

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF THE SEMINAR ON FARM
MECHANIZATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE MALAYSIA,
PENANG ON 27TH NOVEMBER, 1972

Pengerusi MADA,¹ Para peserta Seminar, Tuan-tuan yang hadir.

Saya sungguh gembira kerana dapat bersama-sama di sini pagi ini di samping mendapat penghormatan merasmikan Seminar ini. Sukalah saya mengambil peluang ini menyatakan penghargaan dan tahniah kepada MADA atas langkahnya yang bijak mengadakan Seminar ini di mana tenaga-tenaga ahli dari beberapa negara di rantau ini berhimpun untuk membincangkan masaalah yang kita hadapi bersama.

Saya turut mengucapkan terima kasih kepada Naib Chanselor Universiti Sains² atas kesediaan pihaknya memberikan kemudahan dan membantu menyelenggarakan Seminar yang penting ini.

Mr Chairman, Gentlemen,

I would like, first of all, on behalf of the Government and our people, to welcome all participants to this Seminar of Malaysia particularly to Penang. We are indeed happy with the privilege of being the host country and Penang is even luckier for being chosen as the venue of the Seminar.

From the Seminar programme, I note that you will have the opportunity of seeing something of the country, particularly our rice-bowl region which is directly relevant to this Seminar. All in all, I wish you a pleasant and fruitful stay in our country.

Gentlemen,

As we all know, the current agricultural revolution that is taking place in most developing countries calls for radical changes both in technique and technology of agricultural production. The phenomena increases in crop-yields resulting from recent success

¹ Y.B. Dato Syed Nahar bin Tun Syed Sheh Shahabuddin.

² Tan Sri Hamzah Sendut.

in rice research, for instance, have increased the farmers' income and thereby provide possibilities for more intensive mechanization in agriculture.

It is in this context that I have been looking forward to this Seminar because many of the problems which you will examine in the next few days will have deep significance for Malaysia. I am sure they will be equally relevant to other countries moving rapidly into agricultural modernisation.

Mechanization does not take place in a vacuum. It profoundly influences all aspects of life. Its very existence gives, and will continue to give rise to numerous problems of social, economic and political magnitude. This is very true with most countries of this region where traditional agriculture is characterised by small farm holdings, low farm incomes and cheap labour.

Attempts have been made to mechanise tropical agriculture with equipment originating from the industrialised countries but such equipment is basically developed for different conditions of either larger farm holdings and higher labour costs as in the U.S. or for smaller holdings and higher incomes from a subsidised agriculture as in Japan. Such equipment has not been well accepted under the prevailing agro-economic conditions and consequently mechanisation in our region is slow with a very limited scope.

Malaysia, like most other States in the region, is still a frontier country. We are still in the fortunate position of being able to push back enormous areas of jungle, converting lands for human habitation and agricultural development, planning and implementing the emergence of new communities which will be modern in character.

But, we are not so large nor is our population so small, that we can afford to spend our natural resources with reckless abandon. We are a young nation, but it is desirable for us to exercise mature judgements so that the utilization of our natural and human resources are directed toward the greatest common good.

It is on this concept that the MUDA Agricultural Development Authority or MADA was established some years ago to ensure there would be double-cropping in the area, and the farmers can obtain higher yields in rice. This is now being done, and in the process, agricultural mechanisation is being introduced on a modest scale. I seriously doubt that without mechanisation, these

goals would have been achieved, and it is a fact which we can take pride in that our experiment in mechanisation has met with considerable success.

But, that is not the end of the road. Side by side with our success, we have also created problems. We can think of a number of questions arising out of the new situation. For instance, what effect will mechanisation have upon displacement of labour in the Muda region? Does the mechanization necessary for double-cropping have aggravating effects upon the unemployment situation especially among the youth, let alone the more easily hidden under employment?

These are questions obvious to the agricultural economists and other specialists among you and ever present to the MADA staff. We would like to know the answers and see whether these are applicable to the other regions of the country where the agricultural and social situations are very different. And, if the answers are not satisfactory or encouraging, what are the practical alternatives?

Many economists have pointed to the dangers of displacing farm labour with large agricultural machines. The adverse effects would be even more serious if the tools used to mechanise agriculture are from non-indigenous sources or, in other words, imported from abroad. To minimise the problems, it is essential that the agricultural sector should generate new employment by using labour-intensive practices and by developing agriculture-oriented and other related industries.

The adverse socio-economic implications of introducing imported agricultural machines necessitate the indigenous production of relatively simple, small power-operated equipment. On a closer analysis of the problem, we can only conclude that it would be improbable to mechanise agriculture in our region without a parallel growth of local production of tools and equipment necessary for mechanization. This is the positive contribution, as I see it, of the local assembly plants which are specialising in agricultural machinery in the country.

