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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF THE FIFTH CONFERENCE ON
ANIMAL HEALTH AND PRODUCTION AT
DEWAN BAHASA DAN PUSTAKA, KUALA
LUMPUR ON 20TH SEPTEMBER, 1971

Mr Chairman, Hon'ble Ministers, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia, to welcome all of you to this Conference, representing various countries and organisations.

We in Malaysia feel honoured and happy to be the host to this international gathering. I sincerely hope pooling together of ideas and experiences will emerge as a result of your deliberations during the next few days, which will benefit our people in the future.

This Conference, to my mind, is very important as it deals with a very essential source of food production. I understand you will be discussing the various aspects of animal health and production, and in so doing, you will no doubt examine how best the health of our domestic animals can be maintained and improved, and how best, under the conditions prevailing in the region, these animals can be made to produce to their maximum capacity, so that the supply of food from this source could be assured.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The developing countries in this region, with their characteristic problem of rapidly increasing population, face a host of problems in their endeavour to increase food production. To a certain extent, these problems are being overcome with the advent of the Green Revolution. As staple food grains become more readily available, increasing attention and efforts should be directed towards improving the quantity and quality of protein foods of animal origin.

Thus, it is no surprise to me that the veterinary services of the various countries represented at the Conference here today are focusing their attention towards the attainment of this objective. However, I am fully aware of the Herculean task we all face in achieving our targets due to the shortage of trained personnel and finance. In this connection, international organisations like the F.A.O. have played a vital role in assisting countries in this region in disease control. However, much more has yet to be done in this direction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a way, this Conference is somewhat different from others of a similar nature held previously. As I understand it, you will devote less of your time on the review of progress of projects carried out by our respective countries in the fields of animal health and production. You will instead concentrate on your future plans and activities and the role that F.A.O. as an agency of the United Nations, can play in assisting us in our endeavours.

I am indeed happy at this change of emphasis, for there is, to my mind, certainly much that F.A.O. can still do to improve the status of the animal industry so that the people of every country in this region will attain the optimum level of protein consumption and thereby promote better health and living among our people. In this way, we will gradually eliminate the existing protein gap in the national diet.

I am fully aware of F.A.O.'s contribution towards improving agriculture generally in the Far East and particularly in Malaysia, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my Government's appreciation for their efforts. We have benefited from the Rice Research Programme and currently F.A.O. is assisting to establish a Fish Research Centre in Penang.

However, it appears that in the field of animal health and production, Malaysia has still much to benefit from the services available through this international organisation. I have in mind some of the projects which are given priority in our Second Malaysia Plan. The training of technical personnel for the expanding veterinary and animal husbandry services, the expansion of our research and laboratory facilities and the development of cattle husbandry stations are, to my mind, worthy of more support from F.A.O.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Earlier on, I referred to the existence of a protein gap, and in order to close this gap, scientists today are more conscious of the need to produce high protein foods like meat, milk and eggs. To achieve this, it is essential for every country to have a healthy and productive livestock industry. Malaysia is still heavily dependent on dairy products. In 1970 we imported about \$70 million worth of dairy products and \$3.1 million of meat.

I would, therefore, urge this Conference to give serious attention to the problems faced by most countries in this region in their endeavour to establish the necessary infrastructure to improve and expand their industry.

I refer particularly to the availability of good livestock and good health services that will reduce the exposure of animals to disease. We should not be satisfied with our people, especially growing children, eating any type of food; rather, we should be more concerned in trying to help them obtain better diet by providing quality food like meat, milk and eggs in sufficient quantities and at reasonable prices.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad that this Conference is being held just as we are embarking on our Second Malaysia Plan. This Plan lays great emphasis on agricultural development that is directed towards revolutionising our farmers' personality and his concepts, and, of course, his income and status in the community.

Like in many other developing countries in this region, agriculture is still the main stage of our Malaysian economy, generating one-third of the Gross Domestic Product, and providing employment for nearly one-half of our working population. It also accounts for about 50% of the country's foreign exchange earnings.

There has been substantial development of the agricultural sector in recent years, but during the Second Malaysia Plan period, modernisation of agriculture will be accelerated in order to eradicate poverty and raise income levels. It will also generate greater employment opportunities and we hope it will

help to meet our goal of restructuring our society and correct the economic imbalance between the traditional agricultural and urban sectors of the Malaysian society.

In addition, it is our aim that the modernisation of agriculture will create new opportunities for the development of agro-based industries and it is here, I feel, that this Conference can make a useful contribution through the exchange of ideas and experiences from the various participating countries.

I would also urge the Conference, therefore, to focus its attention and deliberations on the ways and means that can be adopted towards the development generally and the development and improvement of animal health and production in particular so that solutions can be found to some of the problems of rural poverty existing in countries in this region.

In conclusion, I would request distinguished delegates to focus your mind to the problems associated with the promotion of a steady and sustained progress of the livestock industry in this region. Our planners have already earmarked areas which have immense potentials for dairy farming as well as livestock for meat. These projects are being pursued with earnest.

On this note, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have great pleasure in declaring open this Fifth Conference on Animal Health and Production and I wish you all every success in your deliberations.