

PERSIDANGAN ANTARABANGSA MAKANAN DAN
PERTANIAN - MALAYSIA 2,000

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Ucapan Yang Amat Berhormat Timbalan Perdana Menteri, Datuk Sri Mahathir Mohamad ketika merasmikan Persidangan Antarabangsa Makanan dan Pertanian - Malaysia 2,000 di Universiti Pertanian Malaysia pada 25hb Julai, 1977 jam 9.00 pagi.

Terlebih dahulu, saya suka mengucapkan terimakasih kepada pehak penganjur Persidangan Antarabangsa Makanan dan Pertanian - Malaysia 2,000 yang akan berlangsung pada 25hb. hingga 29hb. Julai, 1977 ini, kerana telah menjemput saya menyampaikan "keynote address" serta merasmikan pembukaan Persidangan. Saya diberi faham bahawa ini adalah satu acara yang telah dirancang bagi Minggu Konvokesyen Universiti ini yang pertama sejak ianya tertubuh sebagai sebuah Universiti.

I am greatly honoured to have been invited to be with you today, to address this distinguished gathering of scholars and academics who are dedicated to the problems of agricultural development and to examine it in relation to food production and population growth.

I am happy to note that this Conference would specifically examine the future implications of population growth, resource availability and technological advancement to food production, utilization and consumption and the impact of these activities on the ecology of the country.

We are all aware that the problem of food requirement, and, in this context, agriculture, need to be given priority attention from all nations whether they are developed, developing or still underdeveloped. This is because of the fact that the task of ensuring sufficient food for everyone in a fast-increasing population is no longer something that can be left to chance. Statistics show that the world population increases at the estimated rate of 2% annually. At the same time the advancement of modern medicine continues to reduce the mortality rates. It is estimated that by the year 2,000, the world population which is now approximately 4 billion is expected to increase to more than 6 billion. The production of food, however, has not kept pace with this growth in population. The exploitation of present agricultural resources seems to have approached its limits unless major technological achievements in the agricultural sector make it possible to meet the basic food requirements of a growing world population.

The problem of food production, in fact became a matter of world-wide concern in the early seventies when bad weather in 1972 caused world food production to fall. The consequent increase in import demand, especially for staple cereals, seriously depleted the stocks of the main exporting countries. This resulted in a tremendous increase in world prices for most of the agricultural commodities including rice. Malaysia was not free from the effect of this shortage and the consequent inflation, unemployment and related social problems.

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This concern for the world food situation and the call for a just and equitable world economic order through the establishment of a New International Economic Order proposed in the 6th and 7th Special Sessions of the United Nations General Assembly gave the impetus for convening the World Food Conference in Rome in 1974. In discussing the problem of food shortages, it was felt that one basic imbalance was the growing dependence of the developing countries on the developed countries for their food supplies. Another was that a high proportion of world grain production was not used directly for human consumption but for the production of livestock products consumed largely by the affluent countries. It has become necessary, therefore, to plan and to act in order to eliminate such imbalances and wastage of the world food production and distribution. The fact that there is an estimated 460 million people suffering from malnutrition, half of which were young children makes the problem of food adequate production even more crucial.

Although the supply of food grains improved after 1974, the food problem remains a topic for debate and discussion in international forum. It was generally felt that the short-term improvement should not distract attention from the continuing need for longer-term improvements in the food production capacity especially of the developing countries. Increase agricultural production in the developing countries can contribute to a wide range of objectives including food security, better nutrition, income growth and redistribution and larger export earnings. Efforts to be taken should include more intensive use of land, modern technology, better water management, better seeds, reduction in post-harvest losses and others. Although the role and contribution of developed countries in terms of financial and technical assistance is essential, in the final analysis it is the effort of the national governments themselves which will be decisive. The general view is that there is a need for national strategies which accord agriculture the importance it deserves.

