

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE OPENING OF THE SEVENTH EAROPH CONGRESS ON "HUMAN SETTLEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS", AT THE KUALA LUMPUR REGENT ON 9TH MARCH, 1980

I wish to thank the Malaysian Organisation for Human Settlement, the organiser, for inviting me to say a few words and open this conference. To the participants from overseas, I extend to them a very warm welcome.

The subject which you will be discussing at this conference is one of great importance to us in Malaysia. The building of better human settlement has been our major concern. We are fully aware of the influence of human settlement in shaping society and nation. How the people live, where they live and the conditions under which they live, have a profound effect on their attitude, perception and feeling towards society. How they live, affects their attitude towards their fellowmen. Where they live, influence the horizon of their aspirations, their occupation and their economic performance. The conditions under which they live, influence their feelings toward society, the goals they strive for, their alienation or positive orientations towards their nation.

For us in Malaysia, with our multi-racial society, the development of positive attitudes to society and the nation is crucial to our viability as a united and strong nation. It is for this reason that in our development plans, we have given the most attention to the expansion of employment opportunities, the extension of amenities such as water and electricity, the provision of health, education and recreational facilities.

The availability of housing is basic in providing for better human settlement. It has been said that a man's home is his castle. In fact, it is more than that. It is the base from which he sets out to earn his livelihood. It is the most important school of life for his children. It is the observation post from which he perceives and surveys the world.

Unfortunately there are still not enough houses to meet the demand. As a result, we are faced with the problems of overcrowding, squatters and slumps. We are doing all we can to deal

with the problems. The Government has allocated substantial funds for low cost housing. Our target under the Third Malaysia Plan is the construction of 482,000 units of houses by the public and private sectors. However, there are a number of constraints which have affected our achieving fully the target.

A major problem is inflation. Because of it, house ownership is getting beyond the reach of a large section of the population, especially those in the lower income group. More research has therefore to be done with regard to building materials and structures in order to keep the price down. I would urge you, the experts on housing, to look into this problem and make concrete proposals.

Another constraint is the capacity of the building industry. There is also a need for more research in construction technique to reduce construction time and labour. The use of substitutes which are more readily available, will also help in improving the capacity of the industry.

The building industry has always been in the hands of the private sector. The private sector, motivated by profit, naturally caters more for the middle and higher income groups and neglects low cost houses. The construction of low cost houses has largely been done by the Government. Private developers have often been reminded that they also have moral and social obligations to society. They should also build low cost houses for the people.

The problem of providing enough houses is being compounded by rural/urban migration. It is a phenomenon which cannot easily be reversed. Migration has always been an escape route from the prison of poverty migration from the poor to the more affluent country, migration from the depressed economic sector to the more affluent economic sector, migration from the rural to urban centres. In Malaysia, rural/urban migration is inevitable in the modernisation process. Our task is to ensure that the urban centres have the capacity to absorb and assimilate the people who have drifted to the urban centres. This requires better planning of the urban centres in terms of housing, transport, employment, amenities and recreational facilities.

To provide for this, a new "Town and Country Planning Act" has been enacted. In accordance with the Act, structure plans are being formulated for the major urban centres in the country.

Through these plans, we should be able to develop more efficiently the conditions for a better human settlement. Our efforts are directed to the creation of human settlements where people can live in reasonable comfort, free from social and physical pollutants of modern life.

The designing and the creation of better human settlements, pose a big challenge to us. In that challenge, there are abundant opportunities to shape a better life for us. We can fully exploit these opportunities or we can squander them.

I now have great pleasure in declaring open this Seventh EAROPH Congress.