

PRESIDENT'S SPEECH, MALAYAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION at the Annual Dinner & Dance on 28.3.64

Dato Dr. R. SATHIAH

It is my pleasure and privilege on being installed as the President of the M.M.A., to welcome on behalf of the Council and members Their Highnesses the Sultan and Tengku Ampuan of Selangor, The Hon'ble the Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Al-Haj and Toh Puan Raha, the Hon'ble the Menteri Besar of Selangor Dato' Abu Bakar bin Baginda and Datin Zeharani, who have found time to join us this evening in spite of their multifarious duties.

I also have the pleasure of voicing on behalf of the members of our Association our appreciation and sincere congratulations to Dr. Abdullah and the members of his Council for a year of considerable activity and progress. If the incoming Council can emulate them in a small measure, we shall have cause to be satisfied.

This might be a suitable opportunity to disabuse the mind of the public of some of the misconceptions that seem to have found currency regarding the objects and policy of the M.M.A. We are not a Trade Union fighting for the rights of Government doctors or private medical practitioners. (*We are a professional body of medical men trying to maintain the high ideals of our noble calling and to serve the public.*) We try to do this in many ways. We organize frequent clinical meetings and talks on medical subjects, especially by distinguished specialists passing through this country to help bring our doctors up-to-date; we publish a medical journal encouraging doctors to investigate their cases thoroughly and write up their findings for the benefit of others. We have an Ethical Committee which tries to maintain a code of professional behaviour in keeping with the ideals of a noble profession.

We are aware of the shortage of doctors in the country and the difficulty the Government is experiencing in staffing the rural areas. We wish to assure the Government that we are most willing to co-operate with the Ministry of Health so far as an Association like

ours can do. We cannot of course, force our members to work for the Government or set up practice in this place or that according to the needs of the country any more than Associations of Engineers or Lawyers can do. *Members have their individual right of choice, and in a democratic country the freedom of the individual has to be respected.* We can proudly say our country believes strongly in the freedom of the individual.

It has been hinted in the press that we are opposed to the recruitment of doctors from abroad. That is far from the truth. Of course, we would like to be assured, like any right thinking persons, that the doctors brought in have the necessary basic qualifications and do not lower the standards of medical practice in this country. Some members of the public and press, and I am sorry to say, it includes even a medically qualified person at the Ministerial level, are under the misapprehension that the Malayan Medical Association decides who is adequately qualified and who is not, and that our Association is preventing many doctors from entering the country. This is not true. To decide who is worthy of being placed on the Medical Register is the responsibility of a statutory body, the Medical Council of the country in whose deliberations the M.M.A. has no direct say. And yet, because an influx of doctors may affect the medical practice of some of our members, some of the uninitiated have jumped to the conclusion that our Association must of necessity be opposed to inviting Foreign doctors. The Association has been aware of the growing needs of a rapidly expanding population for properly qualified men and has long agitated for the establishment of a Medical School in Kuala Lumpur. We have also sought to gain public opinion in favour of providing better working conditions for our doctors in hospitals and rural clinics to prevent the mass exodus of men from the Public Services. At last, we are happy to find an enlightened Government which is beginning to implement some of our recommendations. It is indeed

a pleasure to see the Faculty of Medicine taking concrete shape in the Pantai Valley. The new proposals for salary structure for doctors and increase in superscale posts should go some way towards challenging the unpopularity of the Government service.

However, the M.M.A. feels strongly that unless the State and Local governments take on some of the administrative and financial responsibilities for the Health Services of the nation, there cannot be provided sufficient health coverage for every person in the country. The State Governments spend very little on the Health Services although under the Constitution they are jointly responsible with the Federal Government for these services. Despite the fact that the central government is spending record sums on the Health Services the people's needs are still not fully accommodated. The Minister of Health, in laying down annual priorities for the achievement

of schemes should mobilise the State and Local governments to come to his aid. The enormity of the task of providing satisfactory Health Services cannot afford to be underestimated and success would be that much closer with the right kind of co-operation and support from the regional authorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it has been said that an after dinner speech should resemble a lady's dress, it should be short enough to be interesting and long enough to cover all the important points! I think I have covered these, which are to congratulate my predecessor, to assure you that the M.M.A. exists to help its members professionally and be of service to the public to which end it will co-operate whole-heartedly with the Government, and last but not least to thank you one and all, especially Their Highnesses and the distinguished guests who have graced the function this evening.