

TEXT OF A SPEECH BY THE ACTING CHIEF MINISTER,  
MR. A.J. BRAGA, AT THE OPENING OF THE 1ST ASIAN  
REGIONAL PAEDIATRIC CONGRESS HELD AT THE ALLEN  
THEATRE, FACULTY OF MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF  
MALAYA AT 11.30 A.M. ON MONDAY, MAY 26, 1958.

On behalf of the Singapore Government, I am happy this morning to welcome you to Singapore and to wish you every success in your investigations and discussions during this first Regional Paediatric Conference; and when I do so both as Ag. Chief Minister & Minister for Health, I am indeed engaging in "double-talk", not of the kind which has become second nature to our subversives, but to make you doubly welcome in my double capacity.

Conferences of this kind need neither explanation or extenuation. You are all trained fighters in the battle for health; and what more natural that you should meet together to survey the battlefield, assess your victories, exchange information on your strategic and tactical achievements and plans, assess the battles yet to be opened or won, and finally to see at first hand one sector of the front against disease.

Our battle for health knows no national or racial boundaries, and, in conferences of this kind we can build up a personal feeling of comradeship in a common humanitarian task which helps us in our work, and our governments in the developments of their policies for health.

The great development of communications can never be a substitute for the joint meetings and discussions of men and women of similar interests and expert knowledge of one sphere of human knowledge; and it would be a strange development indeed if we were to become so scientific in our instruments that we sat in hermetic isolation exchanging news and views with the eloquence of telepathic silence.

I think our very understandable psychological reaction would be too stand up and emit a loud prolonged roar which would make a children's ward a symphony of silence by contrast.

But you have not come together to roar, but to conduct yourselves in an orderly way as befits a group of medical scientists bringing to the aid of the warmth of your humanity the powers of reason and investigation which some consider are alien to us as politicians in the heat of the hustings. And the problem you will discuss is one which is of special urgency in this old continent of Asia which, in population as in politics, is recovering its youth. The population of Asia within the next 15 years will be as numerous as the population of the world today; and a larger proportion of that population will be children and adolescents.

Our figures here in Singapore are perhaps the most striking illustration of this trend. Of our present population of a million and a half, 50% are 21 years of age or under; and in 1965 when our population, on present trends, will be two million, 46% of them will be 14 years of age or under. At that rate, instead of paediatrics being a branch of medicine, medicine will become a branch of paediatrics!

Having said that I had better beat a retreat to the mantle of ignorance which the layman can always call to protect him against the slings and arrows of outraged science. But, at least, on this we can

agree, that you could adopt as your motto the words of the poet Wordsworth that "the child is father of the man".

We could adapt them by saying that the "ills of the child are the father of the ills of the man", or more positively and more congenially that "the health of the child is father of the health of the man". If we can build in the child the healthy mind in the healthy body, then the health of the community is assured; and more and more we can turn our attention to the positive problems of maintaining health and away from the problems of holding a defensive operation against disease.

When in Asia we can cross that watershed and feel that for our peoples, we can talk of the joy of life rather than the burden of life, we will be on the way to a magnificent achievement.

Our sights may be set high, but those of you who see human lives, potentially the most beautiful things, shackled and defaced by disease, have surely the greatest incentive of all to make the effort, and to stimulate the striving for health among the people. For we cannot remind ourselves too often that the tests of political achievement are in the daily life of the man in the street and the woman in the home and the child in the school.

And unless the new emergence of Asia on the stage of world history and the new powers to her people are associated with an improvement of wealth and health, both social and individual, enthusiasm and effort will wane.

Those who see the problems of Asia today as epitomised in the sick child, the victim of his social and family environment and inheritance, are perhaps the realists and not the sentimentalists of today. Humanitarianism is bigger than any political creed.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, may I say how glad we are that we are able to give you the facilities for this Conference. We hope you will be able to see something of our medical work and institutions, including our latest and perhaps most original institution, the Institute of Health which I was proud, as a citizen of Singapore as much as a Minister, to have opened last week.

You have come from a wide region including South Asia, South East Asia and Australasia, and we like to think it is appropriate you should have come to Singapore in the centre of the region. We see ourselves not in isolation, but as part of the region, and in whose service we have grown to our present position. That is our function as a commercial centre, but it applies in other spheres.

Our aim is to provide an entrepot for experience, and we realise that once we cease to give that service our stature and our standing will decline.

If the fact of meeting here has made your discussions more comfortable, more useful and more companionable, we will feel rewarded in having assisted you in your great humanitarian task.

It is, therefore, in a spirit of gratitude and hospitality, that I now formally declare your Congress open.

May 26, 1958.

(Time issued 1000 hours)

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