

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
ANNUAL DINNER OF THE INSTITUTION OF
ENGINEERS AT HOTEL MERLIN, KUALA
LUMPUR ON 25TH JUNE, 1971

Mr President, Hon'ble Ministers, Members of the Institution of Engineers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I regard it as a considerable honour to be invited as your guest this evening.

When I received your invitation I noticed that you have changed the usual venue for your Dinner, and were going to hold it in the "Dragon's Court"!

I rather expected that there might be a catch in this move and that your President was going to prosecute me in the Court of the dragon and breathe fire over me like a dragon!

However, Mr President, unlike the Selangor Club where we met last year, I have escaped your fire, but, nevertheless, as President of this important Institution, and particularly as an Electrical Engineer, I congratulate you for the sparks in your speech!

Also, I congratulate both you and your Institution for pointing out to the Government what you as a body of professionals think and feel!

If I am correct with my dates, your last Annual Dinner was almost exactly a year ago to the day, and if you look around, not only in Kuala Lumpur, but throughout the whole nation, I consider the number of new buildings, new projects and new installations, which have been built successfully and which have been constructed and implemented successfully—since last year's Dinner—this is a tremendous credit to the Engineers of Malaysia and may I offer all of you my sincere congratulations for the work each and everyone of you have done for the country, and thank you for the part you have played towards our nation's progress since we last met together exactly a year ago at your Annual Dinner in 1970.

My Government is fully aware of the need to give opportunities for the education and training of more and more Malaysian Engineers, but, as you have said earlier, Mr President, an Engineer cannot be made like instant coffee; in fact the number of years required to produce a fully trained Engineer is almost identically as the time required to implement a Five Year Plan.

We must therefore increase the engineering capacity of Malaysia which is so essential for the implementation of our Development Programmes, particularly, in order to successfully implement the Second Five Year Malaysia Development Plan.

One of the reasons for the shortage of Engineers is in actual fact that our Development Programmes are going ahead so firmly and fast, in such a way that there are not enough Engineers in the country to go round to keep pace with our fast moving rate of Development which has been beyond expectations.

So, let us not take a depressing approach to this problem on the shortage of Engineers.

It is not such a sad state of affairs.

With respect to my own profession, the sad state of affairs is that we have too many lawyers and too many politicians, but not enough Engineers!

The remedy to my mind, falls into two parts—one is an immediate remedy which is the temporary recruitment of Engineers from elsewhere to fill the necessary gap.

My Government has already taken action and I am grateful to you Mr President and to your Institution for the kind offer to co-operate with the Public Services Department in drawing up a common list of recognised qualifications.

The other long term remedy is, as you have already mentioned, is what I said in my speech last year, that more positive action must be taken to encourage our youth to be attracted to the profession of Engineering.

As you know, there is a tremendous tendency for the would-be University student to be attracted to academic courses of shorter length.

I do not want to mention any specific academic discipline, but the modern student trend, not only in Malaysia, but throughout the world, is to get a quick qualification, sometimes for reasons of family financial background and sometimes because of a general attitude of school children not being able to make up their minds as to the profession they wish to follow.

Therefore, Mr President, I am so glad to hear to-night that your Institution is taking positive steps to implement my suggestion of last year and that you have set aside a special exhibition room in your proposed new building so that our young Malaysians will better understand the profession of Engineering, and let us hope that more and more will be attracted by it and aim to be Engineers.

I will make a bargain with you tonight—if your Institution can help in the preparation of the script of a simple film, I will approve funds for its making; you, Mr President, and any member of your Institution may be the actors, but we cannot afford enough money to give the pay of a Modern film star!

Mr President, I do not propose to talk at length tonight. However, the Second Malaysia Plan will very shortly be available for all of you to read, and I do know that you as Engineers, in your various tasks throughout the country, will give of your best as you have done in the past to ensure that the development of our country is given a further push forward to greater progress.

Mr President, you mentioned with regard to my Government's New Economic Policy that due consideration should be given to those youth in rural areas to attract them to engineering career. We are already taking action on this, and I also take note of your suggestion to try and encourage more private enterprises to contribute more in the expenditure of training their own people in the private sector.

