

PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES 8

“BANGSA MALAYSIA”



Keynote Address by

TUN DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD

HONORARY PRESIDENT
PERDANA LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

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Papers presented at the Perdana Leadership Foundation panel for
“Bangsa Malaysia” at the International Conference of Asia Scholars 2007,
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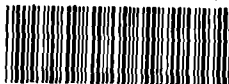
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PREFACE

Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad introduced the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* in 1991, as part of his Vision 2020, aimed at bringing greater integration among the various ethnic groups within the country. The concept however, has generated a multitude of reactions. Some felt that the concept is similar to that of 'Malaysian Malaysia', others worry that *Bangsa Malaysia* would dilute the position held by the Malays, and some saw it as a recognition of all ethnicities in the country as equal partners in nation building.

Much has been said and shared about the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia* and its importance to the nation during the eighth discourse series held on 7th May 2008, co-organized by the Perdana Leadership Foundation (PLF) together with the Institute of Quality and Knowledge Advancement (InQKA) of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). The discourse was an interactive platform where participants who comprised of academicians, senior civil servants, educators, university students and members of youth associations, discussed issues relating to *Bangsa Malaysia*.

The discourse started with a keynote address by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohammed. This was followed by a discussion on the keynote speech, moderated by Dato' Mohamed Dahan Abdul Latiff. The discussants comprised of Professor Datuk Dr. Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, Dato' Dr. K. J. John, and Mr. Alvin Goh. Each presenter utilized their allotted time to share their thoughts on the topic, while other key issues were deliberated on

during the subsequent group discussions. Students from various tertiary institutions participated by playing key roles as facilitators, scribes and presenters. The outcomes of the group discussions were then presented as a closing highlight of the discourse.

This edition of the Perdana Discourse proceedings also includes three papers on the topic of "Bangsa Malaysia" that were presented at the PLF-organized panel during the International Conference of Asian Scholars (ICAS) held in Kuala Lumpur in 2007. The papers are a significant part of these proceedings, adding to the depths and dimensions of the discourse.

Editors



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We would like to thank the Board of Trustees of the Perdana Leadership Foundation (PLF); its Executive Director, Tan Sri Nik Mohamed Nik Yaacob; and the Vice Chancellor of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Dato' Seri Professor Dr. Ibrahim Abu Shah; for their continued support and confidence in PLF and InQKA, for yet another chapter in the series of joint-publications. In this eighth discourse, we are very honoured to have Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who shared his ideas and opinions with clarity and intelligence on the topic of "Bangsa Malaysia". We are also grateful to have with us distinguished personalities of their respective fields: Dato' Mohamed Dahan bin Abdul Latiff, Professor Datuk Dr. Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, Dato' Dr. K. J. John and Mr. Alvin Goh, for their invaluable contributions to the development of knowledge on this topic. Our gratitude goes to Associate Professor Dr. Shireen Haron, Assistant Vice Chancellor of UiTM, for her support and continued 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 our knowledge. We would also like to thank the staff of PLF, Fellows and staff of InQKA and UiTM, for their tireless efforts in making this discourse a success. A note of thanks also to the academicians from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) for their papers on *Bangsa Malaysia* that were presented at the International Conference of Asian Scholars held in Kuala Lumpur in 2007, as part of the PLF panel presentation. Last but not least, we acknowledge the contributions made by the transcribers of PLF, and friends of InQKA

and the University Publication Centre (UPENA) of UiTM, who have helped with the publication of this eighth issue of the Perdana Discourse Series.



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PROLOGUE

The multiracial nature of Malaysian society with Malays as *Bumiputeras*, and the descendants of the immigrant races (the Chinese and Indians) as the minority groups with divergent interests, pose problems towards achieving national unity. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that each group is well entrenched in its own culture, religion and language. Hence, the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* was introduced in 1991 by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the country's fourth Prime Minister, as part of his Vision 2020 in bringing about greater integration among the various ethnic groups within the country. The idea was to create an inclusive national identity for all inhabitants of Malaysia, thus abandoning the National Culture Policy that asserted a Malay ethnic national identity.

However, this concept of *Bangsa Malaysia* has generated a multitude of reactions. Some felt that the concept is similar to the concept 'Malaysian Malaysia' that was proposed by Lee Kuan Yew when Singapore was still part of Malaysia. Some worry that *Bangsa Malaysia* will dilute the position held by the Malays. Others however, are more positive to the idea, as it meant acknowledgement of the ethnicities as partners of equal class in building a nation. Even so, questions with regard to language, culture and religion persist.

From an academic viewpoint, the introduction of *Bangsa Malaysia* is a positive move as it represents an extension of the historical and current development trends that will allow Malaysia to shape a future of unity. It is a way to fortify the nation for the future, a process that

would be facilitated by expanding the spirit of Malaysian nationalism. In view of this, Malay nationalism has to be redefined as Malaysian nationalism. To that end, a few questions have to be asked if the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia* is to be properly understood:

1. Is the meaning of the concept clear to all Malaysians or does the notion mean different things to different people, thus necessitating further debate on the issue?
2. Is *Bangsa Malaysia* the much-needed solution to the problem of national unity in Malaysia?
3. To what extent does the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia* correlate to the requirements and features of a modern nation state?
4. Are the existing social and political structures of the country conducive for the attainment of *Bangsa Malaysia*?
5. What are the major obstacles on the road to realizing a *Bangsa Malaysia* for the country?



Keynote Address by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad
Honorary President, Perdana Leadership Foundation
Putrajaya • November 12th, 2008

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh, and a very good morning to everyone.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Perdana Leadership Foundation as well as Universiti Teknologi MARA for inviting me to speak on this very important subject, 'Bangsa Malaysia'.

