

Address  
by Dr J. A. Maraj,  
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Madam Minister, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is indeed with considerable pleasure that I accept your very kind invitation to take the Chair at this meeting. I am deeply conscious of the honour which you have done me although I am not unaware of the difficulties which are inherent in the task. You will forgive me, I am sure, if I take some consolation in the knowledge that I have around me a well experienced team of colleagues drawn from Malta itself as well as from further afield. I am confident too, Madam Minister, that those who have come to participate in the seminar all wish to come to grips with the difficult problems with which we are concerned and which you have so ably covered in your introductory address. Perhaps through a sharing of experiences we may be able to see more clearly, not only the difficulties and the problems, but how these may be alleviated and resolved.

I should like, as representative of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, to add my own welcome to the participants, especially to Mr Josua Rabukawaqa, High Commissioner for Fiji in London and Mr Samuel Kihumba, Executive Secretary of the Board of Adult Education in Kenya. Both of these gentlemen are well known in their countries for their interest and expertise in the area of youth activity. Their presence adds to our strength and our confidence.

It has been said that the Commonwealth survives on two basic pillars. These are co-operation and consultation. The seminar, I think, provides ample evidence of both of these. I note, for example, that it has been arranged by the Government of Malta, drawing from various Ministries - the Ministry of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour - and it has invited the Commonwealth Secretariat to assist in the operation. It is worth remembering that the Secretariat was established by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers to serve the needs of member countries and we are particularly pleased to come, not as initiators of the seminar, but at the invitation of a member government to assist, as it were, in opening a window on the world. During the seminar itself I hope that these two principles of co-operation and consultation

will pervade all our discussions.

Madam Minister, I thought that it might be useful if I attempted to put the seminar into perspective. You have already referred to the initiative which was taken at the 1969 Prime Ministers' Meeting, where youth was pointed out as an area of activity to which the Secretariat might address attention. I think enough is already known of what the Secretariat has done in different parts of the Commonwealth to focus attention on some of the intractable problems facing youth. I would not wish to go over these. What I would like to say is that this particular seminar has some unique features, for whereas in the case of the seminars in Africa, in the Caribbean and in Asia we brought together people who had expertise in the field of youth - people who were themselves engaged as workers in the field - and discussed with them what the problems were and how these might be approached, this is the first occasion on which we are dealing with only one country. It is also the first time that we have included such a substantial proportion of young people among the participants. I think this is a step forward and it is likely to be repeated next week in the neighbouring country of Cyprus.

I believe from what we have heard in the previous three seminars, together with what will emerge from these two, that Officials of Governments and Ministers themselves, when they meet later, will not only be concerned with the academic and the scholarly, but will go further and develop appropriate action programmes, without which all of these efforts would be to no avail.

It is important to recognise that we can talk for another generation about problems concerning youth, but unless people are prepared to take the necessary political decisions and to make sacrifices where necessary, then we are all wasting each other's time. It was Chesterton, was it not, who said, that "whereas the politician thinks of the next election, it is the statesman who thinks of the next generation". I would hope that perhaps when Ministers of Commonwealth Governments come together to consider the recommendations emerging from our work over the past three years, they will have the courage, the conviction and the sincerity to take positive action so that progress might in fact be achieved. I hope that they will indeed be statesmen.

I think I should briefly indicate at this stage that this seminar will concern itself with five main areas. The first of these is "Youth and Society" to which we have already had such

an able introduction from you, Madam Minister. It is well known that in a post-colonial period many countries are striving for a national identity and in doing so are attempting to produce a more cohesive society. Many of them have in fact recognised that in their societies as much as 60% of the population may be very young people, and this calls for certain adjustments on how these young people are to be regarded within their own societies. As we have been told, youth is not a specific zoological species, it is not merely a part of society. In most countries it is increasingly becoming the largest part of that society. We shall have to concern ourselves with a particular role which youth can play at this transitional stage. We shall have to take a very hard look at the whole concept of development. There is no point in talking about youth and development unless we examine what we mean by youth and even more important what we mean by development. The belief that any country which needs to make progress must necessarily worship at the shrine of industrialisation may have to be examined again. There are many countries which have followed this line and which have lost, it seems to us, certain cherished traditions; their characteristic ways of life are regrettably disappearing from the contemporary scene.

We shall have to ask questions of people who argue that if you invest more money in education you have solved the problems, for a great deal of disappointment, dissolution and disenchantment has been associated with present patterns and systems of education. The seminar, too, will have to give very serious consideration to dispelling the myth that training will solve the problems. In many parts of the Commonwealth people have been told, "Go to school, learn your lessons well, behave properly and you will inherit the earth!". They have gone to school and done well, and at the end of the line there is no inheritance - no glorious future. Then they are told, "Get specific training, because if you train for this or that occupation you will find a job and happiness will be yours". Even after people have been specifically trained, all that they have got is a higher order of frustration, for they are now educated and trained but are still unemployed and unemployable. Whatever we may say about the good life, certainly having a job is one element, and a not insignificant one.

We shall have to ask very serious questions too, about whether it is right and fair to create the sort of gulf that exists this morning in this hall in the form of an orchestra pit. Can we continue to think that we must do for young people what we consider to be right for them? Haven't young people themselves a particular contribution to make to the development of their

societies? In my judgement we seem to have underestimated the capacities of youth and the benefits which may be realised if only youth is given the opportunity and made to feel an important part of the society.

We shall have also to examine, not only what is possible here in Malta, but whether from the lessons which we have learnt in other regions, there are specific programmes of action which may be launched in an effort to solve the rather difficult problems.

I should now like, Madam Minister, to express my gratitude to several people here. First, I should like to thank you most warmly on behalf of all the participants at the seminar, for the excellent introductory address which you gave us this morning. You drew our attention to the complexity of the youth problems, the urgency, the potential dangers, and you asked us to keep our feet firmly on the ground rather than dwell in the realms of academe. I should like to assure you that we will do our best to follow the admirable lead you have given us.

Not many of the participants will be aware that this seminar was brought into being in record time. Ten days ago there was still some doubt as to whether it would have been possible to mount this operation at all. The fact that it has come about is due, Madam Minister, to your personal co-operation, the help which we have had from many of your officers and also to the excellent preparatory work which was done by the inter-Ministerial steering committee. I should like to commend them for all that they have done. I must also record the fact that the seminar would not have taken place, despite the excellent preparations, if it had not been for the generosity of the Commonwealth Foundation which provided funds for this as well as for the previous meetings.

For his very encouraging remarks and for giving us some interesting insights into the local situation, we are indebted to the Director of Education. The points he has raised will no doubt be explored in the working sessions.

Someone told me last evening that when it rains like this, at this time of year, there is a belief in Malta that "a waggon of gold has been delivered". I hope this is true. Already there is some evidence, for it for those of you who have managed to brave the rain this morning to come here have certainly given the seminar a golden start and I should like to thank you for your presence.

I am sure you would wish me to record our gratitude to the authorities of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology for putting their facilities at your disposal. Because of the short time which was available to us, we pressed many of the College staff into service and I wish them all to know how much we appreciate their willingness and their co-operation.

Finally on behalf of those of us who have come from abroad, may I thank you for the courtesies and hospitality which we have already received and in particular for the opportunity of visiting Gozo. We shall long remember our all too brief stay among the young people in that delightful island. I have no doubt, too, that our meetings here will prove to be as profitable and provide equally pleasant memories.