

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
AND MINISTER OF DEFENCE AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF PESTA BELIA AT
MERDEKA STADIUM, KUALA LUMPUR ON
18TH AUGUST, 1961

Mr Chairman, Mr President, Young Malaysians, Visitors from the Borneo territories, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I say I am happy to be here tonight, I think I can speak for everyone present, because I am sure we are all looking forward with anticipation to a very entertaining evening.

Young competitors from every State in Malaya will be presenting dances of Malay, Chinese, Indian and aboriginal origin; not to mention a special display of bersilat. They have been looking forward to this night for many weeks, as they have already taken part in State competitions and have all come to Kuala Lumpur as State champions. Naturally, each State group hopes to go back home again with the national championship.

The whole concept of this programme is a splendid idea, and I congratulate the Malayan Association of Youth Clubs for their initiative and energy in organising this cultural festival to coincide with their national seminar. They have had a big job to do, and young or old people who attend will have a great variety of events to see and hear in these next few nights, not only at the Stadium, but also in the British Council Centre and in the Lake Gardens. There will be top spinning, competition of decorated kites, displays of handicrafts and even cakes and preserved foods. In short, the Malayan public are going to see the best examples of what is of particular interest to Malayan youth.

The Pesta Belia is to me the most significant for two reasons. First, because it demonstrates the natural zest and interest of Malayan youth in Malayan culture. The members of the Malayan Association of Youth Clubs are doing very good work indeed in reviving, maintaining and popularising traditional folk arts.

A new nation should never forget its part, and it is a poor country indeed which ignores its own culture. Fortunately, as we see here, this is not happening in Malaya. The value of such a festival lies in the fact that the cultures of the various races which make up the Malayan nation can all be seen together, and this in itself leads to closer understanding and appreciation by the various component communities of the cultural values important to each.

The second significant factor about this Pesta Belia and the organisers, the Malayan Association of Youth Clubs, is that it is voluntary. We in Malaya live in a land which accepts the policy of free enterprise. We believe in encouraging the individuality and the talents of our people, expressing themselves in their own way, not subject to any regimentation or compulsion from above. The role of Government is to encourage and to help, not to control or direct. This seems to me a most invaluable aspect of Malayan democracy.

If we give free range to the potential talents of our people to say and express what they think and feel, then we have no need to worry at all about the future of Malayan culture because the artist, in whichever medium he expresses himself—singing, dancing, acting, painting, hobbies, photography or many other personal interests—the artist will be giving of his best because he is doing what he really wants to do himself.

I am quite confident that the latent creativeness of Malaysians will come out richly in every aspect of culture; the signs of its emergence are already visible. And we will see the day, all of us present here, when we can be proud of Malayan artists, Malayan authors, Malayan musicians, Malaysians adding to the enrichment of our whole life, Malaysians creating a cultural heritage for our future.

I have much pleasure indeed now in declaring Pesta Belia officially open.