The Government of Malaysia agrees and believes that the responsibility for ensuring sufficient food production lies first and principally with the government. In fact, an important policy objective of the Malaysian Government in terms of agricultural production is to produce enough food, not only for the national needs but if possible, for export. We, in Malaysia, have been more fortunate in that food shortages have not become a major problem. This has been mainly due to the fact that, although a big proportion of our food requirements is not produced locally, our sound financial position has ensured our ability to import it from other countries. Nevertheless, with the increase in our population at the estimated rate of 2.7% annually, and the increasing loss in foreign exchange through such imports, the need to produce food enough for our national requirement has become more and more urgent.

It has been realised that, in the past, we had concentrated more on the production of primary commodities like rubber, tin and palm oil, the mainstay of our economy. This year, however, agricultural census is being carried out in order to get a clearer and more accurate picture of both agricultural production and potentials. With this data, a more definite policy as well as more realistic targets can be worked out and implemented. However, I would like to stress and warn academics as well as the people at large that policies and plans will come to nought unless the people are conscious of the needs and the philosophy behind the national onslaught on the food production problem.

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We are fortunate in Malaysia that we are still self-sufficient in such food as poultry-meat, fish and green vegetable requirements. However, with the increase in population and continuing decreases in fish landings, we have to put in greater efforts in promoting deepsea fishing and fresh-water fish culture to ensure adequate supply of cheap animal protein for the people. Although our target is 100% self-sufficiency in rice, our staple food, we have so far been able to produce only 85% of our requirement now. It is hoped that with the increase of yields, improved cultivation techniques and opening up of new rice areas, this target will be achieved. The Government target for beef production is 100% self-sufficiency if possible. Obstacles to the achievement of this target are very great but we will do everything possible to meet it. Our needs for cooking-oils are easily met by our coconut production and the increasing domestic uses of palm oil.

These are some of the efforts and targets we have set for ourselves in Malaysia in line with the objectives of increasing National food production and import substitution. In so doing we will be able to lessen the strain on the world's food supply and enable less fortunate countries to gain access to the supplies from countries with a surplus of food. ✓

In this context, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased that this Conference will discuss, in the next five days, the problems that confront the world in terms of food production. I have noticed that, among other things, matters related to agricultural policy in the context of population changes, food production and utilisation, and strategies for the year 2,000 will be discussed and debated upon. To ensure that your discussion and debate will have greater impact, I wish to propose that your deliberations give emphasis to a number of issues that I feel require closer attention.

First, is the question of poverty. In most parts of the world, the food producers, i.e. the farmers, the peasants and the fishermen are among the poorest in the community. Unless their lot is improved through better techniques and management, the consequent must be a reduction in their numbers and in turn the production for food, ways and means must therefore be found so that increased production of food is not dependent on the continuing poverty of the food producers themselves.

Increases in the prices of food is generally thought to help improve the economy of the food producers. This is not necessarily so. In Malaysia an effective price increase of padi by almost four times has not made the farmers four times richer. On the other hand, the increase in food price has affected other poor people in the country.

This paradox must be carefully examined before proposals to increase prices in order to alleviate poverty is made. In this context,

I would draw the attention of the participants to the phenomenon exhibited by agriculture in North America. The U.S. began with 95% of its people producing agricultural food grains, but now 5% only of the total population are able to produce for the needs of the rest and still have a surplus for export. It is worthwhile to study this phenomena, for not all of it is due to the vast acreage of land available.

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Another issue that deserves attention is the question of ecology. I am happy to note that the effects of food and agricultural production on the environment will be one of the topics for discussion at this Conference. I believe that, in the haste to develop our country's agricultural and industrial sectors, we should not disregard the importance of maintaining and even improving the quality of life. In this, the ecology requires priority consideration. At the rate this country is developing, the question of control becomes more and more difficult despite the legal provisions that have been enacted.

