

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER,
AT THE OPENING OF THE EDUCATIONAL
AND CULTURAL DISPLAY FOR THE ASIAN
REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE WORLD
CONFEDERATION OF ORGANISATIONS OF
THE TEACHING PROFESSION, AT THE CHIN
WOO STADIUM, KUALA LUMPUR ON 25TH
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I am very pleased indeed that the Malayan Organisers of this Conference Week of Teachers from various parts of Asia have asked me to address you. It is very natural that they should do so, because we know one another very well, but perhaps visiting delegates might be wondering why the Deputy Prime Minister, who is* also Minister of Defence, should be especially invited to speak.

The explanation is a very simple one. In the days before our independence under the quasi-ministerial system we had then, I was responsible for education, and Chairman of the Special Committee which drew up a report on the national educational needs of the Federation of Malaya. That is why this report is associated with my name.

When Malaya attained her Merdeka two and a half years ago I became responsible for my present portfolios, and relinquished the Ministry of Education. It will not surprise you to learn therefore that I have always continued to be deeply interested in education because the Razak Report was adopted and put into practice as the educational plan for the Federation of Malaya, and it is this report which is still at present the basis of our education system.

The broad principles of the Razak Report have been followed and have the approval of the great majority of people in this country, but as education is a question of intense interest to all parents, and Malaya is a country overflowing with young children, you can reasonably expect that there would be some difference of opinion on details or implementation.

That is, of course, what happened. But neither the members of my Committee, nor myself, nor the Government when it adopted the Report ever considered that it would be irrevocable and unchangeable. By their very nature, problems of education are always subject to change; it is a normal process of growth and development.

It is always necessary to review what you are doing so as to ensure that what you have in mind is done well and fits the purpose. That is what is happening in Malaya now. The Federation Government has kept the promise it made to give further consideration to our educational questions, and the Razak Report is now under review by a Special Committee. I understand that this Committee will be presenting its report to Cabinet within a month or so, and naturally under our democratic processes the question of national education will be discussed in Parliament.

Most of the countries represented by delegates in this conference do not have the same complicated problems as we do in Malaya. Generally, for instance, other Asian countries teach in the national language. The Federation of Malaya, is a country of many races who have been living together for a long time. During the Colonial days English was the principal language of administration, and schools throughout for each race, each teaching in its own language. There was no effort on national direction or a unified system of education, and there was no Government emphasis at all on the use of Malay as national language.

Malaya, on becoming independent, had of course to change this approach. We in Malaya are engaged in building a nation of three main races stemming from three great cultures, and if we are to achieve this then it is obviously essential that the youth of our country, and the adults too, must think of themselves as Malaysians, and not as previously of themselves as Malays, Chinese, Indians, etc. The educational system therefore must be keyed to national unity, and this unity in turn is integrated with the development of the national language. No one in Malaya disagrees with those basic principles, and we are all convinced, given good heart and goodwill, that it can be done, that we can create a national Malaysian culture.

In doing this, however, we also agreed that in building a Malayan nation we must also preserve the ancient cultures and traditions of our three main races. We want all Malaysians to take pride and interest not only in their own tradition and culture but also in those other cultures and traditions which are contributing to our consciousness as Malaysians. You will see therefore that we have a unique problem. I think you will also have learned by now that we are progressing very well indeed with our aim of national unity through national education.

This evening you are to see an educational and cultural display, both on the stage and on the floor, by school children of all the main races which make up Malaya. I am sure you as teachers, from other countries of Asia, will sense at once that our ideals are being transmuted into action, and I am sure too, that when the time comes for you to choose Kuala Lumpur again as the venue for another Asian Regional Conference, we will be able to give you further proof of the unity in diversity which is making, and will continue to make, the nation of the Federation of Malaya.

I have very much pleasure now in declaring open for your enjoyment, and I may say, even your instruction, this educational and cultural display.