

## Speech at the Launch of

### The Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies at ISIS Malaysia

by YB Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein

#### Salutations

Assalamuaikum wbt, Salam Sejahtera, Salam 1Malaysia,

#### Introduction

1. Alhamdulillah, praise be to Allah SubhanahuWata'ala, for it is with his Grace and Blessing that we are gathered here today at the launch of the Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies. First and foremost, I would like to express, at the very outset, my deepest appreciation to the ~~Mal~~ Foundation and its Chairman, YBhg. Datin Paduka rD Faridah Abdullah, for graciously committing to fund the Chair for an initial period of ten years. This generous support for the Tun Hussein Chair is indeed a testament of the Foundation's commitment towards programs which benefit Malaysia at the macro-level.
2. I would also like to record my appreciation to the Board of Directors of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia and its Chairman, YBhg. Tan Sri Mohd Jawhar Hassan, for initiating the idea of establishing the Tun Hussien Chair in ISIS. The family of ~~La~~hyarham Tun Hussein Onn is

deeply touched by this gesture to honour and remember a former Prime Minister who was also the first Chairman of this iconic Institute.

3. Indeed, ISIS was very close to the heart of my late father, especially in his retirement. Some of you may remember, Allahyarham Tun used to spend Thursdays here, attending to official work as the Chairman and then spending the rest of the day borrowing books from the library and calling up ISIS research staff for discussions and briefings on major political issues. As you may notice, some of the books in the library, have their passages underlined and notes scribbled, that was indeed what my late father enjoyed most. Allahyarham Tun Hussein also used to take active part in many of the major conferences and seminars that ISIS organized, very often as the keynote speaker. He saw in ISIS an institution that went beyond the world of diplomacy to build bridges and nurture people-to-people relations among nations. It is my hope, that the present and subsequent holders of the Tun Hussein Chair will share the same vision with Allahyarham Tun, in building bridges and maintaining ties especially in this new postglobalization international landscape.

4. On that note, I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to YBhg. Dato' Dr Muthiah Alagappa for being appointed the first-holder of the Chair. I am confident that the Chair will benefit greatly from his outstanding scholarship and emerge as a significant source for new knowledge and fresh insight in the field of foreign policy and international relations. I envision, in the years to come that this Chair will be the standard bearer for excellent academic scholarship in the field of foreign policy and international relations, for the benefit of our great nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

### **Tun Hussein: A Towering Malaysian Personality**

5. It has been more than two decades since the passing of Allahyarham Tun Hussein Onn and yet his contributions to our young nation are still fondly remembered and his presence dearly missed not just by the family, but by fellow Malaysians. He was one of the finest sons Malaysia has ever produced and a father, a child looks up to in loving admiration and for inspiration. The third Prime Minister of Malaysia was a man who dedicated his entire life to public service and championing causes close to his heart. Whether it was in the army, the legal fraternity or later in politics: as a Cabinet minister, Deputy Prime Minister and then Prime Minister, he had but one goal- it was to

see a nation that was free and independent, prosperous and united. Consistent he was in seeing through this goal, from youth to adulthood, the peak of his career and in retirement. He was a Malay patriot and a committed Malaysian, someone who understood that nothing of value was attained without sacrifice.

6. His life-story has been about sacrifice from helping his father, Dato'Onn unite the Malays and found Umno to being apart from his young family to complete his law studies in London and coming back to mainstream politics when he felt Malays were marginalized. He once quipped "***There is no nobler thing than to serve your country, what higher ambition can a man have?***" It was indeed those words which subsequently pushed me into the foray of politics, to follow in his giant footsteps, to dedicate my life to public service and serving Malaysia.
7. Allahyarham Tun was a man who had convictions of steel and he was prepared to act on them. He was consistent in his struggles and at ease with his values and principles. At key junctures in his life, these would lead him to take different paths from what others would have liked. As you would know, he was the first leader of UMNO Youth and later Secretary-General. Yet, he left duty-bound to join his father, my grandfather, Dato' Onn Jaafar, to pursue the latter's dream of establishing a non-communal political party in **Malaya**. Dato'Onn believed deeply that communalism was something that could destroy

the country's hard won Independence. My father was consistent, later when he rejoined Umno in 1969, and as Prime Minister from 1976 to 1981, he ensured that communalism was kept at bay and invested in strengthening race-relations in the country. He will always be remembered for mostly as Bapa Perpaduan- a testament to his commitment towards fostering national unity and preserving harmony in our young nation.

8. Tun Hussein is remembered as a gentleman who was thoughtful and soft-spoken. His style was not to bedazzle for he was not a particularly fiery orator. **His method was to communicate and reason simply, and never to simply communicate and reason.** Ask anyone who knew him and they will tell you that as a man and as a leader, it was never all about him. Many journalists and commentators have written about his gentleness and humility. Ego did not figure in what he did and said. The fact that he did not covet personal glory and power was often held against him. He once said **"If I am trusted to serve, if the country wants me, I will not refuse at whatever cost to me. But to scramble for office at whatever cost, no."** In a moving account that was written on my father's passing, Allahyarham Tan Sri Dr Noordin Sopiee, the first Director General of ISIS Malaysia and one of the finest minds that Malaysia has produced, recounts what Tun told him on the eve of his appointment as Deputy Prime Minister in 1973. My father said, **"People can be too easily**

***led into wanting publicity more than achievement. ... What I do is important. But me, I'm not important."***

9. Throughout his life, he held steadfast by his principles, and core values. He had a deep-seated fear of the corruption of power and of the tyranny of applause. To him his integrity is worth more than anything else. Once the trust is lost on a politician as he says, the premise to lead falters, and the sacred social contract between the people and the leader is broken.

