

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE  
OPENING OF THE COMMONWEALTH YOUTH  
SEMINAR AT DEWAN TUNKU ABDUL RAH-  
MAN ON 30TH JULY, 1971

Mr Chairman, Hon'ble Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy and honoured to be here this morning to declare open this Seminar on "The Role of Youth in the Development Process."

I take this opportunity to extend a very warm welcome to distinguished delegates participating at this Seminar. A gathering such as this will no doubt be of great benefit to us all because it provides an opportunity not only to exchange views and ideas on problems that we face, particularly the role that youth can play in the development process, but at the same time promote closer relationship especially among youth of the Commonwealth.

I do hope that while attending this Seminar, the delegates will enjoy the visit to Penang, and to see our Youth Land Scheme at Bukit Goh in Kuantan, which have been arranged for them. Above all, I hope they will have a pleasant stay in our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Youth and Development have a special appeal for me, since the task of National Development is one to which I have devoted the greater part of my political career.

Long ago, in fact, the two became inseparable to my mind. If it is the future for which we plan, then any social or economic progress we achieve will be mainly for the rising generation to enjoy. The concept implicit in the Seminar theme takes this a stage further. Youth who are to inherit the future have, therefore, a greater vested interest than any of us in the Development Task and a natural right to be actively identified with the Development Process.

I am well aware that Youth today is a subject that all too frequently occupies the headlines of the world press. The youthful protest movement has become so widespread that some see it as

an inescapable twentieth Century phenomenon which is bound to manifest itself in all countries. I do not subscribe to this view. Youth in developing countries pose problems that are real enough but they differ in nature and magnitude from those in some of the more affluent societies of the world. I do not, therefore, regard our Youth as a potential drag on Development but rather as a most important asset to the Nation.

In most emerging countries, Youth represents the majority of the population. In Malaysia, for instance, over 60% of our people are under the age of twenty-five. And when this Conference talks about the Youth that you collectively represent, you are referring to millions of young people with aspirations towards a better world, who in themselves form tremendous untapped resources of energy and vitality which we can harness.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today happens to be the day Apollo 15 reaches its destination and Man will again repeat the incredible feat of reaching the Moon. I am forcibly reminded of what a vastly different world today's youth have been born into. They belong to what has been so well described as the "Accelerating Century".

Already, they have been exposed by modern Science and Technology to a pace of change undreamed of a generation ago. With modern communication, youths throughout the world have been made familiar with these technological triumphs. And, if the evidence of my sons' comic books is anything to go by, their imagination have also been fired. In fact, in the process, they have already been conditioned to enter the Space Age.

And so, we who direct our respective National Development efforts are concerned to modernise, to industrialise, and to bring our countries into the technological era. Part of the drama of the developing nations' drive for modernisation lies in the fact that we are attempting, in the space of one generation, to accomplish an economic and social revolution which occupied the industrialised countries, for the better part of two centuries.

Those of us who knew the more leisurely world of the past are very conscious of this and fear that too rapid a transformation may produce both social and cultural dislocation in which youth

would be the greatest casualties. But today's youth, who are witnesses to the type of Space adventure that is being enacted, are probably more apt than we are, for the new imperatives of a scientific environment.

In Development, we work to the order of the Five Year Planning. Our time horizon is mainly the seventies. But, we must not forget that our Youth will live to see the twenty first Century. This is a sobering thought for the politician—or should I say "statesman", remembering that Chesterton distinguished between the "politician who works for the next election" and the "statesman who works for the next generation".

If we are to be true statesmen, we must take into account the needs, desires and ambitions of the generation for whom we plan. No architect would build a house without consulting the wishes of those who are to live in it, and designing the house to their own way of life.

Development is after all a form of social architecture and requires both consultation and active involvement on the part of youth. Without consultation, we should be unable to anticipate the changing mood and the emerging priorities of the generation that will follow us.

Our experience has shown that unless the proper channels are set up for a meaningful dialogue with youth, this necessary consultation is hard to achieve. We have, therefore, set up a Youth Consultative Council which, I like to think of as a Parliament of Youth. Through this, the younger generation can articulate their grievances, aspirations and ambitions and involve themselves in the formulation of youth programmes and policies. Their views then be taken into account at the decision—making levels and assist the policy makers towards a genuine contemporary awareness. In this way, we hope that the Youth of this country will participate meaningfully in the work of Development. And that personal involvement will be an effective antidote to the alienation from society from which the Youth of some countries seem to suffer.

