

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER TO THE
THIRD ASIAN REGIONAL COOPERATION SEMINAR
AT UNIVERSITY MALAYA, KUALA LUMPUR
ON 2ND FEBRUARY, 1964

Mr. Chairman, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel very glad and honoured this morning to be given the privilege of opening this Seminar — the Third Asian Regional Cooperation Seminar.

Firstly, let me say that it is a great pleasure to welcome each one of you to Malaysia and in particular to Kuala Lumpur. Judging by the list of distinguished speakers who are going to participate in this Seminar perhaps my little speech this morning will be the dullest part of it and I would be much happier if I had the time to take part in your discussions and deliberation rather than merely come and declare it open. I notice that the main subject of the Seminar is Rural Development Economics.

Again, looking at your list of speakers, it might well be that another item on the agenda will be academic "fire works" which is a very stimulating sign. I do sincerely hope that all the words of wisdom which are exchanged during your three-day discussions will be captured and preserved on paper so that a lay-man like myself will have the opportunity of reading them at leisure and perhaps learning some lessons from the conclusions reached.

My own view regarding the present day thinking on Development, particularly thinking at University level and within the range of academic research there appears to me a tremendous tendency towards specialisation; and in the foreground of the World Development Scene today, events are usually discussed under the various headings; "Political", "Economic", and "Social"; these classifications are frequently treated separately by Political Scientists, Economists and Sociologists.

But, as one of your speakers in this Seminar, my ministerial colleague from Singapore, Mr. Goh Keng Swee¹, will agree with me, when development thinking comes to the stage that it has got to be implemented, and put into action through Government machinery, there is a definite need for every concerned to think of development, and every aspect of development, as a "mosaic", because the tendency in this modern world is one of technical tangents and over specialisation, and development

¹ Minister of Finance, Singapore

is often delayed by the inability of specialists to marry each aspect of their speciality into a cohesive whole.

We have found, in our experience in Malaysia, that it is perfectly easy for any country to have a magnificent Five-Year Plan, well written by theoretical Economists, and other Professionals, but what is so much more difficult is the process of putting life into the Plan; translating theory into practice, and practice into results.

Also many plans and good theories will remain on paper, in books, and on files, unless ways and means are devised for the correct interpretation of the Plan to be broken down, and spelt out in clear-cut directives which can be easily implemented by the existing machinery of Government.

Also in Malaysia we have found that with a democratic structure of Government; Democracy is such a system as to make our people at the receiving end, impatient for quick changes and for quick results.

I see that you have three aims at this Conference. This tempts me to say a few words about each of these things.

The first of your aims is to highlight the problems of Economic Development in Asia. You certainly have a list of outstanding Speakers well qualified in this field but let me make just a few remarks from the point of view of a practitioner in the business of implementing Development Programme. My own feeling is that you cannot separate Political from Economic Development. You cannot, in implementing a programme, talk about the pure Economics of Development; this is something one is likely to do in the rarefield and specialised atmosphere of a particular Academic Discipline.

One of the great problems for leadership and Development in a democratic country is that the people are allowed to vote, to vote in privacy and to vote with some real choice of what they want. This means that whatever Government does, however much it works, it must hold its breath while the people vote.

The problem is, on the one hand, to provide the kinds of Development Programmes that are active and forceful and visible so that the people have a sense that their Government is vulnerable and sensitive to their wishes, that the Government is truly their Government and, at the same time, it must be borne in mind that the Government has the problem of laying down the less spectacular, the long run fundamental changes that have to be made if the people are to experience a real and sustained Political and Economic Development.

Our Rural Development Programme, has therefore, been planned in several phases. The launching of each phase is timed to take place at different periods throughout the Five-Year Plan, and each phase, when launched, will run in parallel, and concurrent with other phases already under way.

The First Phase is devoted to a concentration of effort on Government action in the laying of the foundation framework for development in the rural areas. This framework consisted of such Government projects as road-making, improving health, educational, veterinary, agriculture and other services; a faster of land alienation; the development of rural and cottage industries; an increase in the number of land scheme established by our Federal Land Development Authority; and other similar Government activities. Pressure of action on Phase One continued at a high tempo, and will continue thus, throughout the period of the Five-Year Plan.

My Government took all possible measures to maintain and sustain the greatest effort on the part of its officers to fulfil and implement the plans and projects included in the "Red Book" Rural Development Plan; and in order that Government should be able to keep its finger on the pulse of progress, a National Development Operations Room was designed and set up, in which the Development Plans of each Department, District, and State are charted on maps, and where progress is plotted from month to month.

By spotlighting the progress of all aspects of the National Rural Development Plan, it is possible, at the same time, to detect, diagnose and remedy any delays in Development, when and where they occur.

While action on Phase One continued, Phase Two was then launched. In outline, this Phase consisted of a "call to action" by the people to their part and to give of their best in this great task of Nation-Building; this phase was designed to make sure that the rural people have a clear understanding as to how they themselves can obtain a better way of life by their own efforts in building on the firm foundation framework laid by my Government in Phase One.

The main emphasis in Phase Two was laid on taking all steps possible to encourage the rural people to develop their own land to the fullest extent and stress was laid on the realisation that their own particular plot of land is in fact a small part of Malaysia, the progress of which is on trust to them and entirely in their own hands; and that therefore their duty to the Nation as a whole is to fulfil this trust to the best of their ability.

Another aspect of our Phase Two was the revival and rejuvenation of our national tradition of Cooperative Kampong Effort which has held its place in our rural communities since the last several centuries; it is the practice of what is now known in new words, in other countries, as Community Development; a time-honoured-practice which has been the main stay of our rural life in Malaysia for many years.

Every encouragement is given to the implementation of minor projects by the people themselves in the spirit of what we call Gotong-Royong, provided, of course, that such projects do not detract from the time, energy and effort which should be rightly devoted to the development of their own land.

Also, our rural people were called upon to contribute to development by learning better agriculture methods, better health methods and other knowledge necessary for them to apply, and practice, in order to raise their standard of living.

With regard to this, it has been the policy of my Government to expand and enlarge the Extension Services in the various Departments and to achieve this trained Government Officers tour the rural areas lecturing and demonstrating to the people.

It is a practise of my Government to create a more effective form of Extension Services by giving opportunities to the rural people to come forward and acquire such training themselves, so that they may, on return to their villages, put their knowledge to the greatest use.

The literature used for teaching in our Adult Education Classes is so compiled as to incorporate useful and valuable knowledge essential to the maintenance of such essentials as better health, better crops and better living.

It is my Government's avowed intention that no obstacle will be allowed to obstruct the path of progress in this national aim of Rural Development; an aim, in the fulfilment of which, disunity, petty prejudice and personal gain have no place; an aim which can only be achieved if raised to the real of a national pledge in which the Government and the people to forward together, with the fullest mutual cooperation, towards the goal of progress, prosperity and happiness.

Your aim in this Conference is to show the importance of Community Development in National Development and particularly for Economic Development. Again, there are many experts in this field, a field in which I am only a lay-practitioner. But I think we must take

an objective view of the formal Community Development Programme in Asia.

We cannot say that Community Development, at least as we know it to have been practised, has been successful even in developing a sense of national consciousness among the people, or in effectively promoting their economic uplift.

Why have these programmes, in some cases, been so singularly lacking in success?

I suggest, from our own experience in Malaysia that the problem has been with too much formal specialisation in this field. Though we often talk about examining the felt needs of the people, I wonder how far we are able to go in understanding those felt needs, when we operate with highly specialist frames of reference.

It is possible to build a national consciousness or a community consciousness simply by having people work on various small physical projects?

Our own experience in Malaysia has shown us that at least at the beginning, Government must take a strong, forceful and positive effort to demonstrate that it is a Government of the people, that it is a Government vulnerable to the wishes of the people.

In the international concept of Community Development the main thrust in implementing a Community Development Programme comes from what is called the Village Worker who is supposed to be a multi-purpose link between the village community and the Government.

In a democratic country this can be dangerous because this multi-purpose worker, at village level, can too easily become merely a bureaucratic functionary, someone who brings treasures from above, and someone whom the village people themselves will simply try to avoid even if it means spending sometime working out his project to make him happy!

In Malaysia we have many, many years, long before Community Development was ever thought of a traditional link between the machinery of Government and the extension of Government services in the form of a Penghulu who is in charge of a considerable number of villagers.

Also, at village level, we have a perfectly good Ketua Kampung or Village Headman, who is fairly carefully selected and appointed.

This means that a Democratic Government must face the facts as they are rather than be too ideological in a hard and fixed way; it must also be eclectic in choosing from the modern forms of Government. In other words it must pick the best type of approach most suitable for the benefit of its people rather than being carried away into the clouds of high-flying theory, and intellectual ideological "-ism".

My Government, for example, has been accused by both sides, accused by the Left Wing of being too Right Wing and by the Right Wing of being too Left Wing. Of course we all know that these words are often just symbols but do not have much meaning in the immediate context of our day problems. But I think we have been so accused because we are in fact a truly Democratic Government; because we do, as the Tunku pointed out when we achieved Independence, we must "aspire to the freedom of governing ourselves under a system in which parliamentary institutions shall be exclusively representative of the people's will".

This then is the delicate balance that any Democratic Government has to maintain at any time and it is a delicate balance that means that in practice, in the implementation of our Development Programme, we cannot separate the Political from the Economic, from the Sociological, from the Anthropological elements of Development.

Therefore, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to give a summary at this point, a short outline of the thinking behind our own National Development Policy here in Malaysia.

