

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
PERAK BAR ASSOCIATION DINNER AT IPOH
ON 12TH DECEMBER, 1971

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Members of the Perak Bar,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr Chairman, and through you, to convey my sincere thanks and appreciation to your President, Fred Arunalandom, for the honour you are giving me this evening. I have looked forward to this engagement ever since your President first proposed it to me and I was only sorry that I could not accept the first date suggested as it happened to fall during the Fasting Month. Now, at last we have come together and both my wife and I are happy indeed to be here this evening.

It is unfortunate that Fred has had to be away on important matters of State. However, from newspaper reports of him from time to time, I am sure that we are all proud of his performance at the United Nations. Since I had a hand in sending him there, I hope he in turn will find satisfaction in the knowledge that I have kept my promise to be in your pleasant company here tonight.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was only in late June of this year that I was honoured in Kuala Lumpur by the Bench and Bar when they gave me a Dinner on the occasion of my being made an Honorary Bencher of Lincoln's Inn. It was an evening I shall treasure always for I felt then both proud and at home—proud to be so received by my fellow lawyers and at home to be in their company once again.

Tonight is another such occasion and I feel proud and at home once again to be among members of the profession, among friends from far off days, among a familiar gathering that prompts me into a happy remembrance of things past.

I am, of course, revealing no secret when I say that I have not been a practising member of the profession. Somehow, ever since my being called to the Bar more than twenty years now, events have conspired to take me away from the tender mysteries of the law into the ruder mercies of politics.

There have been moments—few and far between—I am sorry to confess—when I have vaguely toyed with the idea of being a practitioner. But then, the tontine of politics grew into a habit, which I have come to accept in preference to the temptations of legal practice.

I say “temptations of legal practice” because I see so many of my friends who have turned out to be skilled, and, judging from all outward appearances, successful lawyers.

Now, having skilled lawyers is not necessarily a good thing in itself. It has been said that if there were no bad people, there would be no good lawyers. I trust that this statement will not stand up to the test in Malaysia as I should very much like to hope that the quality of our lawyers does not reflect the quality of their clients in any inverse proportion.

Indeed, I feel certain that the people of this country have come to be proud of our legal tradition, brief though it may be. The Rule of Law, its application without discrimination, the high mindedness of our judiciary and its independence from the executive, are the essential features of our legal system.

There are indeed times when the Rule of Law, which that system was created to uphold, may be put under some strain by extraneous events. In such circumstances, the Government has no choice but to legislate to meet those events and other similar foreseeable contingencies.

Yet, whatever the pressures, whatever the stresses of the times, we shall never fail to uphold the Rule of Law. I hold steadfast to the view that an infringement of the liberty of the person must only be provisional in character and must be removed the moment circumstances no longer warrant it.

I was indeed pleased to read the other day a recent editorial of your Bar Council Journal *INSAF*, views about human rights which were expressed with a high degree of care, showing understanding of the problems which we face as well as anxiety for the liberty of the individual.

I wish, if I may, as a non-practising lawyer, to associate myself with that sense of anxiety. It is an anxiety that pervades the thinking of all my colleagues. It is an anxiety nourished by our concern for the survival of the Rule of Law.

But, of one thing we should all be quite clear if the Rule of Law is to continue to survive and be sanctified as part of our social system, it has to rest upon the firm foundations of social order.

I and my colleagues in the Government have of necessity, been addressing ourselves to the problems that attach to reinforcing these foundations.

You have heard us repeat tirelessly the problems of our society: the economic imbalance, employment opportunities, and the need to re-structure the Malaysian society. You may even have grown a little tired by the repetition.

Of course, it would be easy for the Government to point only to the good things, the happy things—and life in Malaysia can be very good indeed. But, I feel constrained to tell our people certain hometruths, to remind them that all is not well, and to exhort them against every form of complacency. We will only progress if we dare to face the truth.

And a major truth is that though we have begun to move forward, time is not on our side. The past one year has been, for the Government, a period of intense activity in connection with the Second Malaysia Plan. The Plan is a clear and practical document—it outlines the grand strategy, sets out the specific targets, explain the lines of attack and examines the prospects for further advance.

But the final document which was unanimously adopted by Parliament earlier in the year is more than an economic plan. It is in fact the blue-print of our very future. The twin objectives it underlines—namely the eradication of poverty and the restructuring of society—must be attained if we are to survive and succeed as a nation.

Of course, these objectives will not be attained within the time-span of the Plan. But, by the end of the Plan period, the people must know that we have broken the back of our problems and that we are fast catching up with the goals we have set ourselves.

The journey ahead will be long and harzardous. We face difficult problems and moreover events around us are moving very rapidly so that the international outlook is murky and uncertain. We enter now a period of immense efforts to implemenent the Second Malaysia Plan, to consolidate what we have attained, to safeguard

our security and stability and to inculcate a sense of national identity and national purpose.

In facing these challenges, everyone has a part to play. In particular, I would like this evening to appeal to the legal community, which is an important professional group, to play its part.

We lawyers are in fact a privileged group of people. We have received an education which has enabled us to lead comfortable lives and to be respected members of the community. But, for this privilege and for the comforts of our lives, we owe a debt to the community which we must pay.

Lawyers are, after all, a trained body of men, steeped in a certain tradition of learning which has made us conscious of the social foundations of our society. We must discharge the skills we have acquired in the service of the community. We shall be untrue to our calling, which has a fine tradition of public service, if we now fail to carry out that responsibility.

The first of the crucial five years of the Second Malaysia Plan will soon be over. I can assure you that the machinery of Government has been fully geared and it is now poised to go into the second year of action. The Government is going all out in playing its part. I call upon all of you to play yours.

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is not my intention to inflict a very long speech upon you, particularly as you have given me such a delightful meal. But, as I said a little earlier, I feel at home and among friends. I have, therefore, spoken frankly and freely in expressing what is uppermost on my mind. Politics is a deadly serious business and we are in it, all of us, together. Let us, therefore, work together to build the kind of society we all want, for ourselves and for the generations which come after us.

Finally, Mr Chairman, let me thank you for all your gracious words this evening and let me also say again how much my wife and I appreciate your kindness and your hospitality to us this evening.

And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, may I request you all to rise with me and drink a toast in absentia to the President of the Bar Association of Perak: