

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL
SYMPOSIUM ON ENERGY, RESOURCES AND
ENVIRONMENT, AT THE BANQUET HALL,
PARLIMENT HOUSE ON 17TH FEBRUARY,
1975

Yang Berhormat Datuk Ong Kee Hui, Minister of Local Government and Environment, John F. O'Hearry of MITRE Corporation, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests and Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is both an honour and a pleasure for me to be with you this evening and to inaugurate the Fifth International Symposium on Energy, Resources and Environment.

As we all know, this Symposium is jointly sponsored by the Malaysian Government and the MITRE Corporation — a well-known scientific and engineering organisation in the United States. I would like to extend a hearty welcome to all of you particularly our guests from Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Japan, the Philippines, Algeria and the United States who have been invited to deliver their papers at this Symposium.

A unique feature of this Symposium, if I may say so, is that it will be held in two halves — the first half will be here in Kuala Lumpur while the second half will be in Penang. I must congratulate the organisers for their initiative and effort to bring together so many distinguished participants in good time — infact one month ahead of the originally scheduled date of the conference.

I would like to sincerely thank our distinguished guests — Mr. Nakasone, Dr. HermanKahn, Mr. Hon Sui Sen, Dr. Ibnu Sutowo and the MITRE Consultants — who are able to be with us for the next few days in spite of their heavy commitments in their respective responsible offices. I would like to particularly single out Dr. Herman Kahn whose presence at this gathering has been eagerly awaited by all of us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I understand that the discussions at this Symposium will take in a wide range of subjects in this important and closely related fields. I am sure the ideas that will be generated during the deliberations at this Symposium will be of great importance and relevance to all of us, in particular, the developing world.

This Symposium is indeed timely because recent events on the international scene have placed certain constraints on the socio-economic progress of developing countries almost to the point of threatening the economic survival of a number of them. As the developing world represents two-thirds of mankind, I would urge that in your deliberations, you would direct your minds to the formulation of workable recommendations for the more efficient exploitation and management of energy, resources and environment.

I am given to understand that you will devote some time to the ASEAN region. This I feel will be time well worth spending since this region represents major producers of several resources vital to the economy of the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we find ourselves at the confluence of several important developments. The industrial societies have developed a voracious appetite for resources, at the same time, we are acutely aware that such resources are exhaustible and are indeed dwindling at a greatly accelerated rate.

This therefore is not a happy situation. What is more alarming is that we are depending on the known available resources of energy while further resources are being intensively explored such as making use of solar energy and utilization of ocean waves for the benefit of mankind.

Admittedly this new source of energy would require a tremendous amount of capital and technological know-how for their efficient utilization. I am happy to say that most countries are now aware of the need for the recycling of waste materials to turn into useful products.

We also know that at the present moment, the manufacture of

fertilizer depends entirely on petroleum by-product. And as fertilizer is an essential ingredient for the growth and progress of agriculture-based economies, the decline in the known reserves of petroleum will obviously affect the future of these industries. In my view, there is an urgent need to look into the possibility of using materials other than petroleum by-product to sustain the ever-increasing demand for fertilizer.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I appreciate that what I have just said relates to fundamental changes which can only be realized in the long-term. In the meanwhile, there is a pressing need to introduce immediate measures to alleviate the present situation. These could include the improvement of agricultural practices possibly through a more efficient allocation of resources which could bring about increased productivity. Unless we succeed in doing this, I very much doubt if we can overcome the problems of world shortage of food as clearly ventilated at the recent Food Conference in Rome.

At no time in the human history are we faced with a situation of greatly increased consumption and at the same time of dwindling resources. There is therefore a real need for carefully planned allocation and utilization of energy and resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What I have said so far concerns how we should organise and use our resources in order to obtain maximum benefit. But, at the same time, we have to ensure that, in so doing, we do not indiscriminately temper with the environment that will result in permanent hazards to the future generations.

In this respect, there is one fundamental factor which all of us will have to consider very urgently and that is the control and command of our energy resources. This is of vital importance as otherwise our people will not be able to fully benefit from them.

We know fully well that we are endowed with immense natural wealth which can bring about better welfare to our people. But quite often in our haste to exploit these resources, we overlook the fact that we stand to lose more due to improper planning and lack of vision for the future.

It is, therefore, imperative that this aspect of the problem concerning resources be closely looked into and clear cut guidelines be made on how best these resources be exploited by national Governments and in turn to co-ordinate the exploitation in terms of one region as in the case of ASEAN.

This aspect of the problem is related to other issues such as the question of prices as well as of markets. The developing countries are often placed in a very disadvantageous position especially when the market and prices are subject to the control of developed countries.

In the case of Malaysia, the prices of our traditional resources are not determined here but overseas. This is because we have to sell our products through the intermediary of a third country. However, the situation has changed in recent years and we have now set up government agencies and organisations to sell our products direct to consumer countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Coming back to the subject to this Symposium, we must take cognizance of the fact that the three subjects — energy, resources and environment — are inextricably inter-related. Energy provides the force, resources provide the material for conversion into usable products, and the environment bears the end result and determines the quality of life arising out of our industrial and economic activities.

In this cycle, from energy to environment, two factors dominate. Firstly, there is the inevitable increase in world population and, secondly, the rapacious appetite for resources by industry, with little thought for the environment and the future of mankind.

History has proved that growing population generates greater demand for food. As a result, more land will have to be cleared for cultivation. Unless firm measures are taken, indiscriminate and careless land clearance will result in loss of top soil, lowering of the water-table, silting and clogging of water-ways and the resultant flooding, changes in temperature, cloud formation and rainfall, all of which will lead to serious disruption in the ecological balance.

At the same time, a growing population needs not only to be fed but also to be provided with shelter, clothing and other basic necessities of life. This implies a wide range of economic activities including the construction of factories and the generation of electricity to run the mills. All these in turn emit wastes which if left uncontrolled are harmful to man and his surroundings.

It is regrettable that the organisations which supply the bulk of these needs, more often than not, fail to take prudent measures to reduce the damage and harm caused by these waste discharge. I am disappointed that even in this country, palm oils mills continue to discharge wastes which damage rivers and stream, and factories that pollute the air with harmful sulphur dioxide fumes.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The recent Showa Maru incident in Singapore is another evidence that the large amount of petroleum crude transported by super tankers is a source of serious concern to coastal states. Had this accident taken place in the Straits of Malacca, the damage will be more serious constituting about to national disaster. It would have far-reaching adverse effects on marine life, our fishing industry and the beautiful beaches which line our shores.

As you are aware, these tankers which ply the sea-lanes of the world carry enormous amount of oil well in excess of 200 million tons a year. In addition, even the routine cleaning of these tankers and the discharge of the resultant emulsion means that at a low three percent composition of oil, over six million tones of oil will have been discharged into the world's ocean and seas every year. The Straits of Malacca is receiving more than its fair share of this discharge. It is in this context that we hope the Laws of the Seas Conference in Geneva will look favourably into our case.

Similarly, off-shore mining for oil, gas and minerals also cause a routine and continuous discharge of pollutants. Unless proper safety measures are integrated into the system, accidents can easily happen with severe damage to the environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The question is often asked whether environmental measures would inhibit industrialisation and economic growth, and whether

developing countries can afford such measures. This association in the minds of many between development and environmental measures is understandable, but may not truly reflect the situation. Pollution can originate from both the lack of development as well as indiscriminate development. Poverty itself creates traditional forms of pollution such as poor sewerage and inadequate social hygiene. On the other hand, indiscriminate development inevitably results in the destruction of our resources. This is further aggravated by uncontrolled introduction of poisonous chemicals and substances into the air, water and in agriculture.

The question we should ask ourselves is not whether developing countries can afford to take environmental measures but whether all countries, developing or developed, can afford not to.

Basically, then, the growth of world population, and a fragmented approach by the economic and industrial sectors towards energy, resources and environment constitute the twin problems which we face today. Our earth's resources and its capacity to cleanse itself is limited. Some may say that environmental hazards we face today is simply our planet "kicking back" at us for over populating it and for mistreating it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The interests of industrial development and those of energy, resources and environment, in the long run, should be common. They should aim at utilizing and managing our resources intelligently so that they can be stretched for many more years to come. In doing so, industrialisation and environmental measures should aim at bringing about a better quality of life for all of us and for the future generations.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I realise that my remarks have touched on broad, complex and fundamental issues. Unfortunately, these issues will grow and continue to influence our lives. I am happy that I have the opportunity to share my thoughts with such an eminent gathering of leaders, scholars and scientists as we have here tonight.

In conclusion, I would request you, in your deliberations in the next few days, to consider the urgency of the issues and the prac-

tical and pragmatic measures which both developing and developed nations must take in the interest of all of us.

I wish your deliberations every success.

Thank you.