One problem of environmental pollution in the agricultural sector is caused by the poor disposal of rice hull in rice growing areas. This will increase as rice production is stepped up. Another problem is the wastes from palm oil processing. The pollution of rivers and fish-life that have resulted has significant effects on the socio-economic life of people living in the areas concerned.

In so many parts of the developed world the problems of pollution are now beyond control. Thus, it would be good if, in discussing this aspect of agricultural development in general, the situation in Malaysia could be given close attention. Without doubt, it will serve as a model, useful and relevant to the problem in other countries.

It is my hope also that, in your deliberations, you can consider the role of the private sector in the efforts of food production - especially in the context of Malaysia. It has been seen that, generally, the private sector gives more importance to high-income and low-cost agricultural production especially in respect of rubber and oil palm. However, in this regard, it is neither enough nor fair for the Government to shoulder a greater part of the burden when the benefits can be enjoyed by everyone. The Third Malaysia Plan has identified the role and contribution of the private sector in order to achieve its objectives and targets. At the same time, with the increase in food production in the country, the loss in foreign exchange will be reduced with all the benefits to that nation that this means. The efforts to increase beef production and to undertake deep-sea fishing, for example, will require heavy investments which can be met by the private sector.

It has been recognised and appreciated that one of the limiting factors to further agricultural production is the availability of suitable land. In this context, other alternatives to increase production become important. One of the ways is through decreasing post-harvest losses. One resolution taken during the 7th Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September, 1975 was to call for a reduction of post-harvest losses by at least 50% by 1985. It was estimated that for food grains alone, and assuming only a 10% post-harvest loss, reducing losses in developing countries by half by 1985 would mean a saving of roughly half their projected food grain imports at that time. On the other hand, it has been estimated that developing countries need to raise their production of cereals from 360 million tons in 1970 to 620 million tons by 1985, that is an increase of 72% or 3.7% per annum. To reach the proposed 1985 goal will require an average increase of 4.2% per annum from now on. However, it is felt that the results, so far, are not so encouraging. I believe that if substantial achievement can be ensured in terms of reducing post-harvest losses, we need not be so pessimistic about attaining the targets already set. This is perhaps one issue that merits your close attention since it is one of the subjects you will be discussing.

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Last but by no means the least is the need for intensive research. Since the topic of the conference is "Agriculture and Food-Malaysia 2,000", I feel it is appropriate to ask the type of technologies envisaged up to the year 2000 in order to increase food production. An open mind is an absolute necessity for research to be productive and successful. Far too often progress is hampered or totally negated by people who are too ready to say no to anything new or unusual. The reason why developing countries are left behind is not so much their lack of resource, but their conservativeness in the application of these resources. If we appreciate this and are receptive to ideas and innovation then research will be productive. If not then research will remain a game for scientists to prove their intellectual prowess.

Saya diberi faham bahawa lebihkurang 400 orang peserta dari dalam dan luar negeri akan mengambil bahagian dalam persidangan ini. Ini termasuk peserta-peserta dari berbagai universiti di Malaysia, Canada dan Amerika Syarikat serta juga universiti-universiti penyelidikan dari Filipina, England, Korea, Indonesia dan Malaysia. Dengan adanya sumbangan fikiran serta pengalaman yang amat luas ini, saya percaya bahawa perbincangan yang akan diadakan dapat menghasilkan tujuan-tujuan yang hendak dicapai. Saya berharap bahawa asas perbincangan tidak terlalu akademik akan tetapi berpandu kepada keadaan sebenar serta masalah-masalah yang praktikal supaya dapat ditentukan bahawa rancangan-rancangan yang akan dikemukakan dapat diterima dan dilaksanakan dengan mudah.

Dengan itu, saudara-saudara sekalian, sukacita saya meresmikan Persidangan Antarabangsa Makanan dan Pertanian - Malaysia 2,000 ini.

KUALA LUMPUR,
25hb. Julai, 1977

(dikeluarkan pada pukul 12.00 t/hari)

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