Mr President, I can understand your Institution's wish to be represented in various Planning Committees and other Government bodies. However, on the subject of Committees, let me give you a thought from my own experience.

My life seems to be a continuous movement from one Committee to another, and I am sometimes reminded of the Chinese proverb, which goes something like this:

“Every living thing in the world, be it animal or man, must have been designed by a God, but with one exception!— And that is the “CAMEL” which must have been designed by a Committee, because it makes so many movements before it sits down or gets up!”

We do not want our Development Programmes to move at the speed of a camel; we must move at the speed in keeping with the jet age in which we live.

I believe that if you want to get a job done, give it to an individual; if you want to have it studied, give it to a Committee; if you want to have it delayed, then give it to two or three Committees!

I will, nevertheless, give thought to your Institution’s representation on appropriate Committees, bearing in mind, of course, not only your Institution, but also that of Architects, Surveyors and other professionals.

Mr President, I refer back to the opening words of your excellent speech; I am most touched by your words when you mentioned:

“You as members of the Institution of Engineers should renew and reiterate your pledge of loyalty and support for my Government and that each and everyone of you in your respective jobs give of your best to help make the Second Malaysia Plan the most successful yet.”

I am reminded of the words of the English Poet, Lord Byron, who said,

“He who loves not his country can love nothing.”

I have stated on a number of occasions, and I would like to repeat it here today, that we are facing a crucial period in our history during the next few years. Whether or not we will survive as an independent and progressive nation will depend on our ability to weild our people of various races together and carry out our New Economic Policy as embodied in the Second Malaysia Plan.

Therefore, this is the time in the history of our country when we need real loyalty of each and everyone of our citizens, whatever their status in life may be. Loyalty to our country is an essential ingredient in the implementation of our Plans for progress, and you as loyal citizens and efficient Engineers can contribute tremendously towards making Malaysia into the most stable and progressive country in this region.

As we all know, we are short of Engineers in the various branches of the Public Service, and you know that there is not much money in the Public Service. There are more lucrative jobs in the Private Sector. We in the Government will do our best to improve your conditions of service as seen by the recommendations of the Suffian Commission¹ and also we intend to create a number of superscale posts in the Technical and Professional services in order to improve your career prospects.

But there is a limit to what we can do and it is not possible for us to compete with the Private Sector. It is my hope that in these testing times that we are facing, all of you will endeavour to help the Government to see that the development plans are successfully implemented. It may be a sacrifice to some of you but it is a sacrifice that the Nation and the country are asking from each one of us.

As I said there is little money in the Public Service but if we do our work in the right spirit, we will get the greatest satisfaction. It must be an honour and pride to all of us to serve our country and our people and to ensure that our children and grand-children will have a contented and happy life.

The communist terrorists have of late intensified their campaign of terrorism. The desire to create trouble in the country to cause fear and anxiety among the people so that the people will not give their support to the Government. By this means, they hope that the Government will divert its energy and resources towards fighting the Emergency rather than carry out development plans. However, this Government is determined both to fight Communist

¹ Suruhanjaya yang dipengerusikan oleh Tan Sri Suffian untuk mengkaji gaji kakitangan perkhidmatan awam dalam tahun 1969-1970.

terrorism as well as to implement our development plans successfully. We will gear the whole Government machinery towards this end and we will spare no efforts to prevent the terrorists from making any inroads among the people.

We know that, in the fight against the Communist terrorists, development is just as important as military forces. We will, therefore, exert all efforts in these two fronts to see once again that the communists will never have any foothold in our country.

In these circumstances, I feel that, as Head of Government of this country, I am entitled to receive not only the loyal support of all peace-loving and loyal citizens of this country but of their devoted and unstinted services and sacrifices, if need be, for the future peace and progress of our beloved country.

Finally, Mr President, and Members of this Institution, I am most grateful to you for inviting me to such a pleasant evening, and I would like to wish all of you as individuals and also your Institution the very best of good luck and success.

Thank you.