

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE OPENING OF THE INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS (MALAYSIA)'S SYMPOSIUM ON "THE ROLE OF THE ENGINEER IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION CONTROL" AT THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA, KUALA LUMPUR ON 23RD MARCH, 1972

Mr President, Hon'ble Ministers, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am deeply honoured to be invited here this morning to officially declare open this Symposium on "The Role of the Engineer in Environmental Pollution Control".

I would like, first of all, to congratulate the members of the Organising Committee, for their commendable effort in organising a Symposium on a regional basis, with Engineers from neighbouring countries participating in the discussions. There is already a pattern of co-operation between our country and other countries in this region at various Government levels, and it is certainly most gratifying to see that the area of co-operation is extended to Engineers and scientists in general, as manifested by your presence here.

The subject of environmental pollution which you have chosen is indeed very topical at the moment and is of widespread interest all over the world. The problem, of course, exists in varying degrees in different countries and, although I agree that in Malaysia it has not yet reached an acute stage, it is nevertheless of sufficient gravity to make all of us who are concerned about the problem to sit up and take notice, and contemplate measures to prevent and control it before it gets to unmanageable proportions.

I do remember, Mr President, the pledge of loyalty which you, on behalf of members of the Institution, gave me last year in regard to the successful implementation of the Second Malaysia Plan. From what I have seen so far, you have certainly lived up

to your words and, in spite of the shortage of Engineers which we are now experiencing, all development projects in which Engineers are playing an important part, are progressing according to schedule.

I always have high regards and confidence in your capacity for work and your sense of duty and I have had no reason to doubt that this confidence has been or will be misplaced. I am particularly pleased that you have concerned yourselves not only with the successful implementation of the various development projects but also with the future outcome of the projects we are now implementing in so far as they might affect the environment.

As you so rightly said, Mr President, we Malaysians are now becoming more and more conscious of our environment and the preservation of its quality. Our greenery and the beauty of our landscape have been the subject of admiration of visitors to this country and have greatly impressed delegates to the recent PATA Conference. It is, therefore, our bounden duty to see to it that all these natural heritage are preserved and unmolested not only for the benefit of our overseas visitors but, more important, for future generations to enjoy and appreciate.

But already we see ominous signs that the natural beauty of our landscape is slowly being marred by various by-products of our development and industrialisation projects. Our rivers and lakes are gradually being filled with mud and sediments from various housing and land development schemes, and industrial wastes are beginning to find their way into these waterways. Floods, over which we have no control, are causing more damage than in past years. Our roads are becoming more choked with vehicles which are emitting fumes detrimental to public health. There are people who argue that these are the price we have to pay for progress, but is that really true?

The answer to this question and to many other relevant ones, I hope, will emerge at the end of your deliberations. The subjects of the various papers which have been submitted seem to encompass most, if not all, aspects connected with the pollution of the environment and should evoke some very interesting and lively discussion.

Again, on this same subject, I am sure most of you are aware of the other viewpoint expressed by no lesser celebrity than the well-known American architect and Philosopher, R. Buckminster Fuller. He was visiting this country not so long ago and I remember he took our planners to task over the planning of Shah Alam. Fuller maintains that pollution is nothing but resources we are not harvesting. He argues that with proper planning, pollutants can be trapped in stacks and be made a source of revenue to Government.

Today, most notably in western societies, there is, at the moment, a raging controversy between the ecologists and the technologists as to whether the world today is heading towards ecological crisis and thus endangering our very existence. The deterioration of living condition in cities is often cited as the main factor contributing to environmental crisis. To some extent, it is true that we are faced with the problems of urban living, that motor-cars and motorways are polluting the air and high-rise flats are not the ideal thing of stable community.

However, as against this, no one would deny the tremendous benefits which our present day society enjoys. Positively, our towns today are cleaner with the clearance of slums and shanty huts which used to be a feature in the immediate post-war period. In other words, ecologists should not ignore the success of technology.

I notice from your programme that there will be an open forum on "Environmental Pollution and our Society". This is certainly a good idea to involve people from other disciplines as well in the discussion so that the widest possible viewpoint can be obtained on this important subject.

Being a lawyer myself, the first step that comes to my mind in regard to the prevention and control of the problem of environmental pollution is legislation. There is in fact a Committee already formed to look into this, but on the other hand, as a Politician, I must caution those concerned that whatever legislation they recommend must not react as a deterrent to the setting up of industries nor must they run counter to the main national objective we have set ourselves. The attainment of the goal towards which our New Economic Policy is striving is of course

all-important but I see no reason why this goal cannot be achieved without permanently damaging the environment for our future generations.

It has so often been pointed out to me in the past that Engineers are a breed of practical and down-to-earth people. In your pre-occupation with practicality coupled with your known aptitude and ingenuity for solving impossible engineering problems, I have no doubt that you will find ways and means of preventing and controlling the problems of pollution. Chemical Engineers for instance by virtue of their specialist knowledge should be able to tackle the problems of industrial waste or by-products without much difficulty and should be in the best position to contribute substantially to the discussion during the Symposium. I do not mean that others should take a back seat; the subject is so wide that I am sure there will be maximum participation from all those taking part.

As for your proposal to set up an Education Fund for the pursuit of studies on environmental pollution, this is indeed a welcome move and I fully support the idea. It is regrettable, however, that your effort to raise the money through public subscription has not met with much success so far, but I feel sure that with the increasing interest which your Symposium and Exhibitions will arouse in the public and private sectors your project is bound to get the financial support that it deserves.

With these concluding words, I now have great pleasure in declaring this Symposium officially open and wish you all success in your deliberations.