

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
TO THE ASIAN-AMERICAN ASSEMBLY ON
CULTURAL AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL
UNDERSTANDING AT UNIVERSITY OF
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Mr. Chairman, Dr. Writson, Your Excellencies, Hon'ble Ministers,
Delegates to the Asian-American Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen.

When I received an invitation from the University of Malaya to give the opening address at this unique Asian-American Assembly I felt not only honoured, but also hesitant—in fact, a little like Daniel being challenged to enter the lions' den. I hope I can emerge unscathed.

You have come together, men of intellect from the United States and free Asia, to discuss "cultural affairs and international understanding". The theme is noble and of universal significance. It is your hope that through the give-and-take of ideas and views, information and experience you may be able to contribute constructively to the betterment of co-operation and understanding through out the world.

Being a politician first and foremost, I am naturally very deeply interested in any effort to improve understanding between nations and people, but I am also conscious of the fact that your specialised approach is outside my normal field. But as a politician, however, I could take comfort in Shakespeare's observation that "Each man in his life plays many parts". Therefore, I accepted the invitation, at the same time asking permission to range freely in my own way. So let me assure you that even if I feel like Daniel in the lions' den, there is no need to worry that I am also a Daniel come to judgement.

First, let me say that no man of intelligence and goodwill will deny that in this world today there is a great need to promote international understanding in every possible way, and not through

he medium of culture alone. It is also evident that cultural affairs are an excellent means for bringing men and women of different countries into closer touch with one another. Therefore, I presume I am right in saying that a prime aim of this assembly is to arrive at a practical appreciation of the problems and needs involved, especially from an Asian point of view.

These problems and needs are clearly not as simple as they may at first appear, nor on the other hand are they formidable and forbidding; hence the reason for this assembly. It is plain to me that you disagree with Kipling's dictum on East and West, "That never the twain shall meet".

I have mentioned Kipling on purpose to illustrate one aspect of the question of international understanding. It is often stated that the world we live in is very confusing. We have been subjected to so much dialectic that even simple words change their meaning, and semantics, or the meaning of meaning, has become a major study. The words East and West now have such overtones and undertones of conflicting ideology that if Kipling were writing today he might have been restricted to using other terms.

In this Assembly, I am sure, however, that you will be thinking not of East and West in the context of cold war, but in the more historical perspective of Orient and Occident. Fortunately, we do not have to be concerned about the meaning of some phrases which are still unchanged, still standard, still valid. Delegates here will understand as some of you may hail from either the Far East or the Middle West. Whether from the Orient or the Occident there is no misunderstanding your mutual purpose, which is to survey and scan wider horizons for human relations through culture.

In some fields of inter-change of culture, little difficulty exists. For instance, the expansion and development of telecommunications in all forms, bridging time and space with ease, can make nations on opposite sides of the world seem like next-door neighbours. Already radio and television stations have developed, or are developing, extensive facilities for exchange of programmes. With

the Telstar already hanging in the sky the future possibilities in this field seem limitless. In fact, the day when a television film can be shown simultaneously all round the world is rapidly drawing near.

When that time comes, quite obviously wealthy and powerful nations with all the apparatus of science and technology at their swift command, will have a tremendous advantage. How this advantage will be exploited is of great importance to all developing nations. At first sight, it would appear that for years to come small, newly independent countries will literally be on the receiving end.

George Orwell in his prophetic novel, "1984", has already foreseen one frightening possibility of a world in which all men are aware that "Big Brother is watching you". I am sure that this is a prospect that will have very little appeal to either men or nations who want simply to live their lives and in peace and happiness.

The urge to escape from the range of the all-seeing eye or the pressure of an all-pervading will surely will become irresistible. In such a world there will be no freedom of expression of any kind, creative or otherwise; in such a world, there will be no inter-change of co-operation in cultural affairs.

If we are to avoid the possibility of such a world where individuality of thought and action will be non-existent, where there will not even be lone voices crying in the wilderness, then surely it is incumbent on all men of goodwill to consider not only the problems of the world we live in now, but also the kind of world we want to live.

It seems to me that these questions are inter-related. If efforts for the betterment of international understanding are charted on the right course, then surely it can be possible not only to resolve difficulties and problems of today, but at the same time to set the compass towards an even better and brighter future tomorrow.

