

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON DEVELOPMENT AT THE DEWAN TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN, KUALA LUMPUR ON 26TH JULY, 1971

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be here today to declare open this Sixth International Seminar on Development organised by the Malaysian Centre for Development Studies.

I am particularly happy to extend a very warm welcome to distinguished delegates from friendly countries and to say to them how much we in Malaysia appreciate the friendly co-operation of their Governments as shown by their participation at this Seminar. A gathering such as this has always been a matter of great gratification to me because by bringing together officials from our various countries and by pooling together our expertise and experience, we shall all be the gainers. This is also a very practical manifestation of regional and international co-operation which will strengthen further the ties between our Governments and our peoples.

I am glad to note that this Sixth International Seminar will have Land Development as its main theme.

Land is, of course, one of the basic natural resources for development and progress. For us in Malaysia who are now embarking on an extensive land development programme as embodied in the Second Malaysia Plan, this Seminar is particularly opportune and timely.

I am sure you will agree with me that there is nothing more important to any nation than the land on which that nation finds its very existence. The people come and go following the laws of nature, but the land remains, shaped and reshaped by the processes of nature and the activities of men themselves. It is what the people will do to their land, of what they do to enrich and beautify their environments and their habitat, that will ultimately determine a nation's identity and progress. Man is the active agent of change for nation-building and land is the bountiful, yet passive, recipient of whatever changes and development that are brought about by the people.

Classical economists prescribe land as one of the essential factors of production, beside labour and capital. Thus, to some extent, the nation's potential for economic development depends on the land area, arable land that is, available for exploitation. To most of us, this does not pose a great problem although in some instances, major reclamation work has to be undertaken in order to supplement the existing area or to provide land for specific use. There is always the alternative between quantity and quality in all the things that we do. It follows, therefore, that if a nation and its people can turn to the best of advantage every inch of land that is available in the nation, it can yet become prosperous and rich in spite of the limitation in size.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure all of us are very concerned with the problem of finding the best possible means of developing our land so that it can give optimum benefits to our country and our people. This Seminar, therefore, gives us the opportunity to review our approach to land policy and to examine the technique and method which relate to land development, and search for new solution to our common problems and difficulties through the pooling of knowledge and experience from our various countries.

In approaching the subject of land development, I am sure that you all will be looking at it from various perspectives. This has to be so in view of the fact that land development is a process which involves many aspects of governmental operations at the political, economic and social levels. It is a process that involves the political leaders, the economists, and the administrators, in as much as the people at large, who will be affected by whatever laws and policies the Government may formulate and implement from time to time.

It is no exaggeration to say that land development presents some of the most intricate and inter-related problems in administration. This is especially so in the context of developing countries where land development is closely associated with the development of agriculture and other agro-based industries. In most cases, agriculture remains one of the major sources of economic growth and progress.

I shall leave it to you all to look into the problems of land development in great depth and details. But, from the general standpoint, I can see that there are at least five major areas which demand immediate consideration.

In the first place, a very important factor that all developing countries must continuously study and evaluate concerns land development policy.

As we all know, all policies must keep up with the changing needs and demands of the times. An outdated or an ill-conceived policy can become a major obstacle to the nation's land development programmes and thereby become an impediment to the economic progress of the nation. In short, any effort towards accelerating the pace of land development in a nation must begin with the formulation of a realistic and an enlightened land policy.

As far as we in Malaysia are concerned, we have constantly reviewed our land development policy in the light of our developmental needs and the needs of our farmers. Since land in Malaysia is a State matter, we have the National Land Council consisting of representatives from all the States of West Malaysia to review our land policy from time to time.

Our present policy on land development is clearly spelled out in the Second Malaysia Plan. We are going to pursue land and agricultural development on a very extensive scale, so that every farmer in this country can look forward to owning his own piece of land in order to earn a decent livelihood. Our target for the next five years is to open one million acres of new land for agriculture. This is more than double the area opened during the period of the First Malaysia Plan. The aim is to provide our landless farmers with the land that they so urgently require and more important to give them a feeling of ownership. Besides that, Government will continue to provide the existing farmers with irrigational and other facilities to enable them to improve productivity of their land to enable double cropping. Also existing holdings may not have been exploited systematically and in a way that would produce optimum income. It is, therefore necessary that they should be rehabilitated and consolidated so that the owners would obtain better and higher income.

However, many problems remain to be solved. The most urgent one is the existence of uneconomic holdings in farm areas where there is no more room for the expansion of each individual holding. In such a situation, it is clear that no matter how much money and efforts are utilised to improve the productivity of the farms, the returns may not provide the farmers with an income anywhere near the subsistence level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The problem, therefore, is a crucial one for our land administrators. A solution to the problem has been found in the opening of new land schemes and in moving the farmers into these schemes where an economically viable holding can be given to them. But, this is not an easy task, for farmers who have lived all their lives on their small farms may not want to move and start life afresh in totally new surroundings. The problem, therefore, needs to be analysed in greater depth so that a more imaginative policy can be formulated in order to overcome this obstacle to greater progress.

The other crucial factor in land development concerns land administration itself. With the increasing pace of development, land administration can no longer be a matter of applying old rules and regulations in respect of the day-to-day dealing with land ownership and land tenure. All land administrators in this age of development will have to play the role of "developers" and "agents of change". The land administrators on the field are the people who should know what the problems and the needs of the farmers are, what the needs for development are, and what development programmes will be required to turn the rural farms into modern and productive economic undertakings, so that the farmers can become modern agro-businessmen rather than live at a subsistence level amidst the progress and affluence around them. The land administrators must provide the leadership and vision to create a new and progressive group of farmers, compatible with the need of a young and growing nation.

In Malaysia, more and more is being demanded of the land administrators. We are engaged in improving and modernising the existing farms. We are concerned with the extension of the farms to ensure that each farmer has a viable economic holding.

But, more important, we are also concerned with the development of large tracts of land for new settlement and for the development of multi-purpose projects.

Land development projects such as those being undertaken by the Federal Land Development Authority and large irrigation schemes for double-cropping such as those in the Muda and Kemumbu areas, are examples of our efforts in this respect. We are also working on blue prints for huge regional development programmes such as the Pahang and Johore Tenggara projects which will cover an area of over two million acres.

These vast programmes point to one need and that is a new corps of land administrators. We need a new set of well-trained and innovative land administrators who will be responsible for turning our agricultural and multi-purpose projects into thriving new township and commercial areas based on agricultural products. This, as you know, is one of the major targets of our Second Malaysia Plan which emphasise the need to disperse our industrial and commercial activities into the rural areas in order to bring about a more balanced growth throughout the Nation.

It is clear that the modern land administrator must be a first-class manager and capable of handling land development on a multi-disciplinary basis. He must not only be able to chart out new areas of development and progress, but be able to co-ordinate all branches of government machinery that are connected with land development and agricultural development, and other commercial or industrial activities connected with the agricultural products.

I am glad to say that the government is taking all necessary steps to produce this corp of land administrators. The Government Staff Training Centre will soon be turned into the National Institute for Development Administration to allow for more extensive training in terms of Land Administration in addition to other aspects of Administration and management.

Now another very important aspect of land development will be the organisational problem itself. As already indicated in terms of land administration, the management of huge development

projects often demand more than what can be handled by the normal government machinery. It is the more so where a programme involves not only agricultural pursuit but other commercial and industrial activities such as logging and the processing of agricultural products such as rubber, palm oil, and other cash crops.

It is for this reason that Malaysia has created several semi-autonomous bodies to deal more effectively with agricultural and land development. Within the next few days that you are here, you will already be familiar with bodies such as Federal Land Development Authority, Muda Agricultural Development Authority, the Jengka Development Corporation and the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority.

Through these bodies, we hope that our land and agricultural development will be undertaken on a more systematic and coordinated basis. These bodies have been created with a special purpose and whilst undertaking their functions, they will also carry out the important task of training more and more specialists in the various fields of work so that in the near future we will have a full complement of experts who can handle our land and agricultural development plans effectively and efficiently.

Yet another significant area of land development which all developing countries will have to take into consideration relates to the social implications of the land development process. In as much as our new land policies, regulations, and procedures will affect the life of the farmers and those who earn their livelihood from the land, the opening of new lands for development is only the beginning of development itself.

The opening of new lands involves in fact the creation of new settlements and the establishment and growth of new communities. Farmers and settlers may have to be moved away from their established homes and social environment into the development areas where they are expected to start a new life. Thus, there will be many problems of social adjustments and adaptation which must be properly and effectively handled, if the programme is to succeed. It is for this reason that I have emphasised the importance of approaching the problem from multi-disciplinary approach.

Then again, we all know that there are many human factors which will determine how hard men will work and whether they become sufficiently motivated. It is one thing to provide all the facilities in a development area for people to improve and modernise their farms and their farming methods, or to bring settlers into a new land development scheme. But, it is another thing to make them truly keen and enthusiastic in modern agriculture, even if it is for their own good.

It is here that the problem will arise. The settlers have to be trained on new techniques and methods of farming which would be introduced; they have to be given sufficient incentives in order to be fully committed and involved in the programmes, and exercise their own initiative and leadership capacity so as to get the best results out of their efforts.

These are the human factors which must be taken into account by the land administrators of today. Failure to do so may result in the failure of a land development programme which, in turn, can cause a lot of disillusionment and frustration on the part of the settlers. It may negate the entire efforts of government to improve their standard of living through land development programmes, and cause millions of dollars to go to waste. No developing nation can afford this and immediate steps should be taken to prevent such an occurrence.

Finally, I wish to refer to the importance of regional co-operation on questions affecting land development. On the national level, it is, of course, imperative that we should constantly review our land and agricultural development plans to ensure that they are fully geared to satisfy the needs of our people.

Likewise, on the international level, we should meet together periodically to consider the common problems we face, to learn from each other and to assist each other in whatever way we can. Land, as I have pointed out, is such a basic ingredient in our economic development and it is good that we should co-operate together in this field so that regional co-operation can be brought to the level of specific and everyday problem. Regional co-operation is only meaningful when it is manifested in these concrete ways and our people can then be made more fully aware of the common ties which bind them together.

This problem of regional co-operation calls for top level discussions between the leaders of developing countries in this region. But, I also believe that development planners and implementors at lower levels can play an important role towards achieving this objective. In order to foster this regional co-ordination and co-operation, it is therefore important that the development planners and implementors of developing countries get together periodically to study and learn what each other is doing in terms of development.

In this respect, I am glad to note that the Malaysian Centre for Development Studies is working on a specific programme which will enable development planners and implementors in our neighbouring countries to come to Malaysia and study our development programmes and processes at closer range. We hope that this effort will open the way to a closer understanding and rapport between the officers of our respective countries and thereby pave the way to a more concrete co-operation in our development efforts.

All the various aspects of land development which I have mentioned are, I am sure, common to us all. We have all faced them in varying degrees and we have all devised various ways and means of overcoming them. As such, I hope this Sixth International Seminar will prove useful to us all. Since land development plays a crucial role in our Second Malaysia Plan, I shall personally be interested in the outcome of this Seminar.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that land development must be related to other aspects of national development. Systematic and effective development is not only important in shaping our economy and the lives of millions of people in our country, but it will also determine the pattern of our cultural growth. In fact, it will determine the future of the nation.

With the remarks, I have great pleasure in declaring the Seminar open.