

Opening of the Conference of
Assistant Rural Development Officers
on 11th November, 1960 at K. L.

I am very glad to meet you today, all of you, who have come to Kuala Lumpur from your various posts as assistant rural development officers throughout the country, to attend this Conference.

I have met most of you, individually, during my various tours to districts; and on my return from touring, I instructed the Chairman of R.I.D.A. to call this Conference in order to give you all an opportunity to come to Kuala Lumpur and exchange views one with another and to understand clearly the national policy of rural development: to understand the purpose behind that policy, and to understand the part - a very important part - that each one of you are expected to play in implementing our national rural development programme.

So therefore, I shall begin by reminding you what in fact the Government has set out to achieve in launching its national rural development programme.

I shall then, very briefly, tell you how far we have got in this programme, and finally, I shall explain to you the main points of the policy I am directing R.I.D.A. to carry out in rural development and the part which I expect you - each and every one of you - to play in implementing it.

What is the purpose of rural development? What is the purpose to be achieved in developing the rural areas? What exactly are we trying to do?

Some countries when they first develop after independence, tend to concentrate on the development of urban areas and the rural areas are left alone to develop haphazardly without plan, and without forethought.

But we, in Malaya, now have what we might call a double-edged development knife with which to cut the path of progress - progress in the towns; and progress in the rural areas.

One blade of this knife is our rural development programme: the other blade, is our programme of pioneer industries and industrial development.

It may be that the blade cutting the path of development in our rural areas is sharper - I sincerely hope it is - but it does not mean that the blade which is cutting the path of progress of industry is not equally sharp and I believe that my ministerial colleague, Inche Khir Johari, would say that the blade of his industrial programme is equally sharp.

Therefore, the development of the rural areas is going ahead in parallel with the development of commerce and industry and the two combined are contributing towards the overall economic development of our country.

We can see in so many other countries, which have recently developed, that in fact their development stops at the municipal boundaries of their large towns and industrial centres, and if one goes beyond those town boundaries, within a mile or so, one can find poverty, bad health and poor living conditions.

It is our aim that in Malaya this will not happen.

But as the towns progress, so will the rural areas; and therefore, as the standard of living in our cities improves, as a result of progress and prosperity, it is only right and correct that the people in our rural areas should also benefit from such prosperity as well.

Malaya as a nation, since achieving independence, has progressed considerably; it now enjoys an international reputation as being one of the most stable, one of the most progressive and one of the most advanced countries in Asia.

This is the position today. But what of the future? In five or ten years' time is Malaya going to be a better or worse place to live in?

The answer lies not entirely in the hands of Government.

The future development of our nation is, so to speak, a trust of which all of us - both Government and the people - are trustees.

Government can plan, and make some sound projects; Government can gear its resources to make sure that its administrative, technical and other machinery is working efficiently to give the best it can offer the people.

But the true development of any nation will ultimately lie in the hands of the people themselves and the effort which they put into their daily task.

Our rural development policy, therefore, has been divided into two phases. The first phase: the responsibility of Government. The second phase: the responsibility of the rural people themselves. So far we are still on the first phase and I hope to launch the second phase early next year when it will be made clear to the people through such means as community development, adult education and other such media as to how they themselves can contribute to the development of the rural areas.

Let me very briefly summarise the Government's responsibilities - Government is responsible for such things as:-

- (a) Better land administrative so that the rural people can get land more quickly and more fairly;
- (b) Better roads so that they can have better access to their land and better access from their land to markets so that they can sell the produce of their land more easily;
- (c) Better clinics and water supplies so that they can have better health and be more able to work well on their land;
- (d) Better drainage so that they get better results from their land;
- (e) Better river clearing so that their crops are not spoiled by flooding or erosion;
- (f) Better processing and marketing facilities for the produce of their land so that they get a fair return for their labour;
- (g) Better facilities for the development of rural industries so that they can make better use of their time and increase their income;
- (h) Better schools for the education of their children;
- (i) Better playing fields for the health of their children and where possible electricity and telecommunications, etc., etc.

So, therefore, in order to take stock of these basic requirements of rural development each district was asked to make a district rural development plan in the form of what is now known as the Red Book plan.

Work on the completion of these Red Book plans was, as it were, a stock-taking of the needs of every district so that they could be co-ordinated into an overall State plan and finally so that all State plans could be co-ordinated into the national second five-year development plan. At the same time as this was being done instructions in the Red Book were given to every Government officer concerned that they must work together as a team for the benefit of the ra'ayat in their district.

This first phase is successfully near completion, and I am glad to say that every officer on the ground at district and State level - and that includes all of you here today - worked extremely well and did an excellent job.

I now turn to the part which R.I.D.A. has to play in development in the rural areas; it is my intention that the role of R.I.D.A. be changed slightly from what it has been in the past few years. Before the Ministry of Rural Development was established R.I.D.A. was, as it were, a department of Rural Development with many functions and many responsibilities all concerned with the rural people.

Now that the new Ministry is gradually taking over many of these functions I intend to narrow down the sphere of R.I.D.A.'s activities to the main purpose for which it was originally established, namely the development of rural industries and rural marketing.

If we are to raise the standard of living of the rural people, and remember that is our aim, we must do two main things: These will be the tasks of R.I.D.A.

(a) Ensure that the rural dweller is given a fair return for his labour. This means the establishment of good processing and marketing facilities for the produce from his land.

(b) Develop small-scale rural industries so that the rural dweller may have the opportunity to make the best use of his time, if not working on his land, and thus raise his income and his standard of living.

These are the tasks which you in your daily work as Assistant Rural Development Officers are asked to fulfil. You will be given every opportunity for further training in order to help you carry out your work as efficiently as possible.

It is not my intention to discuss the details of your training - that will be done by people who are more expert than I. But it is my intention to discuss your attitude of mind and the spirit with which I expect you to carry out your work when you return to your various districts.

Firstly, many of you may find that in your day-to-day work there are no senior officers nearby to supervise you and there may, therefore, be a temptation for you to sit back and wait for directions as to what to do and how to do it. This I do not want to see. First and foremost, I expect all of you to use your initiative to the maximum. Remember the aim of what we are trying to achieve and think out, and keep thinking of ways and means whereby your efforts and energy can help raise the standard of living of the rural people in your districts.

Put some spirit and put some life into your work and although there is no one senior to you watching you, always remember that you have responsibility not only to the Government but to the nation for you to devote every minute of your working hours with a full and determined effort to help the rural people.

Then, when the projects have started and are under way in your districts, make sure that you follow up action on them to ensure success.

Your success in your work in each one of your district can only be judged from one thing, and one thing alone, that is results and to achieve results is to stick to what you are doing through thick and thin until the project is a success.

To do this you can in fact get better advice than I can ever give you by looking at a postage stamp and remember that the merit of a postage stamp is in its ability to "stick" to its objective until it arrives at its destination.

Kuala Lumpur,
11th November, 1960.