

TR: 4.6.1966

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AT THE  
LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF THE  
NATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING BOARD AT  
DEWAN TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN,  
KUALA LUMPUR ON FRIDAY, 10TH JUNE, 1966.

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy indeed to be invited to inaugurate the launching ceremony of the National Family Planning Board this morning. As one directly concerned with national and rural development, it gives me particular pleasure to note that the Board has set about its task to plan and act in accordance with the family planning policy outlined in the First Malaysia Plan so soon after the necessary legislation was passed by Parliament at its last meeting.

Family planning is an integral part of the Government's development strategy to raise the standard of living of our people. I realise that people of different discipline and beliefs look at family planning with different considerations. Scientists, economists and demographers call it a *necessity*; humanitarians consider it a *kindness* while those who oppose family planning call it a *sin*.

Whatever name or label that one puts on family planning or planned parenthood, I can assure you that the Government has given this matter very serious and careful consideration before adopting it as public policy.

The adoption of family planning policy is based on two main considerations.

First, the Government is convinced that it is necessary for ensuring economic advancement and higher standard of living of all Malaysians; secondly, it is considered essential on the grounds of mothers' health, children and family's welfare.

As a man, I also believe that family planning will help increase the status of women in our society, by allowing them more time for obtaining equality of opportunity, rights and responsibilities!

At least, if not for everything else, I think women should have the right to decide the size and timing of the family - with the agreement of the husband of course!

In terms of raising the standard of living of the people, the Government, as you know, has provided and is providing under the First Malaysia Plan, major scale of development programmes and facilities such as roads, schools, water supplies, health clinics, ect.

Although impressive progress has been achieved in recent years and while Malaysians are enjoying an economic expansion, much remains to be done. The facilities provided are by no means adequate in relation to the needs of the people especially those in the rural areas.

The rate of population growth is so rapid that our economic performance and willingness to act are put to a severe test. The question is: Will our development progress be sustained at a rate sufficient to promote further economic growth to achieve our national, social and economic goals?

Success in this direction is important, and, I believe, success can be achieved, if positive action is initiated now and not later, to slow down the rapid rate of population increase.

While the provision of medical and health services under our development plan has improved the health of the people, they also have increased the size of the population by reducing the death rate. At the same time, the birth rate remains extremely high by any international standards.

The result is that the real extent of our economic and social progress is clouded by our increasing numbers and per capita income is lower than it would otherwise be.

The population problem thus becomes all the more unmanageable when, at the rate of 3% increase per annum, it will double in 25 years.

The claims on the nation's resources are potentially excessive, and economic development will be hampered if the rate of population growth remains unchanged. This would put a heavy burden on to the parents, the Government and the country, to provide sufficient food, clothing, schools and social services for the growing children, and to provide increased job opportunities for new entrants to the labour force.

In other words, rapid population growth is bound to increase the burden of the young on the community, and divert or reduce investment resources in favour of current consumption; it will raise the net cost of supporting the population and create serious social and economic obstacles to accelerate development.

Therefore, if any great measure of prosperity is to be gained from our development efforts, it is vitally important for all of us to plan ahead.

We must act now to stabilise the growth of population over a reasonable period, and to improve the health, quality and mental capacity of our people for the economic and social progress of our country.

As I have stated earlier, the second main appeal for family planning relates to the health of mothers, children and welfare of the family. Spacing of the children is necessary and desirable, in only to secure better health for the mother, better care and upbringing of children. It will relieve mothers from constant child-bearing as to provide extra care and attention to a small number of children.

There are many instances of the tragedy of poor families having too many children - for example: mothers' lives are endangered; children given away on birth or handed over to charitable homes; children forced to beg by their elders, etc.

There is no need for me to go on justifying a policy the need of which, all are aware, but which few would dare to face.

The launching of this National Family Planning Board is clear demonstration of the Government's initiative to provide, on a national sustained scale, advice, facilities and services for family

planning towards better life for the individual, the family and the nation.

There is already considerable awareness on the part of the parents for the need for family planning and desire for practical help and guidance.

What is needed is to bring this awareness and need for help through improved methods of communication and motivation.

Advice and help will be so organised as to reach both the rural and urban areas.

Education is, therefore, crucial to the success of the whole movement.

Since family planning can be considered an education for a better life, the programme must be closely related and integrated with other development programmes, especially health and rural development activities.

I should like to see, therefore, that various Departments involved in development will cooperate with one another and with the voluntary organisations to make this programme a success. They should help to create the necessary conditions in which individuals, parents or mothers can freely resort to practices of family planning.

The fact that family planning programme is placed under the portfolio of the Prime Minister's Department is to ensure coordination aimed at providing an effective machinery for all the Government Departments and private voluntary organisations to carry out extension work in support of national family planning.

The *composition* of the Board clearly indicates the Government's desire to enlist Government and public efforts in this direction.

Administrative arrangements at the Federal and State level will be greatly strengthened through the National Family Planning Board to reach out to the kampungs, new villages and towns not only with advice but more positively with the means to practice family planning.

I hope that each and every one of you in the audience will assist in this effort. We would also seek the help of voluntary organisations, trade unions and other associations to give concrete support to the programme in each area.

In this connection, I would like, on behalf of the Government to reiterate and sentiments expressed by the Chairman of the National Family Planning Board and record the Government's appreciation to the Ford Foundation for the advisory, training and material assistance given to the Government.

The Ford Foundation has made a generous grant of US\$189,000 for this purpose in response to our request.

In addition, I should also like to thank the Population Council in New York for the supply of materials, technical text books and equipment to enable us to make a good start in this family planning programme.

I must, however, state that it is not the Government's intention to force parents to limit the size of their family. Our interest lies in doing all we can to see that the knowledge, practice and services of family planning are widened and brought to the attention of parents.

It is up to the parents who will have the responsibility of making the choice on the size of a family, the type of education and level of living they wish to offer to their children.

I know that it will take some time to change people's attitude or even overcome their shyness or hesitation to ask of practical help in this matter. Despite the speed with which the National Family Planning Board has been established and the immediate action taken to embark upon its programmes, the task in achieving results in family planning will be a long and enduring one.

Thus, there is no reasonable expectation to an immediate substantial reduction in numbers arising from a vigorous family planning programme in the next few years or so and the increase in numbers will continue to pose a serious challenge to our development effort in the years ahead.

There is a Malay proverb which says, "Hendak cari rotan, jangan takutkan anaknya" which translated into English means, "if you want to look for rotan do not be afraid of its thorns".

In other words, "If you want to do something good, do not be afraid of facing difficulties, trials and tribulations". Difficulties always exist in every human endeavour, so I hope members of the National Family Planning Board will not be deterred by difficulties and frustrations which they might encounter in the first few years of your programme.

But, with such an able, popular and keen Chairman as my friend as Encik Mohd. Khir Johari, I am sure the Board will meet with great success.

As Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Family Planning, he has laboured hard, worked long and taken considerable pains to create this child - the National Family Planning Board. With him at the helm, I am confident, that his child, the National Family Planning Board, will grow and succeed in producing results - results not in terms of numbers but quality, improved standard of living, better health and welfare for mothers and the family, the community and the nation.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I have great pleasure in launching the National Family Planning Board.