

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
ON HIS ELECTION AS CHAIRMAN AT THE
THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE CONSULTA-
TIVE COMMITTEE OF THE COLOMBO PLAN
AT DEWAN TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN, KUALA
LUMPUR ON 13TH NOVEMBER, 1961

I thank you most sincerely for the honour you have accorded my country, my delegation and myself for having nominated me to preside over your deliberations in this all important conference. I would like to assure you that I would do my utmost to discharge the duties of my office.

Distinguished delegates, we are assembled here to exchange ideas and experiences over the way in which we can pool our resources for the economic development of this region of South and South East Asia. This is indeed a great and inspiring task for there are many millions of people in this area who need assistance and guidance so that they would be able to enjoy the amenities of life in a civilised society. It is therefore gratifying to see that as in past years, all countries represented at this conference have given full and tangible appreciation of the importance of this task by the high level of representation of the various delegations.

The progress of economic and social development in this region during the last decade has been great indeed. The growth of productivity both in agriculture and industry has increased considerably and efforts have also been intensified in the building of a strong economic base which will facilitate future growth. Great strides have been made in combating illiteracy and disease. These great achievements are in no small measure due to the substantial assistance which has been made under the Colombo Plan.

There is however little doubt that much more needs to be done if we are to achieve the objective of a better and higher standard of living of our people. The "fall-out" from the population explosion is even more serious and more widespread than it was ten years ago. It appears that the total population of the area has increased by some 100 million over the last ten years. There

still is a great scarcity of capital for development. Our level of technological development needs to be raised considerably and the conditions in the rural areas which must be the backbone of the economics of our respective countries leaves much to be desired.

It is therefore clear that if we are to make any decision at this Conference—the tenth Anniversary of the Colombo Plan—that decision must be to resolve to redouble our individual and united efforts and mobilize our resources for the building of a better and a happier life for all our people.

We, in the new and developing countries, have charted the right course of action which we should follow. Generally speaking, this include increase of productivity and diversification in the field of agriculture, industrial development, both in the field of large and small industries, increase of services in health and education and the provision of other amenities, particularly in the rural areas.

We in this Region have rightly laid emphasis in our development plans on rural development. In the Federation of Malaya, for example, the Government has decided to devote in the next five years over 50% of its capital expenditure for the development of rural areas. We here are determined to mobilize our resources and efforts to correct the economic imbalance between the urban and the rural people those amenities necessary for a better and happier life. We have geared the whole Government machinery to this great national task.

This great task of rural upliftment presents a challenge to us in Asia. It is a complex task because in this sector of the economy more than any others we have to take into account the interaction of economic factors with sociological, historical and cultural factors. We have continuously to persuade the rural people themselves to play their full part in this task to accept and adopt new lines and techniques of production, to adapt and modify their way of life for a better and happier way of life.

In this region of South and South East Asia, we are all tackling these problems of rural development according to the circumstances and needs in our own particular countries. However, in view of the complexity of the task involving as it does a neat blending of economic considerations on the one hand and sociological and cultural considerations on the other, I believe we

could all greatly profit from the accumulated wisdom and experience of each other. Perhaps, it might be desirable to have a regional project under the Colombo Plan in the form of an intensive study in which experts from the developed and the developing countries would join together in an examination of the nature of the problems involved and the methods which might be employed in rural development. They should lay special emphasis on technique for dealing with the sociological and cultural considerations which are so difficult to overcome. Such a project would not only be of assistance to developing countries, it would also enable developed countries to view with better perspective and assess with more precision the requirements for assistance in the field of economic development.

In this way, the bond between all of us in the Colombo Plan could be strengthened and be put to even more constructive and effective use. On the basis of mutual co-operation we can be justifiably confident that we can overcome the various problems and difficulties connected with the development of our respective countries.

It is right and proper that on the occasion of the tenth Anniversary of the Colombo Plan, all of us associated with this organisation should pay our tribute to its founders. By their wisdom, farsightedness, and statesmanship we have been brought together in this endeavour for co-operative economic development. We have gained immeasurably from this association in the past and if we continue to work together in a sincere spirit of real understanding and co-operation, we can look forward to the future with confidence at the strength and success of our association and at the bright gleam of the destiny of our people in this region of South and South East Asia.