

THE OPENING OF THE  
FIRST ALL-MALAYSIAN CONGRESS OF  
THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen.

For me to be here this morning to open this very first All-Malaysian Congress of the teaching profession is indeed a great pleasure; I am always glad to speak to teachers, because in meeting and talking to you I am reminded of my first love in my political career - education - and my memory recalls the happy but terrible days at the Ministry of Education.

You will remember, when the Alliance first came into power, I was then Minister of Education. In those days the field of education in Malaya was like a battle-field with bullets flying from all directions - mostly aimed at the Minister!

There was heavy fire from the public with regard to our education policy as a whole, a policy we had inherited from the past; there was fire from the various types of schools; from the Malay schools, from the Chinese schools, and from the Tamil Schools; there was fire on the question of the language media; there was fire on the question of funds, or rather, lack of funds.

Nowadays, all these question have been settled and the firing from these various quarters has been deflected and all energies, which were otherwise wasted, have been channeled towards the implementation of a sound and progressive National Education system. But from one area of the education field there is still sporadic sniping - sometimes quite intense - firing from the teaching profession!

I know you have problems which require solving - and I am confident they will be solved, but first let us get out thinking in true perspective. Let us go back. In 1957 the problems facing the implementation of a sound educational system seemed, at that time insurmountable.

There was such an insatiable demand for educational facilities at all levels - primary, secondary and higher education - that the task which lay ahead at that time seemed enormous.

Shortage of schools, shortage of teachers, diverse opinions, all added to make matters more complex.

Further, the question of so many diverse language raised with it the problem of many different types of teachers with different types of training and resulted in the necessity of a "crash" training programme for teachers.

All these problems had to be tackled simultaneously and the maximum use had to be made of every available teacher, both trained and untrained, graduates and non-graduates, specialists.

At that time we were, so to speak, undergoing an "emergency" in the educational field and with a crash programme the teaching profession became somewhat disjointed, with many types of teachers of various and diverse

standards of qualifications, experience and training. So therefore, as I see it, your main problem or shall I say, to use a better word, your main desire, is to see the setting up of a system of service with terms and conditions of service in keeping with modern Malaysia and just and fair to all.

What has been done from 1957 to 1967 under the circumstances pertaining at the time, was in my opinion correct. But, time moves on, circumstances change, and in keeping with what might be called " education evolution" the time in my opinion has come to sort things out and as I say, evolve a system just and fair to all of you. This can only be done if you contribute your part with patience and co-operation.

I congratulate you on having the foresight to organise this Congress and I am impressed with the five main aims that you have set out to achieve. I sincerely hope that you will not depart from these main objectives and that in achieving them will enable all teachers in Malaysia to play their role more efficiently in serving the youth of our nation.

We are a young nation and therefore the accent on all our policies including education must be an accent on, and must give emphasis to the correct upbringing of our young people; and if you, the teaching profession, are to play your full part in the task of nation building, the task of preparing our young people for the future, then you yourselves as a profession must have an "esprit de corps", and set an example for them to follow; you must have a spirit of dedication and raise your profession above pettiness and selfishness, and you must have a balanced approach to all matters affecting education.

I must say quite honestly, without overpraising your profession, that I am always impressed as I travel around the country on my development tours and meet from time to time many hundreds of teachers in towns and in villages, both far and near.

I am impressed by their hard work, their sense of duty and dedication, and their enthusiasm and devotion to the task of preparing the Malaysians of tomorrow to be good and useful citizens.

Let me wish you all the best of luck in this Congress and I hope that you will achieve the objectives you have set yourselves and that you will build up the teaching profession into a professional body with high standards and a deep sense of dedicated service which our nation will forever be proud of - a body of men and women of which our nation will forever be proud!