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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE
ASIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE I.L.O.
AT DEWAN BAHASA DAN PUSTAKA, KUALA
LUMPUR ON 2ND MAY, 1974

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Your Excellencies, Mr Director-General, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a real pleasure for me to be here this morning and be given the honour to declare open the Sixteenth Session of the Asian Advisory Committee of the I.L.O.

On behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia, I wish to extend a very warm welcome to distinguished delegates from so many friendly countries and to say how happy we are to have you all with us particularly since this is the first time that the I.L.O. is holding such a conference in Malaysia.

I wish to extend our special welcome to Mr Blanchard, the new Director-General of the I.L.O. who has given us the singular honour of being the first country he visited since assuming office some time ago.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

An international gathering such as this is indeed useful because by bringing together employers and workers representatives from various countries and governments and by pooling together and exchanging our experiences it will no doubt be beneficial to us all. This is also a very practical way of strengthening international co-operation and friendship especially in the context of the present day world of inter-dependence.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am pleased to note that this session of the Asian Advisory Committee has chosen "human resources development in rural areas in the context of the Asian Manpower Plan" as an important item on its agenda. This subject is of great interest to us in Malaysia because we have embarked on an extensive plan to reduce unemployment and eradicate poverty among our people.

The measure taken to eradicate poverty in the rural areas are clearly spelt out in the Second Malaysia Plan and they will involve nearly 75% of our population of 11.4 million who live in the rural areas.

It is a fact that rapid population growth and unemployment are twin dilemmas in all developing countries in this region. In the more developed countries, the population growth has been absorbed by rapid industrial expansion. However, the pace of industrialisation in the developing countries has not been able to cope with their population increases or, for that matter, it will not be able to contain the unemployment problems within the foreseeable future because the manpower for development for the next two decades will have to come from the present population. Moreover, there is one essential factor that has been overlooked, perhaps unintentionally. This is the role of the women.

In many Asian countries today, there has been a marked trend towards the increased employment of women in all sectors of the economy. Today women are accepted as an integral part of a nation's manpower resources. However, they still face limited chances of entering skilled jobs due to lack of proper training and therefore emphasis should be placed on enhancing the role of women by providing them with better opportunities for training and the acquiring of skills.

It is a truism that an educated mother has healthier and more intelligent children and this is related to the fact that she has fewer children. The tendency among educated mothers to have fewer children was noted in Europe before the turn of this century. Besides, the educational level of women is a significant factor because it has a direct influence upon their chances of employment; and the number of employed women in a country's labour force has a direct bearing on the gross national product and the income of the family. This additional income in the hands of women influences food purchase and therefore the nutritional well-being of the family. The fact that this additional income is derived from the direct employment of women is in itself a logical incentive to bring up healthy and well-fed children.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is characteristic of all developing countries that the bulk of our population live in the rural areas where amenities of life

are somewhat limited as compared to the urban centres. In most of these countries, population pressure in the rural areas is coupled with lack of employment opportunities which results in large scale urban drift, particularly among the youths of both sexes in search of work. The towns are a natural magnet to youths from rural areas where the industries and business houses are expected to provide them job opportunities and hopes for the future. Unfortunately, for most of them, the lack of education and more so skills place them at a disadvantage in competition with the urban youths.

In the light of our own experience in Malaysia, rural development and settlement has proved to be a practical solution to relieve rural unemployment. It also has important economic, social and political considerations. It not only provides employment and develops human resources but also helps to redress economic imbalances between the urban and the rural population.

In approaching the subject of developing human resources in rural areas, I am sure you all will be examining it from various perspectives. Rural development is a process which involves many aspects of governmental operations at the political, economic and social levels. It is a process that involves political leaders, economists and administrators in as much as the people themselves who will be affected by whatever policies Government may formulate and implement from time to time. It is no exaggeration to say the developing human resources in rural areas presents some of the most intricate and inter-related problems in administration since rural Development is closely associated with the development of agriculture and other agro-based industries.

Distinguished Delegates.

I hope you will look into the problem of human resources development in rural areas in greater depth and to find a solution to the abundance of unused manpower with the view to increase the income and economic level of the rural workers.

In Malaysia our present policy to improve the lives of our rural population is spelt out in the Second Malaysia Plan. Today as we enter the fourth year of its implementation, we have developed over half a million acres of land and settled approximately 29,000 families in our land settlement schemes. There has also been a small decline in the overall rate of unemployment. In all, some

348,000 new jobs have been created which is about 58% of the original planned target for the five-year period. But, despite these encouraging achievements, there is still an abundance of manpower which can be fruitfully utilized. Our current industrialisation drive, especially bringing industries to the smaller towns and rural areas will hopefully absorb this surplus labour. Another recent development which is likely to change the basic character of Malaysia's social, economic and agricultural life is the establishment of Farmers' Organisation Authority with effect from 1st November, 1973. In the past, there used to be a great deal of overlapping in the operation and function of thousand odd farmers' associations and rural co-operatives since they served the same farmer and in most cases having the same ground level leadership. We have decided on a policy of integrating both these grass-root organisations under a new body known as the Farmers' Organisation.

This new approach does not require the dissolution of any existing body either Agro-based Co-operative Societies or Farmers' Organisations, but there is clear delienation of functions with regard to matters such as processing, marketing, agricultural supplies, consumer supplies, credit, savings and transportation. In short, the aim of the Farmers' Organisation is to upgrade farm techniques through the introduction of specialised knowledge—previously unattainable by the individual farmer—and through the use of machinery with which to reduce the production cost.

Distinguished Delegates.

I also note that the Conference will discuss the role required of the respective Governments not merely in formulating and implementing protective labour laws but also in taking appropriate action on social and economic policies concerning employment, wages and income. They should also concern themselves with other unspecified categories of workers, including those who are self-employed, while promoting steady expansion of those in the manufacturing, construction, transportation and communication industries in accordance with the growing demand in these sectors.

It is clear to us that the services rendered by our respective Ministry of Labour in providing productive employment for all those who are willing to work, including those currently unemployed or under-employed, have become an important aspect of the overall Government policy of obtaining full and productive employment.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

In conclusion, I think it is worthwhile noting that the rural population in Asia is undergoing a gradual change and this will not only determine the pattern of our cultural and economic growth but in fact it will determine the future destiny of our respective nations. Much has been done and will continue to be done for the organised industrial workers and I think it is high time that the focus of attention be given to the rural agricultural population who are by and large self-employed. There is need for a balanced development of both the urban and rural population in order to maintain harmony and stability especially in multi-racial society. It is my hope and desire that your discussion on this subject will bring forth concrete and practical recommendations for our mutual benefit.

With these remarks, I have great pleasure in declaring the Sixteenth Session of the Asian Advisory Committee of the I.L.O. open with my hope and trust that your discussions will bring practical and valuable results.