

ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
AND MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT
AT THE 3RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF
STATE COMMISSIONERS OF LANDS AND
MINES AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM OF THE
DEWAN TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN, KUALA
LUMPUR ON 25TH JANUARY, 1960

It certainly gives me great pleasure indeed to be present at this morning's Conference of Commissioners of Lands and Mines—the first one to be held since the new Ministry of Rural Development¹ was created. As you know Lands and Mines were formerly in the portfolio of the Minister of Natural Resources. These two subjects have now been absorbed into the new Ministry of Rural Development which has been the responsibility of the Prime Minister, myself, and the Assistant Minister.

You will remember that one of the recommendations made in the Report of the Commission on Land Administration and later accepted by the National Land Council was that there should be a conference of State Commissioners of Lands and Mines to be held twice a year and presided over the Commissioner of Lands, Federation of Malaya, at which matters of common interest regarding Land Administration throughout the Federation are discussed. These conference, in my view, cannot but be of immense value to those of you who are concerned with Land Administration.

However, this conference of State Commissioners of Lands is of special importance as this is the first conference held since the announcement by Government of its policy on Rural Development—a policy which I am sure all of you are by now well aware. This Government—the Alliance Government—has decided to give the highest priority to Rural Development work during the next five years. It is the aim of the Government to give the rural people a new deal, a better and higher standard of living than known before, and all possible amenities of a Malayan life. The Government intends to mobilize all its efforts and resources to achieve this aim.

1 Established on 17th November, 1959.

As land use is an important part of rural development, and land is a State matter, you all gentlemen have a vital role to play in this campaign for rural development. That is why your Conference to-day is the utmost importance. You are in the forefront of our campaign for rural development. You are commanders on the field and are directly responsible for the success of our campaign.

In this all important work the Government wants result—quick results. Therefore, to achieve result we must see to it that our machinery is efficient. Efficient Land Administration is vital to the success of our work and the achievement of our aim. It will be your duty to see that all the land offices in your respective State are in the best working condition. With the new emphasis on rural development Land Administration has become the most important function of the Government.

Although as I said, land is a State matter and therefore within the competence of State Governments, my Ministry and the Federation Government cannot be unmindful of the state of affairs prevailing in the Land Office as I cannot escape criticism which may be made in the Parliament. The importance of tackling land problems and of putting "our house in order" is incontrovertible; therefore my Ministry is as much concerned as the State Governments with the inordinate delays in dealing with the large number of land applications still outstanding.

I can assure you that the Federal Government and my Ministry in particular will do all we can to assist you in putting the Land Offices in order and in tackling the arrears of land applications, but, it must be remembered that land is a State matter and the States must realize that it is first and foremost their duty and responsibility.

I am given to understand that the number of outstanding applications as at 30th September, 1959 was over 207,000; this figure is therefore 107,000 applications more than that reported by the Land Administration Commission in 1957. It must be borne in mind that the primary function of Land Offices has always been, and should clearly remain, the alienation of land. This tremendous problem of arrears of land applications must

be tackled and resolved as quickly as we possibly can. It can only be resolved if we all show determination and are prepared to take a bold step. I have suggested to the Menteri-menteri Besar and Commissioners of Lands in the National Land Council the way this problem should be tackled and this has generally been accepted. When we have such a stupendous task in front of us we must decide on our priorities. What are our priorities in the alienation of Land?. Our first priority must be to give land to those citizens of our country who have no land and who want to work on the land and our second priority is to give land to those who have not enough land to live on. It is on these priorities that I would like you to set your mind first. As to how you actually deal with these priorities, it is a matter for you and I hope this is one of the subjects that you will discuss at the Conference. As a Minister I am here only just to state the policy. As to how that policy is to be carried out it is a matter for Civil Servants like you.

