

OPENING ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER
ON THE OCCASSION OF ICFTU/MTUC
SEMINAR ON UNEMPLOYMENT IN ASIA AT
DEWAN TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN, KUALA
LUMPUR ON 30TH JANUARY, 1973

Mr Chairman, Honourable Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here this afternoon to officially open the MTUC/ICFTU Seminar on Unemployment. To the distinguished participants from so many countries gathered here today I extend my warmest welcome and I sincerely hope that you will have a pleasant stay in Kuala Lumpur.

Indeed as clearly explained by the General Secretary ICFTU and other speakers the subject chosen for the seminar is of increasing concern to the Governments in particular, and likewise to employers and workers of Asian countries. High unemployment represents not only a tremendous waste of manpower, but also a major source of instability and unrest.

The problem of providing remunerative employment for the rapidly increasing number of unemployed persons in Asian countries has engaged the attention of governments and international agencies long before it was recognised as a major factor in development policy. However, this deep concern crystallised in more specific terms when employment questions began to move to the centre of our pre-occupations. The labour movement both at the international and national level has shown a keen awareness and understanding of the problems arising out of unemployment now faced by the countries of this region. This Conference is an excellent example of your keenness in sharing the common concern with the government. I share the hope expressed by Mr Bevan that at the end of this conference you will not only pass resolution or express strong view but practically show your determination to play your role in solving this problem especially for the Malaysian Government. I would welcome sincere and active participation by the Trade Union to solve this problem.

I am sure you need no elaborate introduction to the nature and magnitude of the challenge posed by the rising rate of unemployment. This has been adequately and eloquently expressed by the previous speakers. The agony, anxiety, and the numbing insecurity of the unemployed person is well known to all of us. Unemployment denies the person the right to an income, deprives him of basic necessities and ultimately destroys his human dignity. His potential contribution to the national income is also by default. If left unchecked, massive unemployment would destroy the very foundation of our society because there is no greater cause of disaffection and discontent than a worker without a productive job. Until the problem of creating jobs has been solved there can be no overall economic progress because unemployment always means insecurity and poverty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past decade most countries in Asia have maintained a favourable record of economic growth; in fact the growth rate of some of the countries has been very impressive. Despite this, many countries have greater unemployment today than a decade ago. The situation in Malaysia is not very dissimilar to the experience in most of other countries. During the First Malaysia Plan 1966-70 the Malaysian economy maintained an annual growth rate of 6% but our unemployment rate deteriorated from 6.5% to 8% of the labour-force. In recent past, we have done some serious rethinking and came to the conclusion that social progress is not automatically a consequence of economic growth. G.N.P. growth by itself is hardly an indication of changes in social structure and income distribution. Therefore, in the Second Malaysia Plan (1971-75) we have underlined the eradication of poverty and restructuring of society as its two-pronged objectives, emphasizing the vital need of employment generation.

In my view, social progress must be consciously and deliberately planned within the context of an integrated development strategy in which the interplay of social and economic factors is given full freedom and the human objective kept firmly in view. The concept that job creation cannot be regarded solely as a derivative of general economic growth is steadily gaining ground.

The disturbing feature of the unemployment situation in the Asian region is with regard to the prospects of a large masses of

young people, many of them educated, finding work now and in the years ahead. Employment and training policies concerning youth certainly deserve our very special attention.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another aspect of the problem is rural unemployment which tends to be neglected in our efforts at rapid industrialisation. More than 70% of the Asian population are still in the rural areas engaged in agriculture. However, the magnitude of rural unemployment is disguised in wide-spread under-employment. This condition cannot be changed in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is particularly important, at least in the next ten years, to create new jobs in agriculture in the rural areas. The majority of the population in the rural areas cannot be expected to show patience and wait till development reaches them. The promotion of agro-based industries should also deserve urgent consideration and we in Malaysia are actively pursuing this endeavour.

