

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
AND MINISTER OF NATIONAL AND
RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOR
INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY
ON 8TH SEPTEMBER 1967

Today is International Literacy Day - a day which has great meaning in the United Nations' endeavour to promote universal understanding and to preserve world peace and goodwill among men. To us in this country, this Literacy Day provides us another impetus in our determination to eradicate illiteracy as part of our National efforts to bring greater progress and prosperity to our people.

As in many developing countries, we in Malaysia have yet to overcome fully the problem of illiteracy. This problem exists amongst our people, especially those in the rural areas who had no opportunity for proper education during the colonial days.

According to the Census of 1957, which was done before Independence, there were some 2.4 million illiterate people in West Malaysia. It has since been estimated that the actual number was much more than this as the definition of literacy used during that Census was only 'the ability to write a letter and read a Government notice', and falls short of the accepted International definition of literacy which is the ability to do the 3Rs - writing, reading and arithmetic.

With the formation of Malaysia in 1963, it was estimated that the number of illiterates in our country was increased by another 600,000. Thus, the challenge before the Nation to overcome this problem of illiteracy is indeed great.

But now, let us look back at our attempts to eradicate this social problem among our people.

Prior to 1961, that is before we launched our first post - Independence Development Plan, our literacy programme was very limited both in scope and operation. Its success therefore was also limited and confined only to the urban areas.

It was clear by the end of 1960 some greater efforts must be undertaken if a **proper headway** in eradicating illiteracy was to be achieved. As this was also one of the main problems obstructing national progress, particularly the progress of the Rural population which comprise over 60% of the country's population, the Alliance Government therefore decided to incorporate the programme of eradicating illiteracy within the frame-work of the National Development Plan. This decision has proved its worth and great results have been achieved.

By the end of last year some 720,000 illiterate adults have attended basic Literacy training of one year and are now considered, according to international concept, no longer illiterate. Annually, some 230,000 people are given literacy training in about 12,000 Adult Education Classes all over the country. Annually, about \$10 million are spent to ensure that this mass literacy campaign would

reach every nook and corner of our country.

It is not, however, in the number nor the amount spent alone that our achievements should be judged. It is in the successful **bringing of light** to many dark corners of our Nation that our efforts should be highlighted.

As we all know illiteracy is a barrier to man's endeavour to preserve peace on earth. An illiterate person can easily become the tool and victim of the unscrupulous for the realisation of the latter's ambition to power and such ambition may be against the interest of world peace and human brotherhood.

It is a well known fact that the best place for the cultivation of peace and human brotherhood is the minds of men. As a man becomes literate his mental capacity becomes exposed to the bigger world of knowledge. He becomes more enlightened and receptive to ideas and attempts for the preservation of peace; and what is more important, greater also will be his incentives to act for the sake of peace.

Illiteracy also obstructs progress. Its existence does not help our people to keep abreast of time. It obstructs efforts to change the negative attitude of our people, reduces their capacity to communicate with one another and inhibits national efficiency.

These are some of the reasons that have prompted many countries, including Malaysia, to carry out its own programme to eradicate illiteracy and also give support to the United Nations' endeavour, through UNESCO, to pool international resources and efforts to eradicate this social problem.

Our efforts to remove this **road-block on the route to progress** should deserve the support and co-operation of all progressive and peace-loving people..

To us, here in Malaysia, eradication of illiteracy is a **vital key** to our Nation building. We can expect in future no spontaneous generation of vigorous and tolerant Malaysians without the establishment now of at least a generation of development-conscious and hard-working Malaysians who are fully literate.

Since its inception in 1961, our Adult Education Programme has not limited its scope merely to make people able to read and write the National Language and to do simple arithmetic; it also provided them with additional knowledge which are of economic as well as of social value.

As you may know, the course is extended to 3 years and subjects like civics, home economics, muslim religious instructions, applied agriculture, veterinary, co-operatives, cottage industries, health education and other extension education are also taught to students so that, after acquiring the basic literacy education, they are able to obtain more useful knowledge to enhance their **efficiency** both in citizenship as well as in their individual **skills** and craftsmanship.

And so when UNESCO, after a resolution of the Congress of World Ministers of Education which met in Teheran in September, 1965, decided on a new concept of literacy programme now known as Functional Literacy, which is also referred to as job-oriented literacy, Malaysia has little difficulty to follow international practice. This is because our literacy programme had earlier been geared towards being functional so as to complement our overall national development efforts by increasing our people's capacity and efficiency.

We are indeed proud of our achievements since Independence. Only a week

ago we celebrated the 10th year of our country's Independence with much gaiety. We celebrated that auspicious day on such a grand scale because we felt that, after a decade of development, progress and prosperity, as a young Nation we have made much good for our people than what had been given to them in a century under Colonial rule.

Now, as our country enters its 11th year of Independence we look ahead, more determined to do much more. We know the future holds a bigger challenge. We anticipate there will be problems and obstructions.

At this present stage of our National development, when all our human resources are needed to participate in nation building, all forms of obstructions, including illiteracy, must be removed. The Alliance Government is determined to reach and teach all illiterate Malaysians wherever they are, so that they can master their own National Language, communicate more easily with one another and strengthen our National bond as true Malaysians.

Let us, therefore, make this International Literacy Day as a day of awakening! Let all Malaysians, particularly those who are more fortunate, give a helping hand to the less fortunate of our people who are still illiterate and lead them from their world of darkness to a **brighter world** which the Alliance Government has built and will continue to do so in future. In doing so, not only will you be able to contribute your share to national progress and prosperity but also to International understanding and goodwill.

As a special message to all 'Keluarga Dewasa' - all those students, teachers, supervisors and Government Officers - who are participating in the Adult Education programme, and also their helpers and new literates, I extend to you my best wishes and the wishes of the Government and hope that you will continue to give all you can to enhance our country's efficiency by making the programme successful and beneficial.

The key to success within a developing nation like ours lies not merely in the development of man's environment. Beyond it lies the significances of the desire and the efforts to develop the intellect and skill of all; people who give life and hope to the country. To prove itself worthy of the mandate given to it by the people, the Alliance Government, in the short period of less than 10 years, has not overlooked this factor. In fact it has done much more.

Beyond the realm of the many successful tangible development projects lies also another Alliance achievement. In its Adult Educational programme lies the care and attention it has given to the once neglected and unharnessed asset of the Nation - the illiterates. The Alliance Government will not stop nor spare any effort to eradicate illiteracy. I can assure our people that it will not be long before our new nation, Malaysia, will be free from this social evil of illiteracy.