Our National Rural Development Policy was designed giving full recognition to the universal principle that no nation anywhere in the world can hope to develop, or progress, to any extent, except by the full-hearted cooperation and energetic efforts of each and every one of its citizens; and the degree of progress achieved by a Nation, is in truth, really a reflection and direct results of the progress made by each individual citizen in his daily task of raising and improving his own standard of living.

However, in applying the above principle to our own National Rural Development Programme, my Government, before calling on the people of the rural areas to play their part, shouldered its own responsibilities first; responsibilities such as Planning at District, State and National Level, the implementation of projects which are entirely Government tasks and responsibilities and the re-organisation, streamlining and gearing of the Government machine towards greater efficiency for the benefit of the rural people.

It would be wrong therefore for us to have disrupted this traditional structure by bringing in many thousands of young Village Workers who would not be able to command the same respects and confidence which the traditional leaders at that level had already acquired. Therefore, our interpretation of Community Development, in this respect, was to strengthen and to reinforce our traditional systems. It is my personal opinion that development in the sphere of Community Development is similar, in a way, to skin grafting. All of you here today know that if by bad luck we are so seriously ill as a result of burning that our skin has got to be replaced then the secret of our recovery lies not so much in the science of surgery as in the scientific ability to allow a Doctor to give us a skin graft of exactly the right group of skin which, when grafted on to a body, will blend with our own original skin, take root, and thrive to live a healthy existence as part of our body.

So therefore it is with ideas on Community Development, or for that matter, all ideas of Development. We cannot possibly take lock, stock and barrel ideas which have been worked out in the rarefield and academic atmosphere of either foreign or Western Universities and accept them blindly in the blind hope that they will thrive in Asia. Know what is required is a good diagnosis, in the first place, of what exist in our country; what traditions are perserving, and then, selecting from academic ideas what we accept and receive and graft on to our existing social structure, with success in order to enable to meet the changes and progress of modern times.

Our concept of Community Development in Malaysia varies considerably from that of the Philippines of that in India for the simple reason that here in Malaysia, the basis of our Rural Development Policy is to give every family an economic holding of land.

We are fortunate enough in Malaysia until we have a break-through in industrialisation to be able to build up an agricultural economy in which every one in our rural areas can be given a fairly economic holding of land of at least ten acres or more if need be. So therefore in our "Red Book" system of Development we define our own concept of Community Development as follows:

"In a country such as ours, which possesses advanced technical resources, improvements in materials amenities must very largely depend upon the application of those technical resources. There is little scope for active public participation in public works such as the construction of roads or bridges, the extension of water supplies etc. All of these must be left in the hands of Government's own technical services. In present circumstances, in Malaya, the sphere of activity in which the

principles of Community Development can most valuably be applied is in the raising of morale among the individual land-owner and inducing in him a sympathetic attitude towards progress as a whole and in particular to progress by the application of technical agricultural knowledge - and hard work - ON HIS OWN LAND.

And your final aim at this Seminar is to examine the ways of increasing the impact of higher education on National Development.

I have spoken throughout all the shortfalls of purely academic specialisation on the problems of Economic Development. There are, I admit advantages in academic specialisation provided that the fruit of this specialisation is applied to practical Economic Development in their correct context as a cohesive whole in what I have already called the "Mosaic" of Development implementation and not regarded as a separate entity.

So, therefore, I suggest that to increase the impact all of these in the University would be to make the Universities, or to keep the Universities, as centres of free and open discussions, therefore I think that academic freedom is important for increasing the impact of higher education on National Development. But you know by academic freedom people have often seen only the necessity of keeping the University free from Government. I think we must also look, when we talk about academic freedom, to the internal discussion within the University itself. The University must have different centres of information, different centres of intellectual power, and I believe it would be healthy if these different centres of power engage in a discussion between themselves. This does not mean that Government wants to stand by, and rule, by dividing the University. No this means that Government wants to get all the advantage of the maximum free intellectual discourse.

In practical matters this means that I should like to see the University publish more of its research and, of course, you know that when any scientist publishes his research he accepts the responsibility for it; others may find that he is wrong; and others may provide more evidence or more facts to demonstrate that he is wrong; at the same time others may provide more facts and more evidence, to show that he is right but this kind of free intellectual and responsible discussion can be most helpful to any Government attempting to stimulate Development.

However, Ladies and Gentlemen, the real thing I have learnt about Development in the last two or three years is that you cannot implement a really good National Development Plan merely by talking about it. More important than words is positive action — and this morning I

may have talked too much, so I shall now sit down, but before I do so I should like to wish you the very best of luck in your discussion and deliberations and to those of you who are guests in our Country, I do sincerely hope that quite apart from the hours spent in this Seminar, you will enjoy your time here with us and come back again when you can.