Looking around the world today, I am reminded vividly of the opening paragraph of "A Tale of Two Cities". As you will remember, Dickens wrote:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way".

Dickens was writing about the year of 1775 which he reported was like his own time of 1859, eighty-four years later. Now in 1963, just 104 years later, I think we can take what cold comfort there is in knowing that our day is fundamentally little different to the time of Dickens or the era of his novel.

There are differences, however, both in nature and degree, and of course we do not have the advantage of having a Charles Dickens writing today. If he were alive and penning the opening chapter of, shall we say, "A Tale of One World", he would have to note that we are living in a time of nationalism and internationalism, of independence and inter-dependence, of regional association and continental thinking; in a world joined by the United Nations and divided by conflicting ideologies, a world of hot peace and cold war, a world where men of goodwill strive still for stability and peace among all these pressures and developments that envelop or overlap—in short, a world of simultaneous fusion and transition.

And what would he make of this world of over-population where millions go hungry amid fantastic productivity; of a world where science and technology have annihilated time and distance so that nations are only hours apart by air or in contact by minutes through radio-telephone, and even remote villages are becoming familiar with outer space; of a world where men of religion are finding new hope of unity and communion yet artists and writers take refuge in anger or despair; a world where old traditions and

cultures survive and mingle with a flood of new fashions and ideas; a world where opportunities for leisure multiply yet speed is worshipped for itself—in short, a world of rapid and constant change and flux where men live in either fear or faith under the looming menace of the Bomb.

I think Dickens would probably decide that he had wandered into the worlds of Jules Verne or H.G. Wells by mistake, and as far as he was concerned the world was still going to the Dickens. Whatever he might think, it is still the world in which we have to live, facing the problems of the present and the difficulties of the future with what serenity we can.

If greater international understanding in all spheres of life is the solution to the complexity and confusion of modern times, then it is necessary to ask what kind of world we want. No electronic marvel of computing can perform this task, which would mean probing into the minds of ordinary men and women everywhere simultaneously and at one moment.

However, such a computer is not necessary, because deep in our hearts we know the answers already, and I think any man or woman here could put these in one sentence. Let me try. "The world I want is a world where I can live in health and security, in justice and order, in happiness and peace, free to worship my own way and to speak my mind and conscious always of my duty towards my fellowmen as brothers in a true spirit of tolerance and understanding".

There are, I admit, many possible variations of this theme but these do not matter, because in the end they all add up to the same tune. In relation to family, community or nation, they express the point of view of man as an individual.

Therefore, to my mind the first major aim of all those who wish to attach greater international understanding, especially through culture, must be to ensure that neither personality nor identity is lost or submerged in a world of uniformity. Men and nations must

have freedom to express their own ways of life, to assess and to achieve the all-round development essential for their own material and spiritual needs.

I am not suggesting that any nation or people should live in isolation, as this is neither desirable nor possible in the modern age. Once upon a time only a sophisticated man could be described as a citizen of the world. Today, however, this attitude has changed. All people, whether simple or sophisticated, are and must be citizens of the world.

I am stressing, however, that the first duty of any nation is to its own people, to their security, welfare and happiness and that by carrying out this duty in the best possible way suited to their own circumstances and environment a nation is performing its obligations to the peace and stability of the world at large.

Whatever idealists may desire, a plain fact of modern life is that the internal problems of all countries differ. There may be many similarities, but they can never be exactly the same. For instance, if you consider the qualities of patriotism and loyalty these are ideals everywhere, but in practice people have their own ways and customs in expressing their feelings of loyalty and love for their country. In other words, each country has its own national pride, its own feeling of personality and identity.

In considering the question of international understanding, therefore, especially in the realm of culture, the cultivation of mutual interest among the company of nations must rest basically on the fact of mutual respect for one another.

I speak with some knowledge and experience of this question of national identity. Here in the Federation of Malaya we are engaged in a unique task, the moulding of a nation in unity from peoples of many races and creeds. We are very young as free countries go. It is only five and a half years since we won our independence, but I think I can rightly and fairly say that in that short time, all the people working together, we are truly conscious of being Malayan, and we take great pride in the prestige and reputation our nation has won in the eyes of the world.

In the making and moulding of the nation of ours, we have not lost sight of our duty as a nation in the community of nations. We were among the first to offer our services to the United Nations in the Congo, and you will remember that at one fateful time when some nations were withdrawing and that operation seemed in jeopardy, we were the first to assure the United Nations that, far from withdrawing, it was our intention to reinforce.

As Malaysians we have played a leading role in condemning Communist China for its ruthless suppression of Tibet and South Africa for its obnoxious policy of apartheid. We were the founder-sponsors of the new Association of South-East Asia, and the initiators of the Federation of Malaysia, shortly to emerge as a new nation on the world scene.

If anyone should express surprise that it has been possible for us to do so much in such a short time not only in the creation of our beloved Malaya but in carrying out our bounden duty as a member of the United Nations, then I think I can refer him to Madame Pandit. She visited us when she was President of the United Nations General Assembly, and declared, "Why—Malaya is a little United Nations in herself!".

All these are reasons why I have taken the opportunity in this Assembly to dwell on the importance of national identity, and I am sure that every delegate here, whether from the United States or from any nation of free Asia, will understand what impels me to do so, because each in his own way and speaking for his own country would express a similar point of view.

There is one other aspect of national development which seems to me most relevant in the context of your discussion, and that is the question of relationships and attitudes between larger and more powerful countries and smaller and newer nations, between what we may call the developed nations and the developing ones.

I think the first fact to bear in mind is that developing countries, such as Malaya, are working to the limits of their present capacity. There is so much to be done to remedy the omissions of the past,

there is so much to be done to provide for the needs of the present, and there is so much to be done to build for future progress that we must tackle every task in strict priority, and at the same time within the material limits of money and manpower.

Let me instance in Malaya the fields of education and culture, to which we devote more than one-third of our revenue. We have been able to provide for the first time in our history a place in a primary school for every child of primary age, and this year we have made primary education free. Our population is growing at a very rapid rate, so we are building hundreds of new schools and classrooms for the future. We are now tackling our insufficiency in secondary schools and technical schools of all kinds, and we aim to provide secondary or technical education for every boy or girl or young man or woman who is capable of taking a course.

We have built and staffed three Teachers' Training Colleges so far, as well as Training Colleges for Language Teachers and Specialists, and we are beginning construction of a Technical Training Institute for Teachers. And we have plans for at least two more major institutions for teacher training.

This very University which you see growing up all round you is less than five years old, and what you see now is only the beginning, for under our expansion plan this University will double itself inside five years and treble itself within ten.

We are nearing completion of a great National Museum. We have already established a temporary home for our National Art Gallery, and we plan to build a permanent one. In time to come we will have a National Library, a National School of Music, a National Art School and a National Theatre.

Yet all these developments and all these plans in the field of education and culture must take their place in the list of priorities in the creation of all-round national development in every sphere of life.

We in this country have embarked on a gigantic national development programme, particularly in the field of rural development. We have geared the whole Government machinery to this task because we feel strongly that our people of all races who live in the rural areas, in the villages and out of the way places, should be given the amenities of life compatible with modern needs and the dignity of a civilised nation.

Therefore, at the end of 1960, we launched our National Rural Development Plan to provide our country folk with amenities considered desirable so as to help them increase their incomes. This Plan is now in its third year of implementation and we are very pleased indeed that it has been carried out with a great measure of success. Today every village, however small it may be, has received some benefits under this Plan. But, much as we desire to carry out such development as we can, and although we have the administrative machinery to do so, there is a limit to our resources. Therefore, it is impossible for us to do everything at once.

I have given you this picture of the various fields of our National Development in Malaya, so that when you are considering ways and means of bettering international cultural exchange, it is important to remember that our facilities must not be overtaxed. Much of our achievement in cultural fields depends still on the faithful enthusiasm of many part-time voluntary workers. Older and wealthier countries have many cultural institutions and foundations of long-standing, staffed with experts in every field of culture and well-financed either by Government or by private philanthropy. It will be years before we in Malaya can catch up to such standards of achievement, because we simply do not have either the money or the time to build everything at once.

Our volunteer enthusiasts spend a great deal of time, talent and energy in producing and finding funds for cultural events. In Kuala Lumpur alone this year they have already presented five art exhibitions, three concerts, one ballet and three plays, and before the year is out they will have organised ten more art exhibitions, five concerts, one ballet and ten plays.