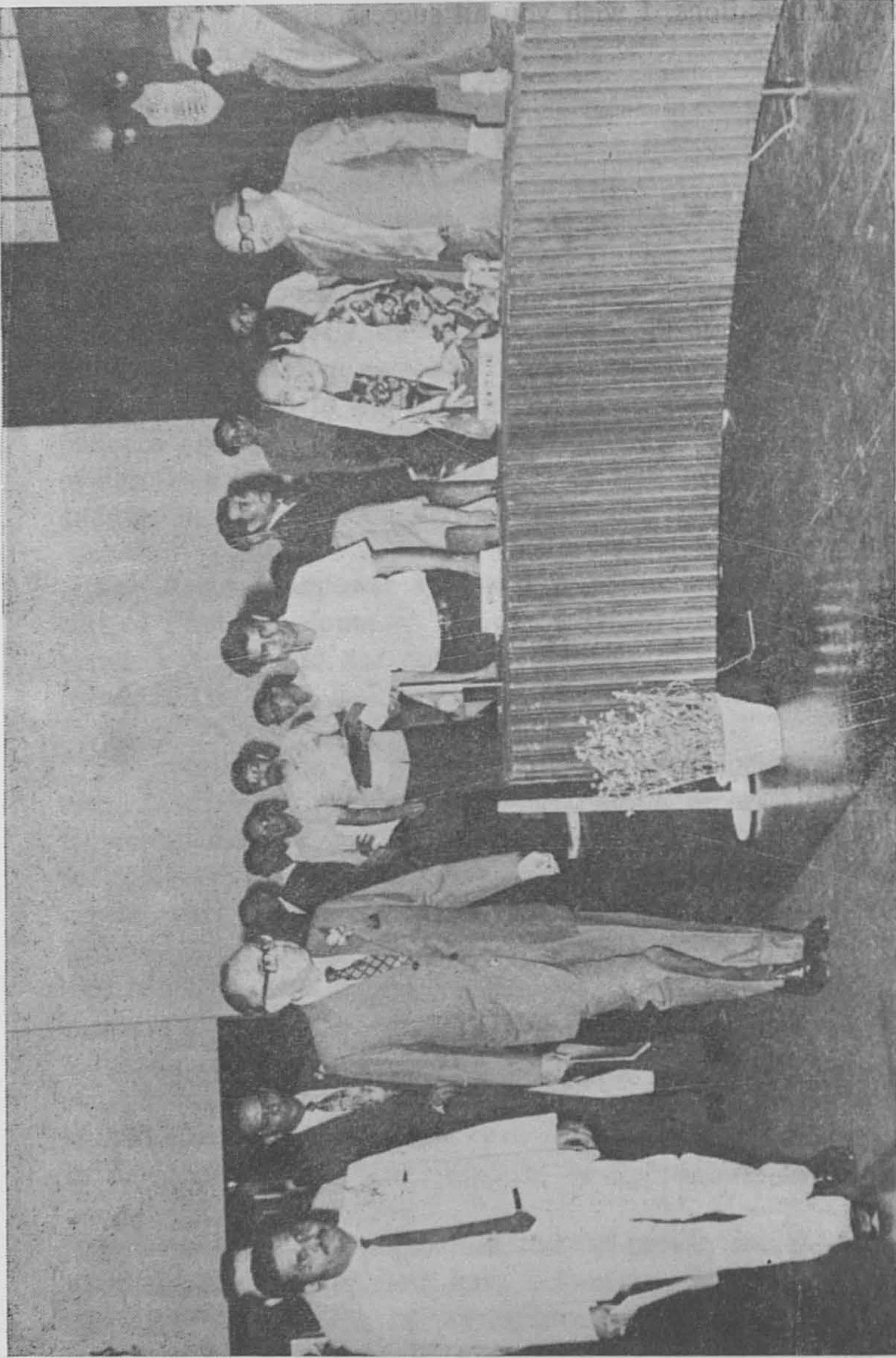
The Asian Manpower Plan which was launched towards the end of First Development Decade provides broad guidelines for action but they do not contain or claim to contain any magic formula. The main task rests with the countries themselves.

The reorientation of planning with primary focus on employment poses many problems. The production process itself has to be employment-oriented. Bold and deliberate efforts are needed to apply labour-intensive methods of production. Here I would repeat what I said on a different occasion: a capital-oriented technology of production geared primarily to conditions in capital rich countries must impose burdens on us not only in the requirements for capital goods but also in throwing out our most valuable resource—our young people. This course is not to sanctify uneconomic methods of production. Science and research should cooperate much more than they have done so far in order to develop and apply intermediate or appropriate technology.

Because of its vast population and the rapidly increasing labour force the countries of Asia have a long way to go in completely solving the problems of unemployment. However, the efforts currently being exerted by the countries themselves and other organisations constitute a significant step forward in the right direction.

Distinguished Delegates,

In declaring this Conference open I trust that you would have a fruitful exchange of views and I look forward to the conclusions of your deliberations. I wish you all success.



Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein sedang berjalan masuk untuk merasmikan Pembukaan Seminar ICFTU/MTUC mengenai "Pengangguran di Asia" di Kuala Lumpur pada 30hb Januari, 1973.

(Gambar Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia)