

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
AT THE ANNUAL CONVOCATION OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA, AT THE DEWAN
TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN, KUALA LUMPUR
ON 10TH JUNE, 1961

Mr Vice-Chancellor, the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Your Excellencies, Hon'ble Ministers, Graduands and Honorary Graduands of the University of Malaya, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Nearly four years ago the Hon'ble the Prime Minister received an Honorary Degree from this University and I was a proud and happy member of the audience which saw the conferring. Little did I think then that on a similar day such as this I would find myself equally honoured, equally proud and equally happy: proud to receive such a great honour myself, and happy since I can now speak to my Prime Minister, the Tunku, on almost equal academic terms.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, you have honoured both the Tunku and myself with degrees in Law. Perhaps you yourself had felt it would have been wiser to give those of us, who are qualified in law, and for that matter all Cabinet Ministers, a thorough grounding in mathematics, but happily that course was not possible for you to follow and in consequence you decided on the next best thing, a degree in Law.

Let me say, Sir, from the depth of my heart I am indeed grateful to the University for conferring upon me the highest honour in its power to bestow. It is gratifying to me that having failed to obtain a degree from the University in the normal way I have now one conferred upon me. Although I have taken part in a ceremony which has some similarity to this colourful and august occasion once in my life before, and that was when I wore a gown to be admitted to the Bar as member of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, it appears that the learned gentlemen of Universities are not inclined to regard the membership of an Inn as being quite the same as a degree.

Therefore, Mr Vice Chancellor, you will forgive me when I say that I take great personal satisfaction in being honoured today with a degree in Law—the first I have ever possessed. I shall treasure this honour all the more for the reason that it is bestowed on me by the University of my own country.

As you know, Sir, I have taken a very great interest indeed in the progress and development of the Kuala Lumpur Division of the University of Malaya, and you will recall that when I had the honour of proposing the toast of "The University of Malaya" at your Convocation Dinner two years ago I drew attention to what should be the ultimate goal, the establishment in the Federation of Malaya of a truly national University.

I am very glad indeed to say that such has been the rapid progress made in this Division in Kuala Lumpur since that time, and so earnest the efforts and energy of the University authorities, that from next year there will be definitely established an autonomous, separate national University for the Federation of Malaya—the apex of our national system of education.

It is my intention to say more on this point later on, but before doing so I would like to outline our concept of the nature and aims of national education policy in the Federation.

In 1956, long before the Pantai Valley began to undergo its magical transformation, I was Chairman of the Committee which established an educational policy designed to be national in its scope and purpose and at the same time aiming to preserve and sustain the various language and cultures of our country. These two aims were not easy to pursue at the same time, but I think we found the right manner of converging on both goals. The fact that our approach to these two goals was right in spirit and substance was confirmed and clarified last year by a special "Education Review Committee", of which my friend and colleague, the Hon'ble Minister of Education,¹ was Chairman.

From this summit of the University, at this time of conferring honours and degrees, let us look at the panorama of the educational scene in the Federation today, and the prospect before us in the future.

* Y.B. Encik Abdul Rahman bin Hj. Talib.

Primary education in each of the four main languages of the country is offered to all children in schools using the language medium of the parents' choice in primary schools which are fully maintained from public funds. In this way faith has been kept with the promise made in 1956 to preserve and sustain the four main languages and cultures of Malaya.

Furthermore as recommended by the Education Review Committee from the beginning of next year, 1962, primary education shall be free of fees in all assisted schools. Thus not only will a place be found in a primary school for all children, not only will parents have the right to choose whether their children shall go to Malay, English, Chinese or Tamil primary schools maintained by the Government, but also, and for the first time in 1962, no fees will be charged in any of these schools.

At the same time, as also recommended in 1956, common syllabuses and timetables have been promulgated for use in all schools so that, whatever language is used, all pupils learn the same things in the same way with the object of fostering a national Malayan outlook.

After the primary stage the Government will offer as from next year at least two more years of education for all pupils. But at this post-primary or secondary stage the government holds that education paid for from public funds must be conducted mainly in the medium of one of the two official languages with the intention of ultimately using the national language as the main medium of instruction.

There are some who allege, falsely, and in some cases I am afraid mischievously, that our education system denies to many of our citizens the opportunity of learning and studying their ancestral cultures. This allegation is completely untrue. It is so demonstrably untrue that I find it is strange that the charge should be fostered and repeated, in face of all the facts, by some elements who are Chinese. I have always considered the Chinese people as having the quality, among many others, of facing facts honestly and realistically. It is not a surprise to us that political opportunists of non-Chinese origin made these charges in order to get the support of the Chinese for their political ends. But it is strange that it could be ever believed in face of all the facts.

The facts are crystal clear for all reasonable men to see that the Alliance Government, which consist of the representatives of the three main races that make up our multiple society, has formulated a policy which is just and fair to all, with, of course within sight, of our ultimate goal—that is, to build up a united people with absolute undivided loyalty to the country. Therefore, I ask all those, particularly our citizens of Chinese origin who have decided to make this country their own, to weigh these facts very carefully and to give no hearing to those false prophets whose aim and whose motives definitely lie outside this country. Malaya is a young but a happy country. People of various races have lived happily together in harmony and friendship. There is every place in this country for every one who is loyal and who has the interest of this country at heart. Let us, therefore, work together and give our children the best education we can afford so that they, in their turn, will make this a happy country and a happier place to live in.

What are the facts? Here in the Federation, in institutions wholly maintained out of public funds, a child of Chinese race can have six years of primary education wholly in the medium of Chinese. What is more, as from the beginning of 1962, he can have such education without paying any fees: the Government is offering free education in Chinese medium primary schools—as in all primary schools—as from next year. I trust that all our citizens of Chinese origin will note this fact well and acknowledge freely that this is not the act of a Government seeking to destroy Chinese culture.

After this free primary education, the child of Chinese race can continue to study Chinese language and literature as a subject in a secondary school where, for this subject, the medium both of instruction and of examination is Chinese. He can thereafter take an Honours degree, if he so wishes, in the Department of Chinese Studies now being set up in the University in Kuala Lumpur.

All this he can do in institutions maintained by the Government. From the lowest to the highest rungs of our education ladder, Chinese can be taught and learnt. And yet there are false prophets who assert that the Government's education policy threatens Chinese and some even go so far as to say that it destroys language and culture. It does not—it preserves and sustains it as

it preserves and sustains all four of our main cultures. I wonder what are the motives of these false prophets. Who do they face both ways? Why do they stand truth on its head? Are they—and this is the essence of the matter—in heart and mind sincere and loyal citizens of our country? By these actions and by denying education to Chinese Schools these false prophets are actually destroying Chinese language and culture.

Let me go back to the education system. Primary schools work entirely in one of our four main languages. They work to the same syllabuses. In all of them all pupils have: to learn English and Malay so that by the end of the primary course all pupils have knowledge of both these languages. But the basic education of all pupils has been in their own language. As I have said, this keeps faith with the Government's promise to preserve and sustain each of the ancestral cultures of this country.

But after the free primary stage—and don't forget that from next year at least two more years of education at secondary level will be offered to all children—after the primary stage, it is essential for the sake of national unity to start, in our schools, to break down the racial and language barriers which so much hindered our development as a nation in the old days.

It is vital to ensure that our education system does not continue to exist in separate compartments insulated from each other. Thus, at the secondary level, in schools financed from public funds but not in others, we turn to one of the official languages as the main medium of instruction and examination—the main medium, not the sole medium, as I have already explained. It is desirable that students who leave our schools should be entryable and able to take full part in the Professional, Social and Commercial life of the country.

I have spoken of the present situation. What of the future prospect? The Government's ultimate objective is to make the national language the main medium of instruction in all schools. There is no saying at present how many years this will take to achieve in perfection, but it is obviously a goal to which we all must work in the building of our unity as a nation, fused in harmony of many races. The immediate years before us are, therefore, years of transition to this goal, and to provide an

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inspiration for initiative and an impetus for co-operation by all our citizens, the Government has set a target date for 1967. If we all work together, resolute and undivided, there is no doubt that the day will soon dawn when our nation, Malaya has one common official language.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, I have tried to show clearly the reasons why our education policy adopts different approaches at the primary and at the secondary level. I claim that these approaches taken together fulfil the declared and competing objectives of our education policy and reconcile, logically and with fairness to all, the legitimate desires of Malaya's various racial groups with the needs of the new Malayan nation.

I now wish to refer again to my earlier remarks about the place of our University in the education system and in our national life. I do so with increased personal interest because today more than ever I can say that this is my University.

The policy in our education system is to increase the use of the national language as a medium of instruction until it becomes the main medium in all schools. This means evolving this University into a bilingual instruction giving greater and greater prominence to the use of the national language so that our national University may stay firmly in its place at the top of the main stream of the nation's education system.

Sir, in such capacity this University can always rely upon the full support of the Federation Government, financially and otherwise. Furthermore, I would like to assure all members of the University that the Government is as jealous as you are of the academic standards of this institution and desires to take all possible steps to maintain these standards.

We are all proud of the present reputation of this University. The Government will do all that a Government can do, to maintain and even to improve this reputation so long as the University keeps its position solidly perched at the apex of our national education system.

I would like to add that it is the firm view of the Federation Government that any institution of higher education in this country must come within our National structure of education. The

Government will not allow any such institution to grow outside the main stream of our National education system as it would obviously be an obstacle to the creation and growth of a united Malayan Nation with an undivided loyalty to this country.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, this may be the last Convocation of the University of Malaya as we have known it up till now. As I have already said, it is intended as from the beginning of the University session next year to establish an independent separate national University in Kuala Lumpur. I would like to make it quite clear that this development has the agreement of the Singapore Government and the support of the University authorities.

On behalf of the Government of the Federation I would like to thank all those for their co-operation in arranging this new development. A Bill to effect the changes as far as the Federation is concerned will be presented to Parliament during the next two or three months.

There is always some degree of sadness about the change of this kind. I myself, who was a student of the old Raffles College, the predecessor of the University, have some feeling of nostalgia when I contemplate this portentous development. All the same, I welcome it.

The change should not be regarded as a "split", as it is so often inelegantly called. It is the logical outcome of the increasing demand for University education both in Singapore and in the Federation. This is now of such dimensions that the creation of two separate brother Universities has become necessary in the best interests of all.

Looking further to the future is my hope, as it is the hope of the Government that our national University here in Kuala Lumpur will not remain the only University in Malaya because our country is rapidly developing and as this expansion takes place so will our needs for higher education in future.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, I am sure that you who have personified the University for so many years, will agree with me when I say it is my fervent hope that relations between the two Universities in future will always be close and cordial. Let "Hands across the

Causeway" be the watchword of each of the two Universities, and let them both thrive in friendly rivalry. In this way both can serve the academic needs and intellectual progress of both areas.

A true University always moves forward, reacting and reflecting social and political developments, and as in any great corporate body there are significant personalities who by their actions and examples stamp a particular quality on the nature and progress of their own University. I wish to pay tribute now to two such men, whom all will agree have played noble and outstanding part in the life of the University of Malaya.

With a bow of respect to the Chair, the first of these is our Vice-Chancellor, Sir Alexander Oppenheim. And now, Sir, it is with courage that I, a Graduate in Law, turn to you, a Professor in the more skilled science of mathematics to say a few words about you personally. You have been a distinguished Professor of Mathematics for some years but have divorced that lifetime love to marry a more shrewish lady, administration, in the interests of the future of the University.

Today on this historic occasion it gives me great pleasure, Sir, on behalf of the Government of the Federation of Malaya, wholeheartedly to salute the sincerity of your work for this University and the good sense and great ability you have shown in guiding its affairs through a period of stress and remarkable change. And I am sure there is no one present here today who will not agree that we have been most fortunate to have the services of such an able and human, gracious and witty Vice-Chancellor. I do not want this Convocation to get the impression that I am delivering a funeral oration for Sir Alexander Oppenheim. We hope to have him with us for many years to come. And I might add that as the University grows older "Oppy" seems to grow younger. Even if you, Sir, should look at layers' judgements with askance I am confident that this judgement in paying tribute to you is absolutely sound and even the best mathematician could not disprove it.

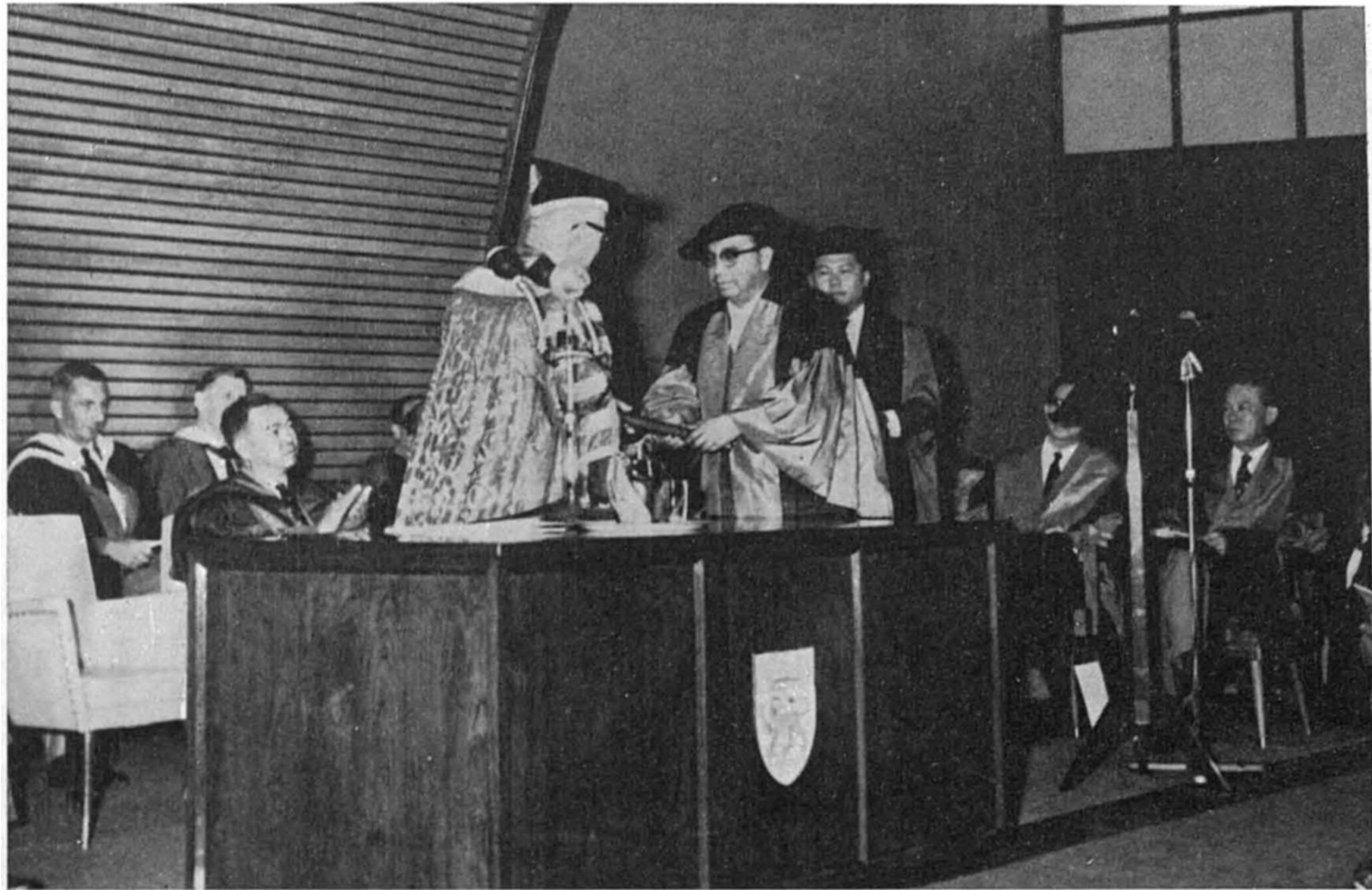
There is another man, great in stature and influence, who has presided over the destiny of this University from the beginning, a man who cannot unfortunately be with us today because the changing fortunes of international affairs will not free him from his duties in Geneva dealing with the problem of Laos. I refer to the esteemed Chancellor of the University of Malaya, the Right Honourable Mr Malcolm MacDonald.

Any eulogy of Mr MacDonald must be an anthem of praise and gratitude. He has been Chancellor of this University since it was first established twelve years ago in 1949. Never a figurehead, he is a pilot with experienced hand guiding the young ship of the University through many rough waters, bringing her safely to her present harbour of sunlit prestige in the world.

It is an open question, however, whether MacDonald's great administrative and political experience and his unsurpassed knowledge of affairs, have been his greatest contribution to this University. I am sure many people in this hall will agree with me when I say that his most significant gift to the University of Malaya has been the inspiration he has given to several generations of young Malaysians. He has taught them and us that a politician can have a golden heart, and a proconsular common touch. We have learned from him that a Scotsman can generate progressive ideas and a British expatriate really understand and sympathise with the hopes and dreams of a country such as ours.

I am sure his influence will live for many generations in this University and his name will be remembered with honour in this country particularly by graduates in great respect for what he has done to us. On behalf of the Government, and I think I may say, as one of the newest and proudest graduates, on behalf of the University of Malaya also, I wish to express publicly to MacDonald in his absence our gratitude and appreciation for his incomparable services as Chancellor.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, with this heartfelt sentiment I would like on behalf of my fellow graduates and myself to express our good wishes and our confident belief in a shining future for this University of Persekutuan Tanah Melayu.



Tun Abdul Razak sedang menerima Ijazah Kehormat Undang-undang Universiti Malaya dari Naib Chancellor, Sir Alexander Oppenheim di Majlis Konvoquesyen Tahunan Universiti Malaya di Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kuala Lumpur pada 10hb Jun, 1961. (Gambar Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia).