

A MALAYSIAN OUTLOOK

CHALLENGE OF MODERN ASIAN HISTORY IS BEING MET BY SCHOLARS

The future of Asian history touches our own future and we would like the people of Malaysia to see our history more in the context of regional and Asian history said Tun Abdul Razak when he spoke at the opening ceremony of the fourth international conference on Asian History at the University of Malaya on 5th August, 1968. Important parts of his speech are given here.

I have always been fascinated by history, both by the people who have made history and by the people who have tried to represent the past in scholarly works. As my colleagues and I move from decision to decision every day. I particularly envy the historians who can later study the same events carefully and in a leisurely manner and tell us whether what we did was right or wrong in the light of later events.

I often wish that I have also the time to weigh matters so deliberately and to consider the many more alternative courses of action historians can think of long afterwards. But let me not give you the impression that I do not appreciate post-mortem analysis. Such historical work is obviously of the utmost importance.

Historians enlighten us about our traditions, help us to find our national identity and can point to some of the possibilities and probabilities of the future if their works are read with care and understanding.

It is, therefore, with the greatest pleasure that I welcome the delegates to this 4th International Conference on Asian History. This is the first time that a conference of historians is being held in Malaysia. I see from the programme that a wide variety of themes are to be discussed and a large number of papers, over a hundred, are to be presented. I understand that there are about 100 overseas delegates representing 23 countries gathered here. And particularly noteworthy is that nearly three-quarters of the delegates are from Asia and nearly half of them from Southeast Asia.

I am also delighted to see that so many historians from Europe, the United States, Australia and New Zealand have come from so far away to join the Asian historians in their deliberations. It is clear that the challenge of modern Asian history is being met by scholars all over the world.

What is specially challenging, of course, is the history of the many new nations of Asia which are finding once again their place in world history. Many have been subject to European pressures, if not actual control, for more decades than we like to remember before their freedom and independence movements succeeded after 1945. They often inherited a corpus of colonial or semi-colonial historical writings and have been expected to build their history upon this heritage.

While the earlier scholarship has stimulated, and even assisted, post-colonial history-writing, the historians of the new countries cannot be satisfied simply to add more material to the old framework. What has frequently been found necessary has been to change the framework itself and to make the people of this area remember that they had a history before the Europeans came and will have a history after the Europeans have left. This task, I believe, has been engaging the new generation of historians of Asia, whether they are Asians or not.

Of course, history cannot stop at national history, however important a role it has to play in the nation-building process. No country is an island today and no country's historians should be satisfied with writing about their own country for their own national audiences. We, in Malaysia, for example, are specially conscious of our position in Southeast Asia and would like to play our part in the growth of the study of regional history. We fully recognise that our history is inseparable from the history of our immediate neighbours and that our neighbours' impinges on our own history. In a larger context, our history is linked with that of our neighbours in South Asia and East Asia and more and more so with that of our friends in Australia and New Zealand.

Thus the future of Asian history touches our own future and we would like the people of Malaysia to see our history more in the context of regional and Asian history. To this end, our school* and colleges, and our University, have given much time to teaching and research about Asia, and particularly about Southeast Asia.

I have personally observed this trend with the greatest of interest. I have seen a wide range of developments over the past decade in the learned societies in the country. As the patron of the oldest of these societies, founded ninety years ago, the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. I have noticed the new kinds of materials and the new points of view which have emerged in the Society's historic journal.

As President of the Malaysian Historical Society. I have seen it grow into an active and vigorous organisation which has been able to provide a new Malaysian outlook about our own past as well as the past of our neighbours. In addition, we in the government have not been idle. We have, through our National Museum and our newly established National Archives, given every opportunity for our ancient as well as our most recent past to be preserved, to be exhibited, to be understood, and not least to be used and studied with pride.

Only a few weeks ago, at an archivists conference held here in Kuala Lumpur. I was happy to learn that our National Archives has been invited to be the Regional Centre for Southeast Asia. This is evidence that our national endeavours can be of value to regional co-operation and is very encouraging to our efforts to bring our region closer in terms of the region's education, culture and history.

I cannot end without saying a few words about our university. It has grown rapidly and the campus is now a really lively centre for the young people of Mala\esia to learn about themselves and about the world around them. The History Department in the University has grown from the 100 or so students in 1959 to the present figure of more than 800 students. These students, after graduation, have provided the country not only with administrators, diplomats, teachers and other professional men but also with an increasingly large group of historians.

From these young historians. I hope to see the foundations being laid for a new history of Malaysia, especially, a new history which places Malaysia squarely in the context of the history of our region. I have noted that the history department works closely with the schools and that the department has succeeded in bringing together many of the teachers in the schools into a History teachers Association which hopes to stimulate lively history

teaching at various levels of education. Its journal, the *Peninjau Sejarah*, is already making a considerable impact in the secondary schools throughout the country.

