

**ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
AT THE ANNUAL DINNER OF THE MALAYAN
CIVIL SERVICE ASSOCIATION IN KUALA
LUMPUR ON 21ST MAY, 1960**

Mr President and Gentlemen,

It certainly gives me great pleasure indeed to be present here tonight at this Annual Dinner of the Malayan Civil Service Association and I am grateful to you, Mr President and Members of your Committee, for so kindly extending this invitation to me. However, in rising to speak I am conscious of a mixture of feelings—of pride, that falls to my lot to speak to such a distinguished gathering of Civil servants of this country; of pleasure, because I meet with so many old friends and colleagues of former days when I was a Civil servant myself, though not a member of your Association; of apprehension, because I find it difficult to find a suitable subject to speak on, and as a Minister of ex-Civil servant there are obviously many things that I could speak on tonight. Even if I say so much, so much must remain unsaid.

It has often been said that Civil servants are the class of people who take themselves too seriously. By being vested with the authority of office they give the impression that on them have fallen the burden of their country, and they expect the general public to regard them with a sense of awe. In the days of Colonial rule in this country they were called “heaven-borns” by the newspapers who circulated the story of senior Civil servants parking themselves on the slopes of Mt. Olympus. During that period they were said to enjoy the rarefield air of the stratosphere so much that they seldom deigned to bother to think about the people living in the lower regions.

I was told some time ago by an Ex-member of the Malayan Civil Service that there was a form of daily service of prayer for use in Government Departments, compiled by an unknown author in 1947 and filed in the Federal Secretariat then. The Service began with a prayer:

“O Lord grant that this day we come to no decisions,
Neither run into any kind of responsibility,
But that all our doings may be ordered to establish
New and unwarranted departments,
For ever and ever. — Amen.”

There was a Litany and a Creed, which I will spare you and the hymn concluded the proceedings:

"O Thou, who seest all things below,
Grant that they servants may go slow,
That they may study to comply
With regulations till they die.

Teach us, O Lord, to reverence
Committees more than common sense,
Impress our minds to make no plan,
But pass the baby when we can.

And when the Tempter seems to give
Us feelings of initiative,
Or when alone we go too far,
Chastise us with a Circular.
Mid war and tumult, fire and storms,
Strengthen us we pray with forms,
Thus will thy servants ever be
A flock of perfect sheep for Thee."

That of course was long time ago and things are different today. I am glad to note that our Civil servants have adapted themselves to the tremendous change brought about by our country's Constitution.

They have accepted new responsibilities and have risen to the occasions demanded by new circumstances. Their ability to move with the times has resulted in the smooth change-over from a Colonial to an independent regime. I am happy to say that the radical change in the character of the administration in this country has not been disrupted by a disorganisation of its machinery. I attribute this to the loyalty, sense of duty, discipline and efficiency of our Civil Service. The Government is strong and efficient when the Civil Service is working effectively. I am proud to say our Civil Service is second to none in Asia today.

Gentlemen, I am sure you are proud of your record, but you must not rest on your present laurels, thinking the garden will always remain lovely. If you do so, you may wake up to find the lallang of neglect has made a shambles of your garden, and like Rip van Winkle, you will open your eyes to blink confusedly at a world different to that when you went to rest on Mt. Olympus.

We are living in a fast moving world. Our country is in the vertex of the maelstrom of change that is sweeping through South-east Asia. A new spirit is spreading through our land, and our people are viewing the administration with expectant and critical eyes. Civil servants today cannot divorce themselves from the aspirations of our people. Sitting in air-conditioned offices and writing minutes is the popular conception of the work of a Civil servant. The other day an officer, connected with rural development work, met a friend who asked him why he had to run all over the country when civil servants were supposed to be tied to their desks. The officer replied that times had changed and certain categories of civil servants had to move into the field to get urgent work done. His friend then remarked, "It's not dignified for you to run about like a mandore!" This idea of civil servants keeping the creases of their pants and their shirt collars immaculate dies hard.

Mention of rural development reminds me that the work of improving the conditions in rural areas is not confined alone to officers of the Ministry of Rural Development. It is work that all civil servants would have to undertake. The ramifications of rural development work will have their impact on practically every department. You have a dynamic role to play in this connection.

You may not actually wield the axe or changkol, but you will have to get away quite often from your desks to see that work assigned to your departments is being carried out quickly and properly. So your shirts will get wet with perspiration and your shoes covered with dust. This is in keeping with the Semangat Bharu. When all Government officers work in this way they will set a new tempo of endeavour to the people in the kampongs. We all should work not merely for our rice and curry but also for the betterment of our country so that our people will be able to enjoy a better standard of living. You will be doing work of national importance and not merely departmental work. You should

discard the old idea that your work is limited to the sectional responsibilities of your departments. The new concept of official duties flows beyond departmental boundaries into the stream of national endeavour. You are no longer insignificant cogs in a sluggish machine. Everyone of you is a vital part of the new machinery of Government. One important point I would ask you to bear in mind. The people in the rural areas will set their standards of endeavour to the output of work and enthusiasm generated by officers in the districts.

There is another important matter that I wish to mention. I went to assure you that the amendment to the Constitution, particularly those pertaining to the Public Services Commission, will not jeopardize the principle that the public service should be free from political influence. As I have affirmed in Parliament, so I will affirm it here again, the Public Services Commission still retains the major functions of Public Service Commission which really constitute the real safeguards to the Public Service.

Gentlemen,

I have spoken at great length on many matters but as a politician, I can assure you, we members of the Elected Government depend on you, members of the Civil Service, for the success of our tasks. Due to the Malayanization Policy there have been a lot of changes in the character and the personnel in our Civil Service during the last few years. To the expatriate officers who have left, or are about to leave, or who are still staying here to assist us during these transitional years, I say thank you very much for your assistance, your devotion to duty and your service to the country. To the Malayan officers I say the future of this country depends on you. We have a great challenging task ahead of us. We have achieved independence but independence is not an end in itself but only a means to an end. We have got to give our people a new and a better standard of living than they have enjoyed before. We have a democratic form of Government with a constitutional monarchy, Parliament elected by the people. We have to see that this system of Government is firmly established in our country. And that system of Government can only be firmly established and appreciated by our people if it can show results, if it can show to them that this form of Government is the best form of Government that they have known. For our Government to

produce such results will depend a lot on the Civil Service, on you, gentlemen, in particular. Above all, we have a far more important cause to fight for. Parliamentary democracy is on trial in Asia today, and our country has become an established unit of that democracy. It is the duty of everyone of us who believe in this idea to see that it is accepted and appreciated by our people; so that they will not only defend it and cherish it but uphold it and cherish it for our generations to come in this country.

Gentlemen, we have, as I said, many difficult challenging tasks ahead, but if everyone of us, politicians, civil servants and others carry on our duty with the right spirit and loyalty, with the true interest of our country at heart, then I have every confidence, our young independent country, which now occupies a prior place in South-east Asia will continue to shine as a bright star in the world.