

Opening of the Information Officers'  
Conference on 10th March, 1960  
at Tengku Abdul Rahman Hall.

-----

Gentlemen,

One year has gone by since I last addressed you at your 10th meeting. Though this department is no longer directly under my Ministry, I shall always take a special interest in it.

It was my privilege to work with you during your period of transition and re-organisation - when emphasis was switched from work connected with the emergency to counter-subversion and nation building. The change was not without its difficulties. There was the re-organisation of your personnel, staff shortages - to mention 2 big headaches, together with the bricks the critics and know-alls threw occasionally at your heads. I must say that you have weathered the change well, due, no doubt, to your Director and the hardwork and the unfailing co-operation of his staff.

This year Tuan Syed Ja'afar Albar, as Asst. Minister in charge of Information, assumes control of the Information Services and Radio Malaya. Information work will therefore be more co-ordinated. Under his able direction you may be assured of a satisfying year, while he, on his part, can rely on the loyal support of every person in this department.

May I, before declaring this conference open, take a little of your time to speak on a subject very close to my heart - the Government's Rural Development Plans. I am the man in charge, yes, and the responsibility is mine - but every man in this room and every loyal Malayan must play his or her part if the plans are to achieve the maximum results.

The Government has given top priority to plans aimed at improving the lot of the rural inhabitants, so that they will be provided with a sound economic foundation for peasant agriculture. We intend to go a step further to ensure that the man on the land receives the full reward of his work and enjoys the amenities of Malayan life in the same measure as his brother in the town.

This is a big task. It is of such importance that a Department of Rural Development has been set up. You will appreciate the difficulties we face in trying to implement this plan. First and foremost we come to face with ignorance and suspicion. The Kampong dweller is conservative. His ideas are set and he is suspicious of changes. What was good enough for his grand-father and his father, is surely good enough for him! It will be your task to break down this wall of ignorance, so that the planners can be assured of a fertile ground to work on. A rural education programme directed towards enlightenment, must be instituted. By this I do not mean just teaching them how to read and write - though that should come later. They must be made to appreciate the Government's efforts to improve their lot and they can only do this if they understand what is being done for them. They must be encouraged to change their conservative attitude and re-orientate their out-look to a national outlook and forsake their kampong one. They will need patience and understanding and in your approach, please bear in mind their religious scruples and beliefs.

I am positive that I can depend on the officers of this department not only to help launch this plan, but to help to bring it to a successful conclusion.

Its success is imperative for the plan spells economic stability and happiness for all our people. Put into your efforts the same drive and tenacity of purpose you displayed in the Emergency campaigns and the battle would be more than half won.

In the deliberations that you will be having during the next few days let me remind you that the aim of the Government is to lead the people towards the sense and reality of nationhood. The supreme need is to build a united Malayan nation. It calls for co-ordination of all the activities and influences which will serve to erase difference and promote unity. As Information Officers you have more opportunities to work for the attainment of this object. In your dealings with the public display complete impartiality and integrity. Let your actions and your behaviour be the model of tolerance and understanding - qualities so essential to nation building today. If each one pulls his weight we would have travelled a little further along the road that leads to complete and real national unity.

I thank you for this opportunity of meeting you again and I take great pleasure in declaring the conference open.