It seems to me this is the right and proper way of tackling this complex problem of arrears of applications of land. It is a way which can easily be defended politically. After all it is the duty of the Government to help those in need first. In the process of tackling this problem we are also solving the economic problem of the country by giving employment to those who have no means of employment. I sincerely hope that this policy will be accepted and implemented in all the States.

Now Malaya is a rural country deriving its wealth from its land, and this state of affairs will continue for many more generations to come. It is also a young country with most of its population under the age of twenty-five. The pressure of this expanding population can only be met by widespread and sound land development. All these factors underline the fact that good land administration is absolutely essential and vital and I think it is no exaggeration to say that the future prosperity of this country and its people and also the stability of its Government will depend on its land administration more than any other factor. This is a challenge which we all must accept.

Now a word on the subject of alienation of new land. As you know it has been decided by the National Land Council that new alienation of land should be by group settlement with proper lay-

out and pre-surveyed lots of standard size. Also it has become the basis of our land policy that we should endeavour to give each person an economic size of holding i.e. 8 to 10 acres of land with 6 to 8 acres of rubber and 2 to 3 acres of fruit trees. I hope you will help to see to it that these cardinal principles of our land policy are faithfully adhered to in the States. It is the intention of this Government—the Alliance Government—to give the people a new level of income—a minimum standard of living commensurate with the dignity of our people as an independent and civilized nation and by which they can enjoy the amenities of a Malayan life. I do hope also that in giving-out land for fringe alienation to existing kampongs and villages the same basic principles will be borne in mind and followed.

The economic size of holding will give our people the minimum standard of living we require and we must resist any attempt to give out land of a lesser unit which would mean giving the people a lower income necessary to maintain this minimum standard of living. I know there is a reluctance on the part of some Malays to leave their existing established kampong and would be content to have holdings of uneconomic size even if they can be allowed to remain in their kampong. But these people should *be* persuaded and guided in their own interest to start a new life in a new place where they will be able to enjoy the amenities of life which they have never seen before and to have a standard of living which they have not known before. These basic principles of our land policy have been agreed to after very careful consideration and I must state quite clearly that the Federation Government would not associate itself with any attempt to depart from that policy as any such action would clearly be against the true interest of our people.

It is realised that as the result of the Occupation² and the Emergency, a major set-back has been caused to Land Administration throughout the country. For these and a number of other reasons Land Administration generally speaking is struggling to hold its own and it has not been quite possible to improve its position with any degree of success. It is however futile for us to go into the past. Our present task is to see how best and how quickly we could establish an effective and efficient Land Administration in the country. Now on you the Government

2 Japanese Occupation in Malaya 1940-1944

places its hope to build up an efficient Land Administration. Success however can only be achieved if the personal efficiency and devotion to duty of every officer working in the service of the Land Administration is maintained at the highest possible level and I urge you to instil this in the minds of all those officers working under you.

Land as I have said earlier, is a State matter and within the competence of the State Governments. The Federal Government at present has powers to legislate to the extent of ensuring common policies on land matters and a common system of administration. However the establishment of the National Land Council has been the means of bringing the States and the Federation much more closely together in all matters associated with land utilisation and administration. The Federal Government is anxious to do whatever it can for the States particularly in matters connected with land administration for the good of the nation as a whole. Apart from providing Federal Officers to work in the various District and Land Departments of the States, the Federal Government also maintains Technical Services and Scientific Officers whose assistance and advice are also available to the States. It has also recently established a Training School for Land Officers of the various States so as to enable them to obtain a background knowledge of the various aspects of land administration.

I am sure that none are more aware than you that the Land Laws and Land Administration in the Federation are rather complex and varying from State to State. The need for the drafting of a National Land Code for the use of all States therefore became obvious. Members of this Conference will be aware that the post of Commissioner for Lands Legislation was created at the end of last year and the Commissioner who has since been appointed has been charged with this major task of drafting the National Land Code. However, before commencing this, it has been decided that the Commissioner should first deal with the legal and practical problems arising from the proposal now before the National Land Council, that opening of new lands should be done by the method of Group Settlement areas and by direct action of the Land Offices. Considerable progress has been made in this emergency task. The Commissioner has already prepared a preliminary draft Bill which is now with the Parliamentary Draftsman and which it is intended shall be

brought to Parliament at its April session and passed through all stages. The Commissioner is also the convenor of a Working Party set up by the National Land Council to consider the practical aspect of this work and two long and valuable sessions of this Working Party have been held. It is hoped that a report by this Working Party can be issued within two or at most three weeks from now. This report will be the basis for a directive on land development methods and for the preparation of subsidiary legislation to the draft Bill when it becomes law.

Now I should like to refer to the Federal Land Development Authority. With the establishment of the Authority, the Federal Government has provided a machinery equipped with the necessary fund to assist in land development schemes in the various States. Too much should not of course be expected from the Federal Land Development Authority in satisfying the universal demand for land. It is only a partial solution of the existing land hunger. State Governments too should pursue, and with vigour, planned land development schemes in their States.

Now I would like to say a word or two about Tin. The Federation has been fortunate in its tin resources. Malaya produces about one-third of the World's tin supplies. For many years Malaya has led all other countries as the largest producer in the world. With foresight and prudent administration, Malaya can maintain this position for many more years to come. Apart from the substantial revenue tin mining has brought to the country, the contribution which the industry makes to the economic life of the Federation is very great indeed. The country would be much the poorer if tin mining were to be allowed to decline. We must not allow this to happen. However to ensure that the Federation maintains its place as the world's largest producer of tin, the States must help to find fresh tin bearing land to replace worked out mines.

While on the subject of mining I would also like to draw your attention to the resolutions and recommendations passed at the recent National Land Council meeting on three important Papers on mining. They are:

N.L.C.³ Paper No. 9 — Land Use in Mining

N.L.C. Paper No. 11 — Land Use: Mining—Special Cases

3 N.L.C. — National Land Council

N.L.C. Paper No. 10 — Land Use: Mining in Malay Reservations and Malay Participation in the mining industry.

Being responsible to the Ruler/Governor-in-Council for land administration you will no doubt advise your State Governments on the implementation of the resolution and recommendations of the National Land Council in this important matter.

I would particularly like to see more Malays to participate in the mining industry although mining is a risky venture. For the most effectual participation by Malays in mining as one form of land use, they should be encouraged to submit applications for mining in the Malay reservations. The National Land Council has accepted the recommendations of the Working Party that scout prospecting of Malay Reservations should be carried out by the Mineral Investigation Drilling Unit at Federal Government's expense and State Governments should then select areas for which they will encourage applications for Prospecting Licences and Mining Leases by Malay individuals, companies or co-operative societies. Given every encouragement, I have not the slightest doubt that Malays could be successful miners.

I notice that the Agenda prepared by the Commissioner of Lands is a long one and embraces a number of important subjects and I do not therefore wish to take up more of your time.

In conclusion and before I withdraw I would ask you to remember always that on your efforts depend the success of the Land Administration in this country and our efforts in rural development and as such you should endeavour to do your utmost and help build up a really efficient Land Administration. Land Administration has now come to the forefront of Government activities of which rural development is the watchword. As I have said, and I repeat here once again, the Government is determined to achieve result in the rural development work. Therefore, the whole Government machinery, Federal as well as State, must be geared to this great task. The Government expects every officer connected with this work to put his shoulders to the wheel. It means hard work and sacrifice but it is a sacrifice demanded of you by the people and country. As Minister responsible for rural development, I can offer you nothing, except in the words of Sir Winston Churchill, but toil, tears and sweat and I ask the same

from you, but if we remember our noble aim and serve our people and our country in the right spirit we find the greatest reward and the greatest satisfaction. I will now leave you to your Conference and I can assure you any decision you make as a result of your deliberations will be given the most careful consideration.