

UCAPAN PERDANA MENTERI DI PERASMIAN PERHIMPUNAN AGUNG MIC YANG KE 27 DI HOKKIEN ASSOCIATION HALL, KELANG, PADA 30 JUN, 1979.

Yang Berhormat Tan Sri Dato V. Manickavasagam Presiden MIC, Yang Amat Berhormat Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Timbalan Perdana Menteri, Yang Berhormat Dato' S. Samy Vellu, Timbalan Presiden MIC, Yang Berhormat Menteri-Menteri dan Timbalan-Timbalan Menteri, Ahli-Ahli Jawatankuasa Kerja Pusat MIC, Dif-dif yang kehormat, Para Perwakilan sekalian.

Saya mengucapkan berbilang terima kasih kepada Tan Sri Manickavasagam, Presiden MIC serta kepada pemimpin dan ahli MIC di atas kesudian menjemput saya bagi menghadiri dan merasmikan Perhimpunan Agung MIC yang ke 27 pada pagi ini.

Inilah kali yang keempat saya diberikan penghormatan bagi merasmikan Perhimpunan Agung MIC. Saya telah tidak dapat bersama-sama tuan-tuan dan puan-puan sekalian di Perhimpunan Agung yang lepas. Oleh hal yang demikian, saya sangatlah menghargai peluang yang diberikan kepada saya pada pagi ini bagi saya turut menyertai di dalam kemeriahan peristiwa kemuncak kepada kegiatan-kegiatan parti tuan-tuan dan puan-puan semenjak setahun yang lalu.

Selain daripada memenuhi kehendak perlembagaan parti, perhimpunan agung tahunan merupakan peluang bagi pemimpin dan ahli parti dari seluruh negara bertemu dan menambahkan kemesraan di kalangan mereka. Di samping itu, perhimpunan agung tahunan memberi peluang kepada ahli-ahli parti bagi merenung kembali kepada kejayaan-kejayaan parti di masa lepas dan menentukan corak dan strategi perjuangan parti pada masa yang akan datang.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The annual general assembly provides the opportunity for the leaders and members of MIC from all over the country to meet and strengthen their solidarity. At the same time, parti members must use this occasion to reflect on the party's achievements in the past year as well as to determine the direction of the party's strategies for the future. I wish to join Tan Sri Manickavasagam in recalling the contributions and services of the late Tun V.T. Sambanthan to the MIC and to the nation.

The late Tun Sambanthan played a prominent role in the achievement of our country's independence and was, both by words and deeds, committed to the achievement of national unity. Our nation's prosperity, stability and unity were, in no small way, a result of his untiring efforts and sacrifices. It is upon these foundations laid by our past leaders such as the late Tun Sambanthan that we today are entrusted to continue to build our country's future.

The past leaders and members of the MIC have played a significant and positive role towards the building of a united and prosperous Malaysia. This role has been continued under its present leadership and I am confident that it will continue in the future. The MIC has played a key role in a government that is based upon the procedure of consultation and the spirit of consensus. This has been the basis for the creation of the Alliance and now, the Barisan Nasional. The process of consultation and consensus have effectively provided for the resolution of conflict which is an everpresent reality in a multi-racial nation like Malaysia. As a nation, we have survived and prospered because of our commitment to the process of consultation and the spirit of consensus. As a nation, we still have a long way to go and many more challenges to overcome. The future well-being of our nation depends upon our efforts today at strengthening the existing machinery for consultation and consensus. In addition we need the presence of leaders from all communities who are committed towards consultation and consensus as the means to the resolution of conflict.

A direct consequence of a government by consultation and consensus is that those who are involved in the process that is the leaders of the component parties, have to be more than just leaders of their respective political parties or communities. Indeed, they have to be national leaders acceptable to all communities and continually guided by national considerations rather than merely representing the interests of a particular community. If we do not rise beyond communal considerations and continue to assume that the benefits enjoyed by one community is at the expense of another there is a danger that the gains that we have achieved so far will be wiped out. This danger is everpresent if we keep upping the ante in competition with the opposition to promise more than what can be delivered in meeting the conflicting demands of each and every community. As members of the party in power, we cannot and should not promise more than what can be delivered by the government itself. We are in a position to deliver our own promises. We must not be placed in the position of having to deliver the promises of the opposition. We have therefore to be truthful to the people particularly those of our own community, as to the gains that have been

achieved and the benefits that are being enjoyed. We must not be detractors to our own achievements.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to touch on an issue which has been raised by Tan Sri Manickavasagam in his welcome address. As you are all aware, the issue of more places in our local universities for non-bumiputera students has attracted the comments of many politicians from both within and outside of the Barisan Nasional. The Government's position on this issue has already been clearly stated in the Dewan Rakyat on December 11, 1978, that in the process of expansion of our universities, more places will be given to non-bumiputera students. This is in line with our promise in our 1978 General Election Manifesto that we will continue to raise standards and expand opportunities for education at all levels and guarantee fair and just opportunities and facilities for all the people.

Consequently, the recently announced intake of students into the five local universities for the 1979/80 session is a demonstration of our good faith in implementing our promise of giving more places to non-bumiputeras. This increase is contingent upon the process of expansion of the existing local universities. It will continue so as to achieve the final objective that our universities intake reflects the racial composition of this country. The central issue is how soon should this objective be achieved. Therefore, the time frame within which the racial imbalance in higher educational opportunities will be redressed is being worked out in the spirit of consultation and consensus of the Barisan Nasional.

The issue of more places in our local universities for non-bumiputera students should be viewed separately from the ratio of bumiputera to non-bumiputera students in our universities. The latter will certainly not hinder the fulfilment of the Government's pledge to give more places to non-bumiputera students since more places will be given to them as our universities expand and this is now being undertaken. As regards to the ratio of places for bumiputera and non-bumiputera students, the lack of opportunities for university education in the past for bumiputera students and the overall opportunities for university education both locally and overseas, should also be taken into consideration. This is directly related to the achievement of the New Economic Policy which has been accepted by all component parties in the Barisan National Government as vital to the achieving of social, political and economic stability for this country.

Apart from the matter of more places, Tan Sri Manickavasagam has also pointed out the need for some form of weightage be given to compensate for the differing standards of education in rural and urban schools. There are also views that weightage should be given to applicants coming from poor families. They are the ones who will suffer most from the lack of places in our local universities since they cannot afford to seek university education overseas. The government appreciates the plight of applicants from rural areas and poor families, and is actively evaluating the methodology to be employed so as to compensate for the economic and social handicaps which can hinder a person's admission into a local university.

We in the Barisan Nasional be the first to understand clearly the government's position. The mechanics of implementing any decision taken takes time. The increase in the number of places has already been shown in the recent intake. We have demonstrated our good faith. We have kept our promise. We must therefore not succumb to the pressure of the detractors who cannot see beyond their own emotions and unreasonableness. Education has been for too long a political issue and it is time that we now demonstrate our will to resolve it in a manner befitting the trust and confidence that has been placed in us by the people of this country. We should not attempt to change the basis for consensus on the New Economic Policy mid-way. Neither should we allow ourselves to be distracted from our agreed objectives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a multiracial society like ours with the various communities understandably concerned over the preservation and advancement of its own interests, education is not the only issue which can become overly politicised. Through the process of consultation and consensus, we have successfully resolved most of these conflicting demands and aspirations so as to sustain our efforts at nation-building. At varying points of our national growth we have achieved consensus on many issues and with each consensus we have moved forward in the process of nation-building.

Inevitably, the process of nation-building by consensus is slow but it is undeniable that progress has been achieved. There are those who would like us to move faster. We are not concerned with their haste. There are however, people who try to nullify each and every consensus and in effect try to bring us back to the starting point of our nation's history. These are the detractors who would have us believe that the

past has no significance for the present and that the present is more important than the future. These are the ones who feed on the sacrifices of past generations of Malaysians and who will contribute nothing for future Malaysian. We must be wary of them because if we hesitate and undo the consensus of the past which are the foundations for our nation's future, our approach to nation-building will be one of imbalance. While we have progressed so far ahead since Merdeka in the field of physical and economic development, we cannot go backwards in the development of the social and political aspects of our nation-building.

A nation cannot be defined by its economic achievements alone; it must also have a soul, an identity, so that it can become a nation that is alive and vibrant. It is therefore imperative that in our process of nation-building, a balanced approach be adopted towards the development of the social and political facets as well as the physical and economic development of the nation. Both these aspects are equally important, and infact, cannot be taken separately. Furthermore, they are mutually reinforcing. For this reason, attempts to dismantle the consensus that have been attained in the past or, more explicitly, to bring the nation's social and political development back to the starting point of our nation's history, can have an immeasurable adverse effect upon our own economic prosperity. We must move forward, we should not make nervous backward glances, because we are convinced that the foundations that have been laid by our past leaders are firm and strong. We must carry on with our duty to build upon these foundations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As members of a political party which has been involved in the reaching of consensus in the past, MIC members have a part to play in this task. The MIC has successfully galvanised the Malaysian Indian Community into working towards this ideal. To be as successful as it was in the past, it must maintain the leadership of the Malaysian Indian Community. And this must begin within its own ranks where discipline and unity of purpose at every level must continually be safeguarded. In this respect, I congratulate Tan Sri Manickavasagam and Datuk Samy Vellu, who have both been returned unopposed as President and Deputy President respectively.

This development is testimony of the capacity of the leaders and members of the MIC to put the interest of the party above personal ambition. This is a sign that augurs well for the Malaysian Indian Community and our nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now have great pleasure in declaring open the 27th MIC General Assembly.