Finally, I should add that we are now exploring new methods and organisations to increase historical consciousness in Malaysia. We are interested in the systematic preservation of our historical sites, in some kind of national trust to see that our past buildings and monuments are not forgotten and, most of all, in an organisation which will directly support and encourage historical research in the country. This last, we hope, may lead to some kind of institute of historical studies which will bring together all Malaysians who love the history of our country.

As you know, in our short history, we had to face two troubled times—the Emergency or the Communist rebellion, and then, the unfortunate Indonesian Confrontation. The 12-year old armed rebellion by the Communists against the Government officially ended on July 31, 1960.

Five days ago, 31st July, starting this year, was declared as "Hari Pemuda" or Youth Day. From now on the ending of the Emergency will be celebrated and remembered as an occasion when the Malaysian youth will hold rallies to pledge and dedicate themselves to serve the nation and to bring progress and prosperity to our country. Although the militant Communist terrorism was defeated on the battle-field, the threat still remains and the remnants of the terrorists are still endeavouring to revive their armed rebellion against the Government and the people of this country— They are still continuing with their activities of subversion and infiltration. However, we are confident that with the support and co-operation of the law-abiding citizens of our country, the Government will eventually be able to rid our people of this menace.

Our Armed Forces and Police are continually on the look-out for these terrorists and continually patrolling our borders and our coast-lines. We Malaysians value our freedom and our democratic way of life and are prepared and ready to lay down our lives in the defence of our independence and our sovereignty and in the principle of democracy which we strongly uphold.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in early 1961, the then Federation of Malaya Government thought it necessary to sponsor the writing

and publication of the History of the Emergency. The Government considered that such an official history will be an invaluable source of information for historians and students of Government and administration, and also for students of communism, guerilla warfare, subversion and infiltration. The unique success of Malaysia's efforts in crushing the militant efforts of the foreign-inspired Communist Party to secure the control of the State contains lessons of fundamental importance for all nations seeking to combat the threat of militant Communism, either by aggression or subversion.

Ladies and Gentlemen. I hope you forgive me for having said so much about what we are trying to do or have done for Malaysian history. That we should do justice to our own history before we embark fully on the study of other peoples' histories seems quite a natural thing to do. However, this does not mean that we are neglecting our region or our continent of Asia. On the contrary, we have never stopped being aware and being really proud of being in Asia and in Southeast Asia. Whatever influences we might have on our way of life and on our society as a result of Colonial domination, we must always realise that we belong to this region of Asia and must be proud of being Southeast Asians. We must, therefore, join hands together to spur greater awareness among the peoples of this region of the desirability of co-operation and unity in our search for progress and the peace and stability of Southeast Asia and Asia.

What we do for our own history is done with the conviction that what we have in Asia, and especially in Southeast Asia, and that what we learn about ourselves will contribute towards Asian and Southeast Asian history. And if we should do our own job well and firmly place our history where it rightfully belongs in Asia, we will surely be doing our little bit towards bringing Asia closer together. By understanding ourselves better in the framework of being proudly part of Asia. I am convinced we are ultimately helping to make Asian history all the more meaningful not only to Asians but also to other peoples throughout the world.

After referring briefly to the Philippine claim to Sabah and the Ministerial meeting of ASEAN. Tun Razak said. "It is the duty of all of us to see that nothing is done to prejudice the good work of this important organisation. Let us see that co-operation and friendship among Asians in this region are continuously enhanced and strengthened.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you are all gathered here under the auspices of the International Association of Historians of Asia, to learn more about one another's history and I hope you will be meeting again and again under the same auspices in various parts of Asia.

Thank you.

- THE RIGHT APTITUDE "

HOW TO DECIDE CAREERS FOR YOUTH

⁴⁴ *The correct career for any young Malaysian should and must be decided not by the availability of courses but by personal aptitudes to accept and follow an academic discipline in applying his own particular aptitude and ability. This advice was offered by Tun Razak when he spoke at the Symposium of Technical Association of Malaysia at Alor Star on January 5th. 1968. He went on to say that half the battle of life in our daily work is to do the job for which we have the right aptitude.*

If you look up the Encyclopedia and read the current definition of "*Technocracy*"; for example, in the Encyclopedia Britannica, it is written that "Technocracy" is a *movement* that originated in 1932 with many principles.

It was the fourth principle which worried me. and I will quote it for you word for word—

"The Economics of the social order of this world are *too* complicated to be understood and controlled by politicians' Control should be placed in the hands of the Engineers and Scientists of the world!"

The presentation of interesting and important papers relating to the many main aspects of the development of our country, has gone further by tying the academic and paper-side of your profession, *to the practical*, by including as part of your programme, a visit to a development project in progress, on the ground, the Muda River Irrigation Scheme.

This proves to me that you as an Association of technical people are not only proficient on paper, but also, have the essential ability to get down to earth; because as I see the future of the