powerful a state is, the more it will be able to defend itself and advance its interests abroad. While the weak state will retain its legal sovereignty, the element of practical sovereignty will raise questions over its effectiveness as a state.

Hence, the concept of national sovereignty and the framework of ideas which surround it, becomes a dominant feature of

contemporary political debates, analyses and policies. Nevertheless, the issue over the future of national sovereignty continues to be challenged, even though it is the very foundation of statehood. While legal national sovereignty remains intact, it is the erosion of practical sovereignty that will ultimately determine the validity of the concept of the state in the future. In recent years, questions have been raised as to the continuing significance of the state, which appears to be challenged and threatened by the impact of globalisation, internalisation, technological changes, restructuring of international societies, neo-colonialism and ecological crises, among others.

To that extent, a few questions need to be answered in understanding the concept of national sovereignty, such as:

1. Does national sovereignty matter in modern society and how is it expressed in terms of the current political scenario?
2. Why do people need national sovereignty and why are certain events perceived as threats to national sovereignty?
3. What is the meaning of national sovereignty to the Malaysian government and its citizens?
4. How accurately does national sovereignty reflect the exercise of authority and power, in the world in which we are now living?
5. To what extent is national sovereignty a guide or a distraction in developing prescriptions for actions in shaping the future?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Board of Trustees of the Perdana Leadership Foundation (PLF) and the Vice Chancellor of UiTM, Dato' Seri Professor Dr Ibrahim Abu Shah for their continued support and confidence in PLF and InQKA, to again come out with this joint publication. In this seventh series, we are very honoured to have Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad who shared his ideas and opinions with clarity and intelligence on the topic of 'National Sovereignty'. We are also grateful to have with us personalities who are distinguished in their fields: Tan Sri Dato' Seri Sanusi bin Junid, Professor Dr. Shad Saleem Faruqi, Dato' Professor Dr Qasim Ahmad, and Cik Nurul Ikhlas Abdul Hadi, who further contributed to the development of knowledge on this topic. Our gratitude goes to Associate Professor Dr Shireen Haron, the UiTM Assistant Vice Chancellor for her support and direct involvement in this series. We express our appreciation to all the participants who have contributed to the group discussions, the results of which have further enriched the knowledge gathered. We would also like to thank the staff of Perdana Leadership Foundation, Fellows and staff of InQKA and UiTM, for their tireless efforts in making this discourse a success. Last but not least, we acknowledge the contributions made by the transcribers of Perdana Leadership Foundation and friends of InQKA who have helped us with this seventh issue of the Perdana Discourse Series.

NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

(Keynote Speech)

Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim. Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarokatuh dan salam sejahtera kepada hadirin sekalian. Yang Berbahagia Deputy Vice Chancellor Universiti Teknologi MARA, Dr. Rahmat Mohamad, Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Azman Hashim, Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Nik Mohamad (Nik) Yaakob, seterusnya tuan-tuan, puan-puan hadirin sekalian.

Firstly, I would like to thank the organisers of this discourse for once again inviting me to speak on a subject that can be controversial, or it can be just an exercise in educating ourselves. We are going to talk today about 'National Sovereignty'. Of course, in order to talk about national sovereignty we need to understand what the term 'nation' means.

Actually, the concept of a nation state did not exist before. In the old days, in Europe as well as in Asia, there were small fiefs, principalities, dukedoms and regions headed by local chiefs. In some instances, the local chiefs were very powerful and rich and controlled big fiefs. There would be other smaller principalities where the chiefs were weaker and they would constantly be subjected to pressure and attack by the stronger principalities.

Therefore, it happens that over time the stronger principalities would subjugate the weaker states. When the leader or prince was

particularly powerful, the subjugated states would be brought together to form a nation. The case of Garibaldi (Giuseppe Garibaldi) the Italian leader is an example of how a powerful leader was able to unite so many principalities to form a new state, and to establish sovereignty for that state. Of course for this to happen it would require subjects with absolute and complete loyalty to the particular state.

It was the same with the Germans. When the Prussians became very powerful they were able to unite the German speaking states. In their enthusiasm, they also included the non-German speaking areas like Alsace-Lorraine. In the far east, we witnessed the same phenomenon. We see many warlords in China and they were constantly waging wars with each other. Strangely however, the Chinese warlords did not manage to unite the Chinese territories. This unity was instead accomplished by the Mongolians. When the Mongols conquered China, they brought the southern and northern parts together to form the great nation of China. China therefore has to thank the Mongols for their unity.

In Malaysia, we have little states, fiefdoms and principalities that we refer to as 'negeri'. These principalities were not defined by officially recognisable boundaries. The states were weak and were submissive to their stronger neighbours, becoming vassal states to more powerful neighbours like Siam, China and Malacca. It was not until the Malayan Union was formed during the British occupation that the Malay states were united to form a Malay nation.

Similar phenomena occurred in other parts of the world. Over time there seems to be a movement towards unity, towards bringing people of the same race and language together as a group. They would form states and pledge allegiance to other states. Over time the concept of nation states, became the acceptable form adopted by people all over the world.

Today we talk about states and we consider these as entities that exercise a degree of authority within their own boundaries.

other words, they are sovereign states. Being sovereign however is not always easy. You need to be strong in order to maintain your independence from the threats of foreign hegemony or colonisation. Many of us, once weak states of the world, were colonies of the very powerful nations of Europe.

Colonisation began when the Europeans started sailing beyond their shores. In 1492 for example, Columbus (Christopher Columbus) crossed the Atlantic to America. Shortly after, Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and discovered (for the Europeans) the East - India, China, and Japan, including the Malay states. The Europeans were aware of the existence of the East but had no knowledge about these countries and the relationships between nations. There was a conflict between the European's view of relations between nations, and that, which actually existed between nations of the east at the time.

In Asia, small principalities were able to govern themselves under the protection of powerful forces in the region. These forces did not exert influence over the internal affairs of the principalities under their 'control'. Therefore, the Malay states remained independent as long as they paid tributes to powerful states such as Siam and China. Such token tributes were mostly in the form of gold or silver flowers sent annually to appease the overlords of these powerful states. Instead of occupying the Malay states, they exerted influence over the states' defence and foreign relations. Otherwise the Malay states were quite independent. This understanding defined the relationships between nations of the east including that of the Malay states. The Malays understood that weaker states submit to and become vassals to more powerful states but retain the rights to run their affairs within their own boundaries. This was a good and practical arrangement that prevented many wars and allowed the Malay states to retain their Malay identity, culture and characteristics, prior to the coming of the Europeans.

In 1509 however, the Portuguese arrived in Malacca. With the arrival, the Europeans introduced a new era and redefined the



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