I have noticed that we have a full audience today and most of them of course are young people. This means that young people in Malaysia are interested in the future of their country. I imagine that they would want to do what is best for this country, and to do that I think, they must believe that attending such a meeting as this would be useful for them. I feel greatly honoured that there are so many people attending this event and I will try my best to 'confuse' you on this issue.

I have been interested in this subject for a very long time. If you care to read the 'Malay Dilemma', you will find that I have discussed about this a long time ago.

When I wrote the 'Malay Dilemma' in 1970, I was trying to find a model for Malaysia, that would enable us to bring the different races together as one nation, to make them feel that they belong to the nation, that this nation is distinct from other nations, and that they are the people of Malaysia. To show the representation of *Bangsa Malaysia*, I have looked for examples in other multiracial countries

and I find none that is the same as Malaysia, in terms of its racial-mix and its origin. The closest that I could find was Switzerland, and in my book, 'Malay Dilemma', I have also discussed at length about Switzerland. It is not exactly like Malaysia but it has a multiracial population, although these races are ethnically the same in the sense that they are all Europeans.

Europeans are divided into not only different races but also different ethnic groupings. For example, there are Latin people who can be found around the shores of the Mediterranean. In the north, they have Germanic people who are quite distinctive from the people in the south. Then, of course, they have the eastern people, the Slavic. These are the three major groups that can be found in Europe. These groups have further broken up into different countries and races. The Germanic people includes the British who are English, Scots and Welsh, the others, and Germans. The people of the Nordic countries have common ethnic backgrounds and they too belong to the Germanic group. In the south, the Mediterranean people are referred to as Latin. These are made up of Spanish, Italian, French and some other smaller groups. In the eastern part of Europe, the Slavic people are also divided up into Russian, Polish, Czechs, Yugoslav and the rest who originally came from central Asia and had migrated to the West and settled down in the eastern part of Europe.

They are different yet similar in the sense that the European culture is based on the Greek culture. This is common to them. Although they came from different ethnic groups, they tend to share the same basic culture. In terms of their skin colour, they are white or what is known as *Orang Putih*. There is not that much of a difference in terms of skin colour between the groups in Europe as there are, for example, between the Asian people who are very different culturally. Of course, there are certain Asian groups like the Mongolians, Chinese, Koreans and Japanese who are physically similar. We also have the South East Asians, the brown people, and of course, we have darker people in South Asia, in India.

In Europe, all three groups are represented in Switzerland. Switzerland has four separate ethnic groups. They include the people of Germanic origin, Latin who are more akin to the Italians, the French and Romanic people, a very small minority group. They speak four different languages in Switzerland, including French, which is the language around the western parts. In the southern part of Switzerland, they speak Italian. In the northern part, they speak German, and a scattering of Romanic people speak their own language, which is unique and is quite distinctive from the other three languages. We can say that these people are of different ethnic origins - the French, Germans and Italians.

The Swiss people speak the language of these countries. There are German and French-speaking groups and then, there is the Italian-speaking group. So, they have three languages (if we ignore the Romanic language). However, they have long formed this country called Switzerland and they even live apart from each other. In the northern part of Switzerland the people are mainly of German origin, the western part the French, and the southern part the Italians. Yet, they call themselves Swiss. They do not identify themselves as Italian Swiss or German Swiss or French Swiss. They regard Switzerland as their country and they are very nationalistic because Switzerland is a country defended by volunteers. Every Swiss adult must be able to handle a gun and train as a soldier. They actually keep their guns in the house so that if there is any attack against Switzerland, they will know exactly where to go to defend their country. They do not require that German Swiss should defend the German part and French Swiss should defend the French part. They are Swiss. How do they solve the language problem? How do they talk to each other? The Swiss are very good linguists. They are able to speak sometimes in as many as five languages. English is a very common language among the Swiss. Practically, every Swiss person can speak English. In addition, each person could speak at least two other languages. They can be French, Italian or German. When you have three languages and people have a command of two, there will always be a common language they can speak to each other with. If they are from the French group, they may speak French and Italian.

The Italian group may speak Italian and German, and therefore, the French group can speak to the Italian group in Italian. The German, in addition to the German language would know enough French to be able to speak to each other in French. Therefore, there is no notion of a national language in Switzerland. Yet they are very much together and they are Bangsa Swiss. There is no doubt about their loyalty and their identification to Switzerland.

This is the situation in Switzerland. Then, we have other countries where the population is made up of various immigrant races like in the United States. This is a very interesting example, because Mr. Obama, a black man who must be in some way a descendant of slaves, has now become the President of the United States. Americans come from different countries in Europe and from Africa (of course we do not know exactly which particular part of Africa they come from because it is lost in history). Obviously, they must have come from many different tribes in Africa. However, once they are in America they lost contact with their tribes and carry no more the culture of their own tribes. They do not know any of the languages of Africa. After years of being in America they speak English. English is their mother tongue and it is the same with the European migrants including Jews who migrated to America.

In America, the migrant becomes naturalised American citizens and swear allegiance to America. Beyond that they all accept that as Americans, they have to accept English as their national language. They go to schools where teaching is done in English and they speak English at home. I do not know if anybody knows of Americans who do not speak English, but the Americans I have met speak English. English is the national language of America. This is despite the fact that the Anglo Saxons may not be the first to settle in America and found the country we now call the United States of America. Their numbers were not very big but they have inter-married with the descendants of English-speaking settlers from England, Ireland and Scotland. They constitute the original people of the United States and they gave their language, culture and identity to the United States. The United States has accepted English as the mother tongue and