10. When Tun Hussein took the helm of the country after the untimely demise of Allahyarham Tun Razak, he was consumed with the awareness that his was a position of great responsibility. He did not shirk his responsibility, nor did he seek to benefit from the high office. He did his best in the only way he knew how, and that was by being careful and methodical. He valued and sought consensus. Tun Hussein Onn was there when the country needed him most. His towering personality- a man with integrity, discipline and a sense of purpose is indeed sorely missed in the Malaysian political landscape today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Tun Hussein Onn: Internationalist and Malaysia International Relations**

11. Having spent 8 years studying law in the UK and in 4 years pursuing a military career in India, Allahyarham Tun Hussein on was an outward looking leader with global perspectives. Indeed, the 1970s provided a strong test for his internationalist character. During his tenure, the international system took a hit- the world economy had still to recover from the global downturn that started with the Arab oil embargo after the Arab-Israeli War of 1973. Globally, inflation was running rampant and unemployment was rising. Stagflation was recorded in Western economies. Currencies had become unshackled from their moors. In 1970, world inflation averaged around 6 per cent, which was already much higher than previous years. In 1979, it hit a peak of 13 per cent. Interest rates were in the double digits. That same year, there was another oil shock that sent economies, even high-growth ones like Malaysia, reeling.

12. Politically, the world was awash with conflict. For most of the decade, West Asia was in crisis, not only because of Israel's occupation of Palestine but also internal discontent. Civil war raged in Lebanon during the second half of the decade and uprisings in Iran, which had begun in late 1977, culminated in the overthrow of the Shah in 1979. In Central Asia, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. It set into motion a chain of events that continues to this day. The Soviet invasion re

intensified the Cold War with the West. Before then, relations had actually started to improve, with negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States to limit the number of nuclear weapons.

13. But there were positive developments as well. Perhaps most notable among them was the 1978 Camp David Peace Accord signed between Egypt and Israel. Although not liked by many Arabs, the Accord reduced conflict in the Middle East and provided the basis for a period of relative calm. Closer to home, China, which had been undergoing leadership struggles since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, finally saw Deng Xiaoping emerge as leader in 1978. Deng then initiated the 'four modernisations' which led to the opening up of the Chinese economy, with profound benefits for the global economy and regional prosperity.

14. However, the biggest challenge was closer to home combatting the threat of the rise of communism. Tun Hussein was an avid neutral, internationalist at a time when the world was divided into two separate spheres of influence between the West and the Communists. The period of his premiership was a period of political turmoil in Southeast Asia especially in



Indochina. Saigon fell in 1975 and the Khmer Rouge regime under Pol Pot took over Cambodia in April 1976, rocking Indochina's fragile and complex political landscape. The threat of Domino effect sweeping the region became ever so real. Acting in concert with other ASEAN member states, Malaysia emphasized independence, nonalignment and peaceful cooperation. Thus, the First ASEAN Summit in Bali, Indonesia in 1976 saw the Declaration of ASEAN Concord and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. The first of these pledged member states to work together to promote peace and stability, while the second put in place a framework for the settling of conflicts without the use of force. The subsequent year, Kuala Lumpur hosted the Second Summit, which my father chaired, and that celebrated the first decade of ASEAN. Tun Hussein, a committed internationalist also visited Deng Xiaoping in China and Alexei Kosygin and Brezhnev in Moscow in 1979, to get the two Communist giants to respect the neutralization policy by ASEAN countries adopted under the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). Tun Hussein was a man committed to peace and harmony, and he was a champion of Malaysia's foreign policy of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect with all countries, regardless of size and political systems. His commitment towards peace and national security, serves as an inspiration to me today in ensuring that our nation is protected at all time.

15. I have touched briefly on some of what I think were then the more important world and regional events to give a sense of the times surrounding Allahyarham Tun Hussein Onn's term in office. To say that they were challenging is an understatement. Changes, both negative and positive were occurring, and key decisions had to be made. It was clear that a level head and a steady hand were needed, and the government that he led provided a significant measure of both. Continuing on from the solid foundations laid by his predecessor, Tun Abdul Razak, Tun Hussein forged a course of peace and stability that enabled the country to grow, develop and prosper for the decades to come. Indeed, he was a responsible leader and a visionary when it comes to international relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

### **Importance of International Studies for Contemporary Malaysia**

16. Let me now conclude by saying a few words about international studies. Dato' D Muthiah will be delivering his Inaugural Lecture shortly and so I will be brief. Probably more than in the case of other disciplines, works on international studies have been dominated by Western scholarship. Asian and other non-Western scholarship has grown tremendously in recent decades, but the West continues to exert the primary influence on the discourse with regard to organizing concepts,

analytical frameworks and, especially, the framing of issues. Despite claims to universality and objectivity it is only understandable and even unavoidable that perspectives and approaches tend to be influenced to some extent by particular historical experiences, national interest and cultural background.

17. This of itself is not a major problem. The world owes a great deal to Western scholarship, much of which is indeed of universal relevance and applicability. Many non-Western scholars themselves are Western in their thinking and writing due to their training and reading. But perspectives from other historical, cultural and geopolitical contexts are nevertheless in relatively short supply and are greatly needed to enrich our understanding of international issues and inform our approaches to promoting peace, security and prosperity. It is here that Chairs such as the one ISIS is establishing and scholars such as Dato' Dr Muthiah, can make an invaluable contribution to the texture and body of knowledge available in international studies. It is our responsibility to chart out recommendations for Malaysia's foreign policy in the post-Globalization era, and figure out which frontiers we ought to master and engage in the years to come.
18. The International Studies Chair at ISIS Malaysia can play a pivotal role in contributing to this objective. I know that my late father would have been proud to be associated with it. On

behalf of my family and myself, I now take great pleasure in officially launching the Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies at ISIS Malaysia.

Thank you.