This is not to make light of the problems confronting Youth in our countries. But, in the developing world the problems are different in kind. Of course, it is true that anyone born into the

second half of the twentieth Century belongs to a generation that confronts a crisis of values. The very swiftness and, at times, violence of scientific change imposes a degree of stress unknown in more leisurely centuries.

Whilst landing Man on the Moon, our scientific advances have also demonstrated a capacity to obliterate mankind from the Earth. Traditional norms and values are breaking up under the impact of science and technology. All these contribute to a greater sense of insecurity.

These facts of contemporary life are common to youth everywhere. But beyond this commonality, the problem may be sharply differentiated as between the advanced countries and the developing world. Where there is a surfeit of material well-being, youth tend to become estranged from society and the established order, creating the phenomenon of the Hippie and the drop-out. who are as yet relatively unknown to the emerging nations.

Our problems in the developing world, on the other hand, are more concerned with the economic plight confronting many of our Youth. The impetus to Development has been described as the revolution of rising expectations. These rising expectations can soon turn to a dangerous frustration unless there are clear opportunities for their realization. The problem of unemployment endemic in the developing world, and which bears down relentlessly on the school leaver, is a social time bomb in our midst easily ignited by youthful resentments.

Where you have a sizeable rural population, another characteristic of the emerging nation—this encourages the drift to the towns. The rural migrant who is invariably unskilled joins the urban poor, leaving the security of the traditional kampung or village life, he becomes disoriented in the cultural and economic environment of the city and lives a hand-to-mouth existence on the fringes of urban society. Enforced idleness quickly leads to juvenile delinquency and urban crime. This accelerating trend must be arrested.

Youth, therefore, becomes the focus of our Development effort. Development, as I have always seen it, is a means of achieving social justice where the wealth of the nation is distributed fairly

among the people. The challenge is not just to provide more job opportunities. This must be accompanied by schemes of technical training. Our youth must be equipped with the skills and the scientific know-how to sustain our programmes of industrialisation since our aim is to create a technically competent generation.

At the same time, we must guard against the dangers attendant on urbanisation and industrialisation. We have before us, as warnings, the behaviour patterns of youth in today's advanced societies, bent on self-destruction through drug addiction and other forms of alienation. Like other forms of pollution, we must anticipate and minimise the social pollution that could overtake us too. Devoid of values and a sense of purpose, youth become no more than flotsam. We must inculcate into them a feeling of belonging and of identification, and inspire them with a sense of purpose in life.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

So far, we have talked of what Development can do for youth. We now reach the point of the supportive role youth can play in the Developing process. It is dangerous to keep youngsters too long in a state of dependence without giving them the responsibility which helps to mature them. If their energies are harnessed to the national purpose, they can provide so many tributaries—tributaries that are swift and forceful—in the mainstream of development. It is better this way than to allow them to form dangerous cross-currents impeding the nation's progress. For this, we shall need to do more than train our youth—we shall have to motivate them so that they are fully committed to a purposeful and meaningful life in the service of the Nation.

Some will contend that the generation gap serves to divide the cadres of Youth from the forces of the Establishment. If we might here return to the subject of Apollo 15, we may find in this a symbolic significance. The astronauts, the epitome of fitness and vitality, are symbolic of the venturesome spirit of Youth. But, they are guided on the ground by the cumulative knowledge, expertise and judgement of mature men of Science. When a common objective unites them, Youth and Experience are both compatible and complementary. From our own experience, the objective in development is progress, national unity and nation building.

I have often described development as a Trinity comprising Planning, Implementation and Evaluation. Of this equation, the most difficult to secure are the skills of implementation—the ability to translate plans into action. We have now established a Youth Service Corps. We also encourage student exchange programmes. The inter-flow of students between Southeast Asian countries has done much to generate a genuine regional outlook. The Commonwealth has, of course, always enjoyed this type of interchange (but the direction has tended towards Britain). Perhaps, this Seminar might consider schemes for a more comprehensive and varied programme of student exchange in future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The thought with which I leave you is that all our schemes in our respective countries should aim collectively at the peace and stability which is the necessary pre-condition for development. Let us strive to assure that our youth will come of age in a world secure from conflict and in which they can enjoy the fruits of their efforts. Then, and then only, can we contemplate the Space achievement of Appollo 15, as heralding a new era—where the Youth of today, by then adults, will be free to enjoy that same technology applied to the material well-being of all citizens.

On that note, I declare this Seminar open and wish the delegates success in their deliberations.