

Speech of Tun Abdul Razak, Deputy Prime Minister,  
At The Official Opening Of The Malaysian Crop Diversification Conference  
Held At The Federal Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, On 10 November, 1969

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am greatly honoured to be invited to be with you here today to address this distinguished gathering of people dedicated to crop diversification and to interchange your knowledge and experience in this Conference.

Two weeks ago, I had the honour of launching the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute or MARDI.

On that occasion, I stressed on our greatest need in Agriculture, and that is, diversification of our Agriculture, and, this I emphasised, must be undertaken with adequate knowledge and guidance.

This Conference is a pleasant coincidence, and I would, therefore, like to congratulate the sponsors, the Incorporated Society of Planters, for choosing this subject.

And I also want to thank the various individuals who are sharing their ideas and research with us through presentation of papers.

Together with the recent Symposium on Palm Oil Quality and Marketing, these meetings will be of great value to our Agriculture.

For some years now, Agricultural diversification has been a national objective.

And for even longer period, research workers in the private sector and in Government have been working towards the development of new crop and livestock opportunities in Malaysia.

Steady progress in this direction has been made as evidenced by the rapid increase in palm oil production, the expansion of acreage planted to high-yielding padi varieties, recent increases in tapioca production and current interest in sugar cane, cocoa, maize, soya beans, groundnuts, sorghum and other crops.

I am pleased to see that all these crop possibilities will be discussed at this Conference.

A common element among the successes that have been realised is the vital importance of Agricultural Research.

Attempts to diversify through trial and error are expensive and generally of limited success.

But, with research, the range of feasible crops becomes wider.

First in rubber, then in oil palm, now in cocoa and other crops.

Problem-oriented and adaptive research has demonstrated that these crops, which are not indigenous to Malaysia, can be cultivated here successfully.

Strengthened Agricultural Research is a major objective in our First Malaysia Plan, and will remain so in the Second Malaysia Plan now being formulated.

It will also receive strong public support in the future, largely through the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute or MARDI. It is expected that MARDI will give special attention to a number of important research areas.

These include work on cocoa and oil palm; soil and water management in irrigation areas; rice production; livestock improvement — with particular emphasis upon pasture production and beef cattle; food technology and research designed to develop new end-products for our agricultural commodities; and, finally, production economics and marketing research to identify and exploit those new crops which can be produced efficiently in Malaysia.

However, we realise that time and much effort will be required for the fully effective functioning of MARDI.

As I look over your Conference Programme, I am impressed by the degree of professional co-operation which it reflects.

Research workers from Government, the private sector, educational institutions, the R.R.I. and others have, by their presence here, indicated their willingness to pool their knowledge, to share research results, and to discuss together this topic of great significance to our Agriculture, to our national economic progress and the well-being of our people.

This co-operation, this sharing of knowledge, should be maintained and further encouraged, because Malaysia's limited supply of trained personnel does not permit us the luxury of unco-ordinated and overlapping research efforts among various groups.

Through the workings of its Scientific Council and Governing Board, it is hoped that close liaison can be maintained with other public and private research programmes so that unnecessary duplication can be avoided.

Government is well aware of the excellent research by the private sector, particularly, in oil palm.

We do not wish to jeopardise the effectiveness of that effort but others would like their efforts to continue. We are appreciative of the important contribution which it has made to Malaysia's agriculture.

It is expected that MARDI will develop productive and mutually-beneficial relationships with the private sector and other research organisations coordinate their efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The emphasis on crop diversification which this Conference lays upon is indeed timely from the national point of view.

In little more than a year, we will embark upon the Second Malaysia Plan.

In that Plan, job creation will be given high priority and Agriculture will be required to play a major role in this aspect.

It is now estimated that in the 1971 – 1975 period, our West Malaysian labour force will be increasing by something more than 100,000 workers each year.

Providing rewarding jobs for these additional workers will pose a great challenge to our economy.

