

SPEECH BY DR ANG KOK PENG, MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH,
AT THE OPENING OF THE 5TH BIENNIAL ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR
BIOLOGY EDUCATION (AABE) INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MONDAY,
10 JUNE 1974 AT 9.30 A.M. IN THE AUDITORIUM OF THE REGIONAL
ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTRE

Acc. No. NARC

74 0024 1040

In the earlier stage biological study was concerned with the collection, identification and establishment of genera and species of plants and animals in their respective natural orders and families. Hence morphological and anatomical studies predominated at that time.

2 **Tremendous** strides have since been made in biology in the recent one hundred years or so through the momentous findings of Darwin and Huxley which established the evolutionary principle of biology; the practical biological experiments of Mendel which provided the basis of modern genetics; and the work of Watson ^{and Crick} on DNA which gave us an insight into the mystery of the fundamental processes of life itself. With the tools of modern science more milestones will no doubt be set up in the road of progress.

3 While we are pleased with these achievements in biology, for many of us in Asia we need to be practical in our approach to the study and teaching of biology. It would do us well to pay particular attention to the application of biological knowledge to the solution of some of the problems confronting us today. The role of biology in the context of our present day society is an important one whether it concerns food production and population explosion, or the maintenance of an ecological balance in the process of urbanisation and other land usage, or the control and elimination of environmental pollution.

4 In Asia where the vast majority of the people live and work in rural areas, agriculture and animal husbandry form the basis of their economy. Practical biological knowledge would be

of assistance to them. Their economic development could be speeded up through modern and efficient methods of production, and a faster rising standard of living enjoyed if population growth is limited at the same time. It is here where teachers of biology should bear in mind the vital question of population planning and food production.

5 The flora and fauna of the world vary from place to place and in consequence the biological problems that are of importance in one area may well be of no significant consequence in another. As biology in certain respect is a regional science, the teaching of biology needs therefore to have a relevance to the place where it is taught. While keeping abreast of advancement in biology and adopting modern methods of teaching, the teachers should also be conscious of their environmental constraint and adapt and innovate in their teaching so that their students can appreciate the indigenous biological problems of their countries and perhaps help to solve them.

6 Apart from having a curriculum reflecting the regional aspect of biology it is important to have teachers with flair and imagination, vigour and enthusiasm, who are able to make the subject of biology interesting against the background of the students' living environment.

7 We are honoured to play host to this distinguished gathering of biologists from various countries. I hope your Conference will successfully address itself to the betterment of biology education in the service of your fellowmen. And may your discussions of common problems and the exchange of experience bring about closer regional co-operation in the dissemination of knowledge in biology education. I extend to all of you a very warm welcome and wish you a pleasant stay in Singapore. I now have great pleasure in declaring the Conference open.