This is typical of the outburst of cultural activity taking place in our country in the past few years and it is growing all the time. Independence has surely produced a great release of spirit among our people. When one considers that all creative activity is going on with remarkable spontaneity and yet without benefit of many of the basic facilities taken for granted in older and wealthier nations—for instance, a National Art School—it is quite surprising what splendid results are being achieved.

It can safely be said that at the present time Malaya has the capability of presenting exhibitions of art or photography overseas which could arouse attention and keen interest anywhere. We have already begun to make our entrance on the international arena, as an exhibition of works by Malayan artists is at present touring India, and I am aware that plans are being made for a similar exhibition to be held in Australia. A recent colourful example of cultural enterprise was a tour organised throughout Malaya of national dancers from Thailand, the Philippines and our own country. In these ways Malaya is beginning to contribute to international understanding through the medium of culture. How much more we are able to do in the future will depend on growth and development of cultural affairs here, and of course this must take their priority. In the meantime, we are doing all we can.

One interesting manner of contributing to closer understanding between nations is the organisation of study tours, a field in which Malaya has taken the initiative in Asia. Each year, beginning last year, a sum of one million dollars is set aside to sponsor study tours of neighbouring countries in Asia for various kinds of groups, such as youth or culture, teachers, or women or farmers, who spend a few weeks touring other lands. For instance, a dance group has visited the Philippines and also Thailand. Quite apart from Government sponsored tours, our teachers also are extremely active in this field, arranging trips to Japan or India or other countries during their vacations and at their own expense. In these ways, Malaya and Malaysians are getting to know their neighbours in a personal manner, and our neighbours are coming to know us. We consider such tours are an excellent means of making and keeping

contacts with friendly lands. It will be seen, therefore, that Malaya is already making constructive efforts to bring about closer understanding.

I have not mentioned the question of sport, because strictly speaking it does not come within the scope of this Assembly, but in order to present a balanced picture, I think I should record the fact that Malaya has done and is doing, a very great deal in this field to promote international understanding. In a few weeks we will be hosts to football teams of youth from twelve countries in Asia at a festival in Penang. Every year the Federation of Malaya is host, paying all expenses, for what is known as the Merdeka Football Tournament. In fact, I believe ours is the only country in the world which sponsors every year an international football meeting. These efforts are another demonstration of our willingness to enhance friendly ties and understanding.

Then there is the question of scholarships. Many Malaysians are studying abroad under scholarships provided by ourselves, and many more through scholarships, awards or fellowships granted either under the Colombo Plan or directly by foreign Governments. The natural tendency is to award scholarships in the more technical field, and only modest attention has been given to scholarships in cultural field. It would seem to me that this could be an excellent method of extending cultural understanding, because it also helps to answer our problem of training the experts we will need in future years if we are to establish many and varied cultural facilities comparable with those in other lands.

If a small country such as Malaya finds itself hampered in providing outlets for expression overseas, because of the great demands being made on our resources of personnel and finance, then naturally, we welcome any gesture which enables us to reciprocate. For instance recently the Government of India invited a cultural delegation from Malaya to visit India for four weeks, and a representative mission of twenty found the tour a most refreshing and enlightening experience. In fact, one of the Malayan artists held a one-man show of his impressions of India within four weeks of returning to our country. I might say that foreign nations have

been taking a very great interest in Malaya in a cultural way, making it possible for talented musicians to come here or for art exhibitions to be held here, with rewarding results, I feel, on both sides.

This is exactly as it should be, because the inter-change of culture through the many possible media available today must, in my view, flow two ways if it is to be of fruitful and lasting value. Both large countries and small must have freedom to operate. The projection of culture must spring from a genuine desire not only to know and to be understood, but it must also be reciprocal, as the cultivation of mutual interest is essential to the encouragement of friendship and understanding.

Fortunately, this is the spirit which prevails in the free world already, and, speaking from a Malayan point of view, the extension of this spirit of co-operation and trust offers the best hope for the future. Tolerance, and respect, interest and welcome, these are the keys to friendship and fraternity. With these keys we can unlock not only individual doors of opportunity but also fling wide the gates of goodwill, thus opening the way to wider horizons of understanding in our rapidly narrowing world. It is my hope that the nations of free Asia and our friends in America will travel both ways happily together on this highway of amity and accord.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you all success in your discussions and deliberations at the Conference.