Gentlemen,

I do not doubt that you will go into details about these and other related questions in the course of your deliberations. But I cannot leave this set of questions without stressing that the problems are by no means academic ones, to be treated as an

interesting intellectual exercise. They are of profound importance to the well-being of a nation. Research personnel of Government agencies and universities **must** assume responsibility by studying situations, analyzing findings and then, providing those who make or implement policy with their conclusions, hopefully practical recommendations—at least, possible alternative paths for the administrator and policy maker to consider.

In this increasingly man-made world of ours, our most difficult problem is to find a way by which we can live with the technological advances man has devised. Each development in technology, each accepted invention or innovation, solves some problems and, at the same time, creates new ones.

I should add at this point that research on mechanization and its consequences should embrace not only present and immediate years ahead. We normally plan five years in advance. To be concerned with trends in mechanization and technology for the next decade or two might very well prove to be useful. But I must hasten to add that projecting too far ahead over an unlimited time, as it were, makes me uneasy. Statistics themselves may be convincing, but the messages attending them are not always conclusive.

For Malaysia in the future, there is one planning facet or reasonable certainty. With large programmes like Jengka Triangle, Pahang Tenggara, Muda River or Kemubu Scheme well on their way, there will be a need to plan on a smaller scale—smaller insofar as land area, numbers of population involved, and suitable technology for programmes to be implemented. Engineers, economists and planners will have to learn how to “think small” as someone has put it. Grandiose plans and liberal budgets will not be feasible. Whether machines themselves will have to be scaled down or new forms of social organization developed to accommodate technical needs to modest situations remains to be seen. Nevertheless, the prospects for engaging in lesser enterprises, I dare say, are challenging; and it is likely that they will be more difficult to execute than larger programmes.

Gentlemen,

It is inevitable that mechanization will bring us face to face with other problem areas as consequences or derivatives of mechanization. Properly speaking, we should expect that machines

free people to do other things—increase their productivity, engage in activities which will enhance family income and level of living, save time and energy and, some, to consider new activities in their lives.

Machines take the jobs of men but also can make life more pleasurable. There is more time for leisure. But the question is how shall our farmer spend his leisure time? Now that he is freed from some chores and labour, there ought to be opportunity for personal growth and participation in community affairs and thereby channel his leisure for a more satisfying social life.

The question of values is a difficult one. Development, as we understand it, means progress in improvement of the state of affairs in our society by increasing the standard of living for all, providing a variety of services, and working toward a reasonable attainment of various ideals shared by most of the population.

We look to an increase in scientific and intellectual skills in the coming decades, but at the same time, hope to retain those values which we consider important. Will mechanization and technological advances affect our social values?

The introduction of cash and wage labour has made incisive inroads into traditional forms of mutual labour exchange in our rural communities. Some studies have been made on our rural communities shift in their structures and internal relationships.

One understands the basis of reluctance to move from tradition, though there may not be agreement with this position. The study of values and ideals in our more traditionally oriented community is essential to understanding and careful planning for constructive change. The link between these and the problems of this Seminar may not be readily apparent, but it is real one. Generally speaking, mechanization is regarded as synonymous with over-emphasis on the material aspects of life. This in itself may give rise to anxiety especially among our less sophisticated rural community.

The problems which we are likely to encounter are by no means insurmountable. Our farmers are pragmatic as well as persistent and their sense of the good things in life need not be shaken. Where mechanization has been emphasised, the response has been excellent. Nevertheless, it is well to bear in mind that value systems differ in many respects between the urban and rural sectors of a nation and this fact cannot be ignored.

Gentlemen,

I would venture to suggest that we must consciously seek appropriate political, economic and social methods for dealing with the forces set loose by new technologies. We recognise that machines provide us control over nature, but we do not wish that machines have power over man as well. To effect the necessary social controls will be no easy task; it must be done wisely and well; it must be done justly.

I have not talked about tractors or paddy-dryers. Some, among you, I am certain will discuss these with better expertise and experience. I have not weighed the relative merits of the two-wheeled tractor and the water buffalo. I leave that to you. The machinery I know best is Government and here I have had more than my share of diagnosing friction points, the need for injecting new sources of energy, of check and balance and so on.

I have not touched on the question of policy *per se*. To do so would be misleading; policy is the sum total of many intricate facets of life. I would not wish to state a "policy on mechanization" blithely, because as such we have none.

What we do have is a policy on agricultural development and mechanization plays its part within the programmes we have in the field, varying with conditions of land use, intensity of labour, nature of crops and all of those other factors relevant to whether mechanization will be used and to what degree. I have chosen to discuss a number of questions which recur in our own deliberations on development policy, in varying degrees of significance, and trust they will provide some guides to you in your deliberations.

One often hears that the general condition of a country is best determined by the state of its agriculture. I would add that for ourselves, we examine that state continually, evaluating the direction it takes not only for the part that it plays in the national economy, but among food producers and food consumers as well. We have made many gains and great strides in recent years but realize full well that the road to progress is long and never ending.

On that note, Gentlemen, I have much pleasure in declaring open the Seminar of Farm Mechanization in South-east Asia and I wish you success in your deliberations.