

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF SIXTH ASIAN
CONGRESS OF GYNAECOLOGISTS AND
OBSTETRICIANS AT FEDERAL HOTEL, KUALA
LUMPUR ON 21ST JULY, 1974

Dato Dr Ariffin Marzuki, Chairman Organising Committee,
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Pertama sekali, sukaiah saya mengucapkan terimakasih kepada Organising Committee Congress ini kerana sudi menjemput saya serta memberikan saya penghormatan merasmikan pembukaan Congress ini. Sepanjang yang saya ingat, inilah kali ke empat tahun ini di mana saya telah mendapat peluang bersama-sama dengan ahli-ahli medical profession (dan juga dental) dalam majlis-majlis mereka, samada yang berhubung dengan Conference seperti ini ataupun majlis keraian mereka sendiri. Pengalaman dan pengetahuan yang saya dapati daripada majlis-majlis seperti ini amat besar faedahnya kepada saya dalam menjalankan tugas-tugas saya sendiri kerana lazimnya ahli-ahli medical profession mengutamakan clinical approach terhadap sebarang masaalah dan tidak banyak bicara lain lagi.

Saya suka juga mengambil kesempatan ini mengucapkan Selamat Datang kepada para perwakilan dari negara-negara tetangga dan negara-negara Asia yang lain serta pakar-pakar dan pemerhati-pemerhati dari Amerika, Eropah dan Australia.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

As I was saying, I am indeed happy to be with you on this auspicious occasion. On behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia, I extend to you a warm welcome to Kuala Lumpur. We feel very much honoured that you have chosen our capital city as the venue of this sixth Congress which is attended by well-over 300 participants. Most probably, many of you are here for the first time and I hope the Organising Committee has seen to it that Malaysian hospitality extends beyond our saying "Selamat Datang". From the brochure, I notice a special programme has been laid out for the ladies while the men are

at the Conference. I hope all of you and your good ladies will have an enjoyable and pleasant stay in our country.

I am told that there are three cardinal principles in Obstetrics, namely: watchful expectancy; masterful inactivity and relaxation. Although I do not belong to your fraternity, I can certainly recommend to you the last one in particular during your sojourn in Malaysia. A well-known columnist once wrote that he has always felt a genuine pity for Gynaecologists and Obstetricians. In his view, they must be missing a lot in life, since you normally regard any SYT with a figure of 36-23-36 as simply another case of gynaecoid pelvis, spontaneous delivery and adequate lactation expected! However, judging by the prevailing expression of contentment of the gathering here, I am not sure that the columnist is entirely right.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Coming to the more serious aspect of life, it is said that "healthy babies require healthy mothers" and that "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". The implications are of course that Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, by virtue of their responsibilities in the physical and mental well-being of their charge, have a key role to play in building a strong and healthy nation. I think we all agree that the health of both mothers and young children is the foundation stone of a progressive and viable society. It is therefore most appropriate that the Asian Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, in working towards the betterment of womanhood, have chosen the five major themes for your deliberations in this Congress.

In particular, I note with keen interest that Nutrition and Maternal Health are given special emphasis in your programme. We in Malaysia have been acutely aware of the harmful effects of undernutrition and malnutrition, especially protein-calorie deficiency and growth retardation in the rural sector. Consequently, in 1969, we launched a pilot Applied Nutrition Project for a population of roughly 10,000 in the village of Teluk Datuk in Selangor state. The focus of attention in the programme are pregnant and lactating mothers, infants and toddlers. We adopted a multi-disciplinary approach with the Ministry of Rural Economic Development as the Co-ordinator of the project, while

the other Ministries involved include Health, Information, Education, Agriculture, especially the Department of Fisheries and Veterinary Services.

I am happy to say the results have been most gratifying and the Project has now been extended to the State of Trengganu and very shortly will include other States in Peninsular Malaysia and also Sabah and Sarawak. I am hopeful that your in-depth discussion on "Nutrition and Maternal Health" would provide useful pointers in the long-term implementation and evaluation of our schemes.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today, more than half humanity live in Asia, while millions survive in object poverty and at below subsistence level. The task ahead—its magnitude, its implications to food production, employment opportunities, education and other aspects of socio-economic development—is therefore obvious to us all.

I think we all hold the view that every child born should be a wanted child and should enjoy the environment of a healthy and happy family life. He should have not only food, clothing and education but also parental love and protection. This means that individual families should ideally be limited compatible with the means of proper upbringing from infancy to childhood. However, we know that planned parenthood as a way of life involves much more than those statements. We are at present in the process of integrating planned parenthood programme into our rural health services. No doubt your working papers and recommendations on the communication aspects and recent advances in this field will be studied closely by us and where feasible, to be implemented accordingly.

As I said earlier, we have made considerable progress in Malaysia in the field of health. The various programmes we have carried out during the years after independence in providing for baby care and ante-natal care have resulted in reducing infant and maternal mortality among our rural population. However, we are not complacent about this and the Government is spending more money and mobilising greater manpower resources to improve on the existing services.

The influence of Obstetric Service on perinatal health is obvious and stress has been made in this context on obstetrics as preventive

measures. Our planned parenthood programme is particularly directed to improve the health and well-being of expectant mothers through properly phased motherhood and better ante-natal care besides all round improvement of hospital services.

As the number of death from childbirth is decreasing gradually and longer life expectation of mothers, the influence of other diseases in the health and welfare of mothers will be noticeable e.g. cancer. Here too prevention can be organised and I am glad that such voluntary organisation like Cancer Society is actively working in this field. We would certainly like to see greater effort being made in the detection and prevention of cancer especially among childbearing women since this is curable.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Obstetricians are said to be trained to plan to a large degree and for a long period ahead and at the same time to cope with any sudden emergency. I have every confidence that Datuk Dr Ariffin and his Organising Committee would spare no effort in making this Congress a success and your stay a pleasant one.

On that note, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I now declare open the Sixth Asian Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.