Even with very rapid expansion of the industrial and service sectors, Agriculture will be required to provide more than 40% of all new jobs.

Some of these will come through new land development, other through the use of more labour per acre of existing land.

And the number of jobs created will depend in part, upon the type of crops grown.

While nowhere are beneficial results from good research more evident than in our natural rubber industry, one side effect of progress is that employment in rubber, our largest industry, has not expanded in recent years.

We noted that oil palm acreage will grow rapidly; but oil palm requires considerable less labour per acre than rubber.

On the other hand, I need not tell you that maize or sorghum or soya beans require more labour per acre than rubber; and inter-cropped rubber provides more employment than rubber as a sole crop.

For similar reasons, the inter-cropping with cocoa of some of our half-million acres of coconuts seems highly desirable.

And I have been told that market prospects for cocoa appear bright over the next several years as world demand exceeds supplies from traditional exporting countries.

I also hope that fruit and vegetable production could be greatly expanded in Malaysia, thereby providing additional employment and replacing the sizeable quantities now imported in one form or another.

All of these become important considerations when viewed in the light of the large number of jobs which agriculture must provide in the years ahead.

Rubber has a bright future and will remain so as our main crop.

With inter-cropping, however, that future can be made even brighter because it provides additional income per acre as well as additional employment.

And both – income and employment – are required if our agricultural economy is to prosper.

The emphasis your Conference gives to inter-cropping is particularly relevant to Malaysia's small-holders.

In the past, small-holders have successfully inter-cropped young rubber with a limited number of short-term crops.

The research reflected in your papers may lengthen the list of crops which can be grown in this

manner. Inter-cropping often provides the margin of income which makes their replanting of rubber possible.

In many areas of West Malaysia, replanting of small-holders' old, low-yielding rubber is the best assurance of productive land use and higher incomes in the future.

Small-holders are keenly interested in replanting. They must be given the opportunity and assistance to do so.

Presently, more than one million acres of small-holders' rubber consist of old, low-yielding trees long overdue for replanting.

Consistent with our national policy of providing additional income and employment opportunities in rural areas, we will increase small-holder rubber replanting targets in 1970 to 110,000 acres — or nearly double the 1969 target.

Replanting programmes of that size or larger are contemplated for future years.

There will be ample opportunities here to inter-crop and thereby provide additional income and employment.

Our research and extension efforts must ensure that these opportunities are exploited.

Our policy of rapid replanting, together with incentives to encourage expansion of capacity to produce improved form of rubber, will help to ensure the longer-term viability of rubber production in Malaysia.

This is not inconsistent with our view on diversification — that we should produce those crops for which we have a particular competitive advantage, but, in addition, we should spare no efforts to find and develop other crops which can be grown efficiently in Malaysia.

Through efforts of the organisations represented here, I am confident that additional crop possibilities can be moved from the experimental stage to commercial production.

In closing, I would like to express here my aviding confidence and optimism regarding future agricultural development and diversification in Malaysia.

We possess the land and labour for rapid expansion in this sector. And we aware that rapid agricultural development is essential to satisfactory economic progress in our total economy.

In recent years, the institutions required for agricultural modernisation and expansion have been established; organisations to improve agricultural processing and marketing are being strengthened.

Bank Pertanian, our new public credit institution for Agriculture, will begin its operation soon.

Our Agricultural schools are being expanded to provide badly-needed field-level workers.

