

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE  
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE TWENTY FIRST  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF PATA AT PARLIA-  
MENT HOUSE, KUALA LUMPUR, ON 31ST  
JANUARY, 1972

Mr Chairman, Mr. Marvin Plake, Executive Director of PATA, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

At the outset, I would like to welcome you all with our traditional greeting "Selamat Datang Ke Malaysia". It is both a privilege and a pleasure for me, on behalf of the Government and the people of Malaysia, to bid you all welcome to our country.

We Malaysians regard with immense pride the fact that PATA should have chosen us to be hosts to such a distinguished gathering of delegates and their good ladies—who have come from so many countries in the Pacific region and elsewhere.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some thirteen years ago, speaking at the 8th Annual Conference in Singapore, my predecessor and our first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, had given the assurance that should you decide to meet in our country, "we shall not be lacking in our welcome nor in our hospitality".

I am most happy indeed that you have decided to hold this Conference in our Capital, Kuala Lumpur, which, as from tomorrow, will enjoy the full status of a city. Coming here after the Workshop session in Penang, I sincerely hope that your deliberations during the next few days will be most fruitful and that you will enjoy the rest of your stay in our country.

Distinguished Delegates,

I have no doubt that such a gathering of prominent professionals in the field of tourism from various countries will be of immense benefit to the members of PATA. On our part, we regard this Conference as a good augury for the future of tourism in Malaysia.

However, we fully realise that this Conference is no "open sesame" and thus the observation made by your Executive Director is a moot point to remember because it is up to Malaysians themselves to seize the opportunity to promote and create a big impact on the prospects of tourism in this country.

From another viewpoint, this meeting can be regarded as a practical manifestation of both regional and international co-operation which will further strengthen the ties between our peoples and our Governments.

It has often been said that travel broadens the mind and promotes human understanding as well as our knowledge of the world. It is with this in mind that we thought it appropriate to have a monument specially built for this Conference—you would have seen it immediately after leaving the airport—bearing this description "In the furtherance of world peace and prosperity through travel for pleasure and understanding".

Distinguished Delegates,

We are indeed happy to be a member of P A T A and to be associated with its laudable effort. For P A T A represents an institutional relationship, bringing with it very lasting ties of goodwill and friendship.

Therefore, I highly appreciate and value your efforts in bringing the peoples of the world to our Pacific area. Although the world has literally shrunk with the advent of the jet age, I am sure, to a lot many people, the Pacific still promises an exciting adventure in an exotic land.

It is only right, therefore, that this highly praise-worthy effort by P A T A should receive the active support and co-operation of all Governments in this region. Today, due to political circumstances obtaining in certain countries, they are yet to be with us in this constantly growing organisation.

Perhaps, we can afford to be more optimistic; given the right political climate, we may expect all those countries whose shores are washed by the great Pacific to join the P A T A family in the not too distant future.

Distinguished Delegates,

While most of you might be familiar with this country, I would presume that for some others, this might be your first visit. We have been described as a country of many races and, therefore, of many different cultures. This fact would have left its impression on your first arrival in Penang, where, I understand, you had a successful workshop session and the Penang Pesta.

Last September, I had occasion to address a gathering of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in this very hall. I told them, as I am telling you today, that our problems in Malaysia are unique, for in no other country is the balance of the major communities so delicate; in no other country are political and economic powers divided so sharply along communal lines.

However, we realise too that this multi-racial character of our nation is a great asset, provided we can forge out of it a strongly-knit society which can then be fully mobilised for the common good. The traumatic experience we had in May 1969 only serves to strengthen our determination to strive onward in a genuine attempt to foster harmony, goodwill and national unity.

This is vital to us, and I believe for others in this region too, as it is the pre-requisite for peace and stability. It is only when the situation of peace and stability is obtained in each and every country, that regional as well as international co-operation can be of benefit and achieve the desired result

Distinguished Delegates,

I am sure you will agree with me that there is nothing more important to any nation than what a nation-people will do to their environment which will ultimately determine the nation's progress and identity. As a developing nation ourselves, we in Malaysia are of the view that in our effort to raise the standard of living of our people and in providing such amenities as recreational areas for them, we cannot do it alone successfully. We feel that it would be desirable to work together as partners in development to achieve the common goal, though each one of us may have to adopt our own method and at the same time retain our own identity and character.

I am very glad to note that the whole theme of your Workshop in Penang has been devoted to the subject of "Pacific Destination Area of the 80's—Planning their Development". I am also given to understand that a great part of your discussions have been concentrated on the need for ecological balance, a very current topic today involving the conservation of plant and animal life.

No one would deny that studies on the proper development of our environment are of utmost importance in our present day world. It certainly has direct relevance to development efforts for tourism. This we will always bear in mind that while recognising the need to improve and develop our tourist potentials, which may require interference with nature, we must ensure that we do not upset the ecological balance.

Another important matter which requires attention is the need for planning and research and integrated development. My own experience as the Minister responsible for national and rural development for many years, and the fact that we are deeply involved in our Second Malaysia Plan, has fully disciplined me in these basic requirements for research-planning and integrated development programmes. For without them, all efforts will only be futile and will only result in lost expectations.

Distinguished Delegates,

It heartens me to note that the first and foremost item on your Agenda is the overall evaluation of the progress and results of these annual gatherings. Apart from identifying projects, it is also important to ensure that something is achieved from time to time. Otherwise, all the pains and trouble to organise such Conference will mean little more than nicely printed reports.

As far as Malaysia is concerned, tourism is a new industry—a new dimension in our economic pursuit. For so long, our economy has been dependent on our primary products—principally rubber and tin; and lately oil palm and timber have assumed growing significance.

Nevertheless, we are aware of the vast potentials of travel and tourism and, to this end, my Government has planned to exploit our available resources, along with the private sector, so as to reap some benefit from this new industry.

We have adopted an open-sky policy in order to attract tourist flights; at the same time, we are improving our existing airports and building new ones in anticipation of the growing volume of air traffic. Special incentives are given to hotel entrepreneurs and the Government actively sponsors hotel-catering courses to meet the increasing demand for trained personnel.

Meanwhile, both here in Peninsular Malaysia and in East Malaysia, rapid developments are taking place in providing road-link through the one-time inaccessible parts of the country. Our land settlement projects, although essentially an economic venture, are in themselves no less interesting as tourist objects. And, being in the Tropics, we consider ourselves fortunate in the abundant wealth that Nature provides—the long sandy beaches, cool mountain resorts and the green countryside.

I need not elaborate on this since most of you were in Penang; some have been to Kedah and our legendary Island of Langkawi. I hope you will be able to see more of the country as you travel down to the East Coast states, historic Melaka, Johore Baharu and on to Sarawak and Kota Kinabalu.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Of course, it is not only places that you will see; you will also want to meet our people. It is a most fortunate coincidence that this 21st PATA Conference should be held in the midst of our joyous celebration commemorating City Day. Kuala Lumpur is the first to be bestowed the city status by our King and for us this has a special significance. Our people would be most happy to have you all enjoin in the fun and gaiety—not anything like Mardi Gras but typically Malaysian in form and content.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The years ahead are full of challenges for us in Malaysia. The current Five-Year Plan which is now in its second year of implementation and the subsequent ones are designed to bring about far-reaching changes in the fabric of our society. Through the Government's New Economic Policy, we hope not only to eradicate poverty among our people, at the same time, achieve the goal of restructuring our society with the industrialisation of the rural areas and thus opening vast employment opportunities for all particularly the younger generation.

Naturally, the general effects of this social change are bound to have a strong impact on internal as well as external tourism. As people earn more income, we can logically expect greater saving, part of which will find its way in the direction of travel and tourism. This is the rationale of developing our tourism infrastructure and tourist facilities-cum-amenities for the next decade.

The Tourist Development Corporation of Malaysia, once formed, will take over the task of co-ordinating and integrating development efforts in tourism. This young body will look up to your guidance and assistance, until it has gained sufficient experience and expertise to be on its own feet.

Distinguished Delegates,

In the next few days, you will be deliberating on your future programme to further enhance tourism in the Pacific area. Although your stay is brief, I sincerely hope you will find time to see as much of our country as possible before proceeding to your next destination and home.

Once again, I wish to reiterate how happy and proud we Malaysians are for the honour of your visit here with your good ladies. We have done everything possible to make your stay here both enjoyable and memorable, with varied and exciting programmes. As your hosts, we offer to accept your observations and criticism for it is through mistakes that we learn and improve ourselves.

Lastly, I sincerely hope you will find the opportunity to visit us again and perhaps stay a little longer and meet our people in their homes and in their daily work.

With that, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have great pleasure in declaring open the 21st Annual Conference of the Pacific Area Travel Association and wish you success in your deliberations.

Selamat Sidang P A T A !