

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF THE FIRST MALAYSIAN ARTISTS EXHIBITION AT THE BRITISH COUNCIL CENTRE, KUALA
LUMPUR ON 10TH JUNE, 1964

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for the compliments you have paid me this evening in bidding me welcome to open this important Exhibition, and particularly for your wish that I may relax and enjoy myself on the eve of leaving for Ministerial Talks in Tokyo.

I am happy to be here because this Exhibition, embracing works from artists from all over the country, can well be described as an effective illustration from the cultural point of view of the reality of Malaysia, both as a nation and a democracy.

Among the liberties we enjoy is freedom of expression, which is the right of any citizen. Usually this is taken to mean freedom to state your opinion either in speech or in writing. For artists, however, freedom of expression is a vital necessity. Creating a work of art is a very personal act, which springs from an inward need to depict what his heart feels or his eye observes. I am happy to say that in Malaysia there has been abundant proof in recent years of freshness and vigour and individuality in the flowering of Malaysian art, and along with this rapidly increasing interest and pride among the people in the talents and skills of the artists in Malaysia.

I am very glad, Mr. Chairman, that the Arts Council is greatly pleased with the Government's decision to have a separate Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. The creation of this Ministry is clear evidence of Government's determination to encourage and assist cultural activities among our people and also to encourage our young men and women in carrying out their many activities, including sports. Malaysia is a young nation. Half of our population is under twenty one years of age. It is therefore desirable that we should divert our efforts and attention to the welfare of our youth so that they will be able to carry out various activities which would make them loyal and useful citizens of our beloved country. The creation of this new Ministry shows also that the activities in this fields of culture, youth and sports have expanded greatly in recent years that they have now earned full attention by the Government. I think it is a great tribute to the artists, to sportsmen and

to the youth of our country that our Prime Minister, the Tunku himself has decided to take charge of this Ministry and it also shows the importance of these activities in our national life and in our work of nation building.

However, it is not possible to create a completely new Ministry overnight, so it will be necessary for all to bear with us in patience for a while as we go ahead with finding staff and premises and working out plans, not to mention the question of finance, so that the Ministry can cope with all demands.

I can assure you that our cardinal aspect of the Government's policy will remain unchanged, and that is our belief that it is the role of the Government to encourage and assist, and not to control and direct. We believe that in our democracy the activities of artists, youth and sportsmen should spring and grow from voluntary desire as they have done in the past.

In other words, the "Gotong Royong" spirit will be encouraged in culture, sports and youth activities just as it has been in other fields of national development. I know the response will be there, because we can see all around us that this spirit is actively operating already. This Exhibition alone is an excellent example of "Gotong Royong".

That is why, both as Deputy Prime Minister and as Minister of National and Rural Development, I am happy to be present here, and I take very great pleasure now in declaring open this First Malaysian Artists' Exhibition organised by the Arts Council.