

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF THE SEVENTH MALAYSIA-
SINGAPORE CONGRESS OF MEDICINE AT
THE AUDITORIUM OF THE GENERAL
HOSPITAL, KUALA LUMPUR ON 4TH
AUGUST, 1972

Mr. President, Professor Seah Cheng Siang; Master of the Academy of Medicine, Malaysia, Datuk K. A. Menon; Dr. J. L. Frew, President of the Royal Australian College of Physicians; Distinguished Delegates and Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish first of all, to thank the Academy for giving me the honour and the opportunity to address you and subsequently to declare open this Congress. On behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia, I wish to extend a very warm welcome to all the delegates and participants from Singapore and overseas and I hope that you will enjoy our hospitality during your brief stay here.

I am deeply touched by your kind gesture in electing me an honorary Member of the Malaysian Academy of Medicine, an honour which I accept with humility.

This is the second occasion I had the honour and privilege of addressing this august body. I would like to take this opportunity to express my warm congratulations to all concerned in holding this Congress in our Capital, which brought together again not only leading medical personalities from Singapore and Malaysia but also from other Southeast Asian countries, Japan and Australia. It is without doubt that the deliberations of this Congress would be of great value of the progress and development of medicine in our respective countries.

Distinguished Delegates,

We in Malaysia were fortunate to inherit a sound health service system at the time of independence fifteen years ago. However, the system had one basic weakness in that it was largely an urban-based delivery system. In a situation where nearly 80% of the

population lived in rural areas, this large section of the population were denied the benefits of modern medicine. As a result, they had to rely on the Bomohs or Medicine-men, on traditional medicine and spiritualists or the roadside pill-peddler.

It is with the object of correcting this imbalance, that the Government embarked upon a massive Rural Health Service programme aimed at providing an integrated medical, health and dental service to our far-flung rural communities. By now, we have had three five-year plan periods, and I am pleased to see that a vast network of health centres has been established, some in the remote area of the country. It is now for us to ensure that the highest standard of medical service is made available through these units, so that our rural community will enjoy a high standard of health which is an essential factor for increasing their economic productivity.

The current Five-Year Plan which embodies the New Economic Policy will see further advances in the provision of medical and health services and to achieve a more balanced distribution of such services between the urban and the rural areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am especially proud to address you today in this auditorium which is a part of our new General Hospital. This complex when completed in a couple of years, would be the symbol of our high aspiration in giving the best medical service to our people. Besides having a very modern Radiotherapy Department, a Neurological Institute, a Paediatric Hospital and other super-speciality units, there will also be an Institute of Orthopaedics and the Institute of Urology.

But our attention is not focused on the Kuala Lumpur only. New hospitals have been built in Seremban and in Kuching and new District Hospitals are being built or have been completed in Tanjong Karang, Dungun, Changkat Melintang, Papar and Ranau. Ipoh and Kota Baharu will have new hospitals soon and there will be new District Hospitals at Telok Anson and Kelang. Facilities in Kota Kinabalu and Sandakan will be expanded. There are plans for new District Hospitals in Telok Datuk, Sitiawan, Jerteh, Tanah Merah, Machang, Jerantut, Jengka, Beluran, Tembunan and Beaufort in Sabah and Limbang and Serian in Sarawak.

We appreciate the fact that residential treatment is a heavy consumer of resources especially medical manpower. Towards this end our Ministry of Health has expanded its training capabilities immensely in respect of all categories of staff-professional, para-medical, auxiliary and ancillary.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The objective of manpower planning is not just for the adequate number of physicians but for the right use of physicians. There is a need, in private and public medicine alike, to take a hard critical look at every level of specialisation in the health services, in order to match the right skill with the right function. This presupposes a resolution to undertake a functional analysis within the health service. I am convinced that this is an area where the Members of the Academy, who comprise the leading Senior Consultants in this country, with their vast store of experience and knowledge, of the local health and needs and problems, would contribute most effectively.

I understand the Ministry of Health in conjunction with the Medical Faculty of the University of Malaya and the Academy of Medicine are jointly arranging the holding of post-graduate examinations locally. The holding of examinations leading to higher degrees in Medicine, Surgery, Pathology, Anaesthesia and Public Health, in conjunction with various examining bodies from overseas, would be a precursor to the establishment of our own Royal Colleges. Furthermore, the establishment of post-graduate courses locally is the only way that the country can be assured of a constant supply of specialists.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Medical Education is a continuing process. I need not emphasise its importance if a high standard of professional practice is to be maintained. Hence, the role of the teacher should not be confined to specialists stationed in the larger general hospitals only. I am in full agreement that it should be the function of every specialist in the country so that our young doctors will attain the necessary skills to serve local needs and problems. I am glad to hear that the facilities for teaching have been improved in all hospitals and I hope that these be utilised to the maximum.

It is gratifying to note that the Academy has grown from strength to strength every year. As mentioned by Datuk Dr Menon just now, the membership has exceeded the 200 mark. I am sure, that with the present leadership your strength will grow rapidly and I wish you all the success.

I must thank you for your assistance to the Government in the past, and I would like to assure you that your Academy has the support of my Government in all its future undertakings.

I look forward to the report of your deliberations which I am sure will be of benefit to us for the planning and development of our medical and health services. Last, but not least, I must thank you again for having bestowed upon me the rare privilege of being an honorary Member of such a distinguished society.

I now have the pleasure of declaring the Seventh Malaysia-Singapore Congress of Medicine open and wish you every success in your deliberations.