

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF THE CULTURAL CONFERENCE OF THE
MALAYSIAN SOCIETY OF ORIENTALISTS AT THE
LIBRARY ROOM UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA, KUALA
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Mr. President, Hon'ble Ministers, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very glad to be here today and to be given the honour of opening your Conference. I am sorry that I am only here merely to open the Conference and wish I had time to spend the next three days taking part with you all in your discussion groups. I notice from your programme that the subjects under discussion are not only of tremendous interest to me personally but also are of vital importance to Malaysia and our people.

This Conference on the cultural problems of Malaysia is very timely and desirable. Our country is going through rapid changes and facing the problems of building a united people whose sole object of loyalty is to Malaysia. I am glad to say that despite numerous pressing problems confronting us and the nation, the efforts to build one nationhood out of our multi-racial society are achieving encouraging cooperation from various races in this country. This must necessarily take time but I have no doubt that with patience, understanding and cooperation any difficulty can and must be resolved if we want Malaysia to succeed and have a prosperous and happy country for all our people.

As you learned professors, eminent scholars and distinguished leaders realise the Alliance Government's chief concern and problem right now is the urgent and difficult problem of a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious Malaysia and the integration of the various communities into a modern, cultured and patriotic Malaysians.

South East Asia today, and Malaysia in particular, is the greatest melting pot of the most important cultural traditions in human history. The cultures of China, India, the Middle East and the indigenous Malay-polynesian cultures have here entered into a conflict and confluences as nowhere else in the world. I feel, as distinguished scholars and professors must have already known, that nowhere else in South East Asia that these conflicts and confluences are pronounced and represented in such an urgent and concrete form as in Malaysia. The challenge facing the leadership today is the harmonization and en-

riching these various cultures that we had inherited from various parts of the world. I am quite sure the assessment and findings of this conference will be of great use to scholars and even to us in Government.

We would like to know your views of the cultural impact of nation building in a multi racial society such as ours.

Malaysia is a part of South East Asia. It is also a part of greater world of Malay-speaking people. Yet Malaysia is not an exclusive cultural entity. Cultural patterns in our country have been largely influenced by the civilizations of the great continents of Europe and Asia. Arab and Indian traders brought their religions and created empires in the Malay archipelago. Then Western civilization, fortunately, did not completely destroy the traditional way of life of our people. In British Malaya, Native rulers and administrators existed side by side with colonial rulers and the cultural patterns remained traditionally the same. Liberal laws and legislations eased somewhat the lives of the people. While colonialism had not completely uprooted our traditional way of life — our attitude towards life, social and cultural values came under the influence of money and economic markets.

In all former colonial territories, in our country especially, the initial awakenings of subjected people took the form of cultural renaissance, expressed in movements for cultural identity as protests against political and cultural domination and some of the ways of life and values of our colonial masters.

In 1957, Malaya became Independence and Merdeka gave impetus to cultural movements in this country. And ever since, our nation has been trying to evolve one nationhood and one common loyalty. The birth of Malaysia gave greater impetus to the emergence of one nationhood and with it goes the need to evolve also a cultural identity of Malaysia. Our country is indeed a unique example of this search for a cultural identity of its own. We have inherited as a result of colonialism, a society in which non-indigenous people have found a stake in this country, and as I have said earlier, the urgent problem now is how to fuse them into a cultural and political entity. We have found at least one answer to the problem — in the National Language. We know language alone cannot resolve the problem as there are differences in cultural traditions and in Malaysia, religion plays a dominant part in influencing various peoples' outlook and attitudes towards life. But a greater understanding of each other's outlook and attitudes towards life is only possible when there is a common language and that is why the National Language is that all important.

The Alliance Government is creating for the young people of this country an environment which will ensure that their children, if not they themselves, to give their undivided loyalty to Malaysia alone. All our national policies, especially, the National educational policy are directed toward creating a strong, cultured and patriotic Malaysians.

Independence and Malaysia gave freer life to all loyal people of this country. This freer life is the most important unifying factor of our people not only politically but culturally. I can see and feel that all our people are conscious of the fact that they are sharing the same destiny. Their acknowledgement is indeed a great factor in influencing harmony, unity and solidarity among diverse groups. A sense of belonging has been aroused and all loyal Malaysians now assert their common national identity and patriotism.

Our country was threatened out of its existence from the day of its birth. However, despite Indonesian aggression and confrontation I am proud of the way in which our people of all races have stood together in unity, harmony and goodwill. We in Malaysia have made our concept of Malaysia clear. Our concept is to bring together peoples of various territories under one flag so that they all regard Malaysia as the sole object of their loyalty. This concept of a United Malaysian nation is embodied in our Constitution. Our Constitution provides and guarantees everyone a place in this country and protects his right and privileges. Malaysia is rich and each group is guaranteed its rightful share. Each group will get according to each needs and contribution. The goal is a united Malaysian nation with a common loyalty and I am sure you will agree with me that we are doing rather well in the fulfilment of this objective.

I have much pleasure in declaring the Conference open and wish it great success. Thank you.