

## THE MEKLONG INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Mr. Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of today's Honorary graduates, I would like to express our gratitude to the University of Singapore, for the honour that you have so graciously accorded to all four of us. It is to me a new and most gratifying experience to have the highest academic recognition bestowed on one, without having been mercilessly tortured by one's professors, without going through the painful nightmare of written and oral examinations, of writing and re-writing theses, which, if I am permitted to say so, are usually boring to writers and readers alike. So we are really grateful for what we have today received. My own feeling is one of pride and humility: I feel proud to be associated with this famous university and its learned scholars of extensive reputation; at the same time, I feel humble in the hope that I have deserved this high honour, and in the fear lest in the future my failings should reveal themselves to you to warrant a sense of profound disappointment for all concerned. All I can do is to assure this learned company that I shall try my best not to cause any such disappointment.

Speaking of disappointment, it is natural that in our human behaviour and in our social interaction, we should be swept up one day by a sense of elation due to chance success that might come our way and then the next day, or month, or year, a reaction follows with a depressive mood caused by the thoughts that the so-called success is really an illusion. Public opinion no doubt plays a big role in these changes of mood. And public opinion, like the operatic "donna", is fickle. Buddha has taught us to view

both successes and failures as impermanent, immaterial, both to be treated with the equanimity that they deserve.

Universities, like human individuals, are also subject to successes and failures, hopes and disappointments, praises and criticisms. When scientific discoveries occur, when academic excellence is manifest, when our students have brought about some changes which are desired by the people, such as the change of government in Thailand last year, then public opinion registers its appreciation and praise, which are often exaggerated. Exaggeration usually is even more pronounced when university, professors, and students are attacked: students are at best a nuisance, they are unruly, unkempt, immoral, and ill-mannered; professors are parasites; universities, ivory towers which nowadays are breeding grounds for extremists, anarchists, and drug addicts. Ministries of Finance, bent on being mean to universities, would point out the low-benefit, high-cost character of the university, compared with other levels of education.

Mr. Chancellor, I submit that, irrespective of the swings of public opinion, universities should go their own sweet and bitter way. What needs to be considered is the question: are we serving society?

Regardless of what people might think, in Thailand, three universities have come together to co-operate in a rural development programme, designed to serve society. The three universities are Kasetsart University (agriculture), Mahidol University (medicine), and Thammasat University (social sciences). The programme is called the Meklong Integrated Rural Development Programme, with a total area of some 1,470,000 hectares, and a population of 1,500,000. The area encompasses parts of seven provinces, west of Bangkok, with the nearest point some 50 km. from the capital. The Meklong valley is bordered on the eastern side by the Ta-Chin River which runs through the Nakorn Pathom province and on the western side by the Meklong River, one of

whose tributaries is the famous Kwae River on which the equally famous but fictitious bridge stood. This portion of the kingdom is of special interest to us social scientists, medical scientists and agricultural scientists because of the variety of problems it offers. Social scientists will deal with people of at least four races and dialects, with the problems of land tenure, theft, maladministration, illiteracy, the failure of the co-operative system, to name but a few. Medical scientists will be challenged by the problems of preventive medicine, and we hope to a lesser extent, curative medicine. Family planning, home and personal hygiene, nutrition, pollution are high on the agenda. The variety of soils and crops—rice, fruits, vegetables, tapioca, sugar cane, livestock, salt farming, fisheries, these and the all-important water management project will fascinate and motivate agricultural scientists. Students of all the three universities will provide the main work-force in the spirit of study-service.

We began early this year and have undertaken three surveys: one to find out what service and facilities are at present available from the government; the second, to find facts regarding the people and their mode of life; the third to study and analyse the character of soils in the area. The next step, in preparation, is to send six teams of field workers to live in six selected villages, scattered all over the valley. Each team will consist of a faculty member and three or four students: the emphasis is on the intermingling and co-operation among members of the three universities. The field workers will live in the villages as villagers, trying to gain the villagers' confidence, to assess the villagers' problems in all aspects, to help the villagers to help themselves, to introduce changes according to the villagers' wishes, and to improve the villagers' livelihood, health, education and self-government. A list of faculty members willing to serve as consultants in each specific field is being drawn up, thus pooling the three universities' expertise and scientific resources for the programme. There will

be established a close link between the field workers and the headquarters in Bangkok. Development projects beyond the capacity of the universities will be submitted to the Planning Board, Budget Bureau, and the competent government departments for consideration and implementation, fully supported by data, facts and assessment of local needs and expected benefits.

What do we expect from this Meklong Integrated Rural Development Programme ?

- 1) University teachers and students will serve as links between the ordinary people and officialdom: because of the defect in our system of government and public administration during the past twenty years, the gap between people and officials has grown wider and wider.
- 2) The programme will supplement, on a micro-basis, the government development efforts which so far have concentrated on infrastructural building, necessary but insufficient for the purpose of combatting poverty and improving the quality of life.
- 3) The villagers will be helped to help themselves and to create in their midst institutions for mutual help.
- 4) Teachers and students will acquire scientific knowledge from the real world to supplement what they normally learn from textbooks in classrooms.
- 5) Teachers and students will benefit from the wider outlook of multi-disciplinary approach to development.
- 6) The universities will learn how to cooperate with each other, and how directly they can make themselves useful to society.
- 7) This methodology of development will be analysed periodically to find out where it goes right and where it goes wrong; lessons to be learned from this assessment can perhaps be applied to other parts of the kingdom—and perhaps wider generalisations could be made.

It is too early to say whether this development programme by our universities will live up to our expectations. And no doubt

there are many other programmes organized by many other universities around the world, the University of Singapore included, which deserve even greater mention and attention than the Meklong programme. I hope this distinguished and learned company will forgive my audacity in attempting to share with you our hopes and ambitions in this particular case. We Asians have always been great travellers, and our literature is rich with interesting and exciting travellers' tales. If this traveller's tale cannot be called interesting or exciting, at least I hope that this assembly will graciously accept it as a tale submitted in gratitude for the honour received by my fellow honorary graduates and myself.

**PART III**  
**SOUTH - EAST ASIA**

## BEST WISHES FOR ASIA

I am grateful to the organizers of this Assembly for the honour of addressing this inaugural session. And I join my colleagues in warmly applauding and thanking the President of India for his words of profound wisdom and for his kind words of welcome on behalf of the great Indian nation. To be in Delhi again is a joy to me personally.

On this occasion, it is perhaps permissible to offer to the Asian people some good wishes: and I shall confine myself to three wishes.

First and foremost I wish and pray that Peace will reign everywhere in Asia, and for a long, long time. And by that I mean real peace—not merely outward cease-fires with inward bitter hostilities. or superficial withdrawal of troops from one place only to increase them at another. Without peace, what we are going to discuss in this One Asia Assembly cannot bear fruit. International sympathy, mutual tolerance, the spirit of brotherhood, the practice of Panja Sila, are as sorely needed in Asia as in any other part of the world.

My second wish is for Nutrition—that is, good food for the body and the intellect of our people. Hunger is still the scourge of the masses: we must produce and consume more food, and more nutritious food. We must also produce and consume more spiritual and intellectual food; and therefore educational and cultural development for the masses must occupy the top of our priorities.

In recent years, Asian governments, one after another, have become more oppressive and have more and more attacked and limited freedom among their peoples. My third wish therefore is for more Freedom—not only for the mass media, scholars, writers,

students, but for the man in the street and the man in the field. Without freedom, efforts at economic development would be a waste of time and money.

Best wishes for Asia: Peace, Nutrition and Freedom for Asia,



## BUILDING PEACE IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

1) The responsibility for building peace in the modern world rests primarily with the Great Powers. An open clash between any two Great Powers anywhere will bring about the gravest peril to the whole world. Nowhere is this danger more evident or more acute than in South-East Asia, a battlefield for more than a decade now. The involvements, direct and indirect, of the U.S. and China, and others, in this region have been dangerous, but so far they have been contained within perilous bounds. The long-drawn conflict has caused widespread and profound miseries to millions of human beings, including those outside the region. The situation there still represents the gravest threat to world peace.

2) Political settlement in South-East Asia is a first prerequisite for world peace. Both preventive and constructive measure are required of the U.S. and China, and of the nations within the region as well.

3) For preventive measures it is necessary to revive the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, enunciated in 1954 by Nehru and Chou-En-Lai, which were subsequently adopted and expanded by the Bandung Conference in 1955. The Five Principles are commonly known as "Pantja Sila". They are:

- (i) Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations;
- (ii) Refraining from acts or threats of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country;
- (iii) Abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of any country;

- (iv) Recognition of the equality of all races and nations, large and small, and promotion of mutual interest and co-operation;
- (v) Settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means.

4) These Five Principles should be implemented at once by all nations concerned. In particular, the U.S. and China, and other Great Powers, should:

- (a) speedily withdraw all military personnel from all the countries in South-East Asia;
- (b) abstain from organizing, maintaining or supporting subversive activities in all the countries of the region;
- (c) abstain from interference in the internal political affairs of the nations in the area.

5) The problems of the overseas Chinese and dual nationality are perennial and potential sources of conflict within the nations and between the nations. These problems can be solved to some extent by China; but the South-East Asian nations concerned must also adopt wise and responsible policies and measures to solve them within their national boundaries. These problems are the legacy from the old days; that is true. But the urgency is now greater than ever before.

In 1955, a Sino-Indonesian agreement provided for the free choice of only one nationality for all persons over 18. This was a step in the right direction; but it has proved to be inadequate. There has been no provision nor efforts for the assimilation of overseas Chinese into the host societies.

In both Indonesia and Cambodia, Chou-En-Lai expressed the hope that overseas Chinese, having made their choice, would "increase their sense of responsibility toward the country whose nationality they have chosen". Loyalty to the host country where they live and earn their livelihood should be urged.

6) After so much destruction and misery for more than a decade, the social and economic conditions of Laos, Vietnam and Cambo-

dia need to be rehabilitated, reconstructed and developed. Financial and technical help from the Great Powers are required.

Even for other countries in the region, continued and speedy development necessitates external assistance.

This is the constructive side of the Great Powers' responsibilities. Such an assistance, however, must be free from political or other conditions and should be the subject of bilateral agreement based on freedom of choice both of the donor and the recipient.

7) In the long run, the social and economic viability of South-East Asian nations and peace among them depend on the degree of co-operation within the region. The Great Powers can ensure lasting peace in this critical subcontinent with their encouragement and support for closer regional collaboration.

8) It must be emphasized that what is expected from the Great Powers is only a part of the necessary conditions for peace in South-East Asia. For peaceful coexistence, for rehabilitation, for the solution of dual nationality, for development and closer co-operation, the nations in the region will have much to do for themselves and among themselves.

## THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF A SOUTH-EAST ASIAN

### *A chronicle of hope from Womb to Tomb*

While in my mother's womb, I want her to have good nutrition and access to maternal and child welfare care.

I don't want to have as many brothers and sisters as my parents had before me, and I do not want my mother to have a child too soon after me.

I don't care whether my mother and father are formally married; but I need them to live together in reasonable harmony.

I want good nutrition for my mother and for me in my first two or three years when my capacity for future mental and physical development is determined.

I want to go to school, together with my sister, and learn a trade, and to have the school impart social values to me. If I happen to be suitable for higher education, that opportunity should be available.

When I leave school I want a job, a meaningful one in which I can feel the satisfaction of making a contribution.

I want to live in a law and order society, without molestation.

I want my country to relate effectively and equitably to the outside world, so that I can have access to the intellectual and technical knowledge of all mankind, as well as to capital from overseas.

I would like my country to get a fair price for the products that I and my fellow citizens create.

As a farmer, I would like to have my own plot of land, with a system which gives me access to credit, to new agricultural technology, and to markets, and a fair price for my produce.

As a worker, I would want to have some share, some sense of participation in the factory in which I work.

As a human being, I would like inexpensive newspapers and paperback books, plus access to radio and TV (without too much advertisement).

I want to enjoy good health; and I expect the Government to provide free preventive medical services and a good, cheap, readily available curative service.

I need some leisure time for myself, and to enjoy my family, and I want access to some green parks, to the arts, and to traditional social and religious festivities.

I want clean air to breathe and clean water to drink.

I would like to have the security of co-operative mechanisms in which I join to help others do things which they cannot do alone, and they do the same for me.

I need the opportunity to participate in the society around me, and to be able to help shape the decisions of the economic and social as well as the political institutions that affect my life.

I want my wife to have equal opportunity with me, and I want both of us to have access to the knowledge and means of family planning.

In my old age, it would be nice to have some form of social security to which I have contributed.

When I die, if I happen to have some wealth left, after leaving an adequate amount for my widow, I would wish, the government to spend the rest to make it possible for others to enjoy life, too.

These are what life is all about, and what development should seek to achieve for all.

Appendix to

“Thoughts on South-East’s Development for 1980.”