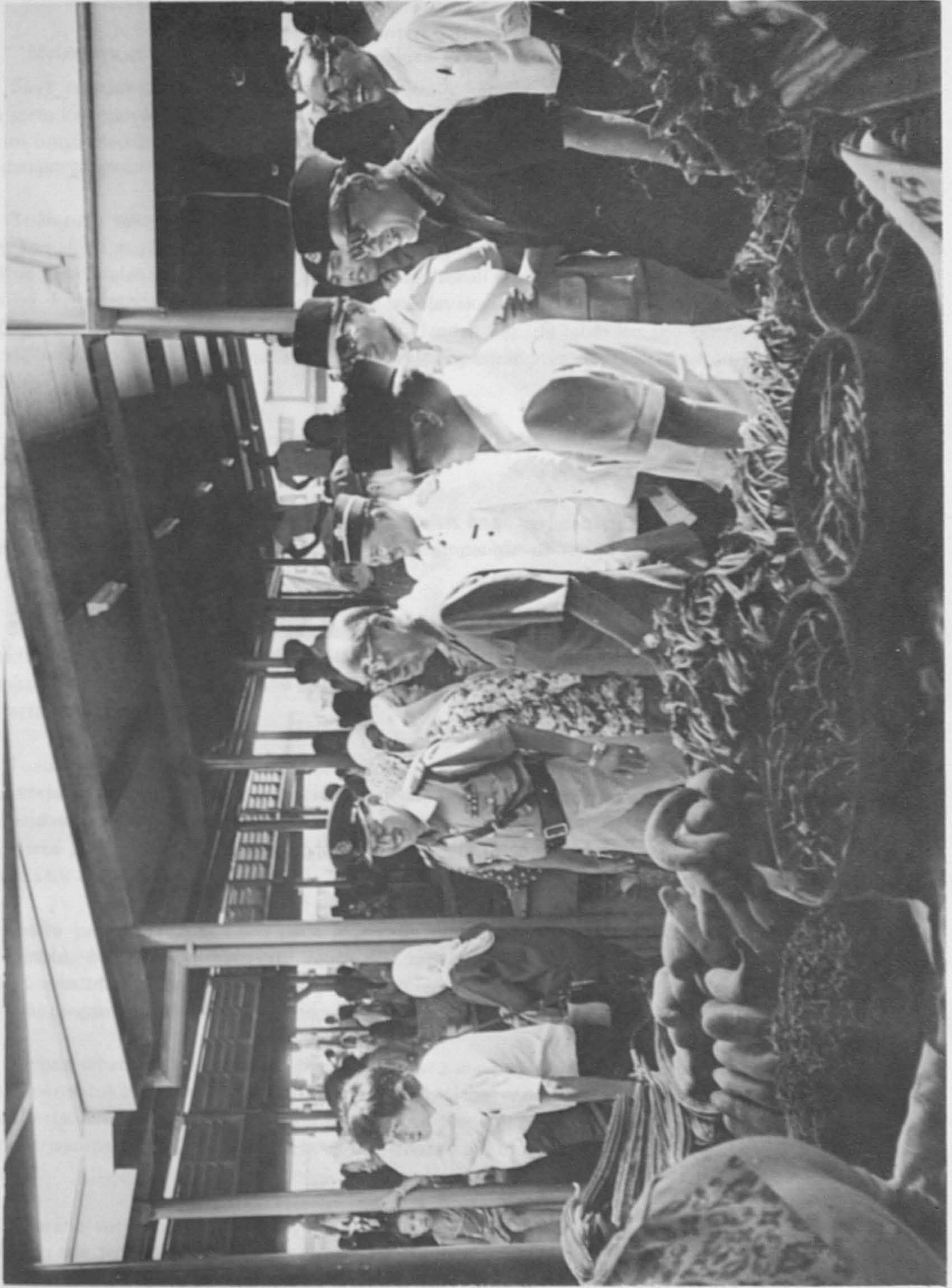
The College of Agricultural is to be upgraded and enlarged again. In the Faculty of Agriculture, more emphasis will be placed upon practical training and post-graduate studies.

The programmes and the efforts of the various organisations represented here will help to ensure that our Agriculture will provide jobs, the income opportunities, the foreign exchange earnings required for general economic health and widely shared prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now take pleasure in declaring open the Malaysian Crop Diversification Conference.

Thank you.



*Allahyarham YAB Tun Perdana Menteri melawat gerai hasil pertanian di Pekan Sehari Sg. Besar, daerah Sabak Bernam pada 29hb. Mach, 1973.*