

ADDRESS BY Y.A.B. DR. LIM CHONG EU, CHIEF MINISTER OF
PENANG, AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE ASIAN AND PACI-
FIC SEMINAR ON CONSUMER TESTING AND RESEARCH HELD AT
RECSAM, GLUGOR AT 9.00 A.M. ON MONDAY, 4TH OCTOBER,
1976.

Mr. President,
Your Excellency,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It was some ten years ago when I first spoke in Malaysia' Parliament on the subject of consumer organisation and the need for consumer protection. There was then no consumer organisation in the country nor was there any special government agency co-ordinating the efforts to give the consumer a fair deal.

2. Today, there is a consumer organisation in nearly every state of Malaysia, there is a Federation of Consumer Organisations and the Government has not only a consumer protection unit in the Ministry of Trade and Industry but also a National Consumer Advisory Council which attempts to bring

together different interests to bear on consumer issues. The problems of consumers even got a full page under "quality of life indicators" in the socio-economic Report of the Government this year.

3. The consumer movement has indeed come a long way in Malaysia. But this experience of the expansion of this socio-economic movement to protect the interests of the consumers is a world-wide phenomena culminating in certain countries to a complete acceptance by governments of the responsibilities to protect consumers while in most, a mix of government and volunteer action supplement each other. In many countries, consumerism has achieved the status of a national problem leading to the creation of cabinet portfolios.

4. I understand that the most rapid growth in consumer organisation in recent years has been in the Asia and Pacific Region. Already there are now some 30 organisations covering

* Economic Report 1975-1976 published by the Treasury Malaysia.

nearly every country that is a member of ESCAP - the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific. This has moved your organisation to establish a special programme to assist these many new organisations both private and governmental - a programme whose head is Anwar Fazal. I am happy to record that he was a former member of my staff.

5. This Seminar which is funded by the Government of the Netherlands is, I understand, a part of this effort to assist new organisations to develop their capabilities to act for consumers through systematic and meaningful research.

6. The most successful and credible consumer organisations in the world have achieved their status by being objective, thorough and fair in their assessments of products and services and in their utterances on behalf of the consumers. Like many progressive socio-economic movements, it draws to it all kinds of people with all kinds of motives and this variety can be

reflected in uneven and sometimes quite uncharacteristic performances on the part of consumer organisations themselves.

7. Your Seminar is therefore most significant in that it will help you avoid these pitfalls, that it will develop skills and experiences in the kind of outstanding, unbiased, objective work that is the hallmark of many successful consumer organisations.

8. This Seminar is significant also because there is a great deal of need for research in many areas affecting consumers. I am particularly happy to note that you have given "Food" and "Safety" aspects the kind of priority they deserve. Certainly these are interests which deeply concern a developing nation such as Malaysia.

9. I understand also that it is the objective of the Seminar to identify future directions in consumer research in developing countries and to work out programmes for individual and joint action.

10. In all the above tasks I wish you success.

11. I wish also to congratulate both the Government of the Netherlands and the International Organisation of Consumers Unions for making this Seminar possible and for honouring us by holding it in Malaysia, and in Penang.

12. Penang rates high among visitors for its quality of life, for its hospitable people and fine cultural institutions and its hills, beaches, climate and food. I hope that you will have time to take advantage of these and see the island and meet the people. You can then make your own unbiased, objective consumer evaluation of Penang as - the Pearl of the Orient - a tourist destination for all.

13. I now have great pleasure in declaring this Seminar open and wish you all every success in your deliberations to secure for consumers a better deal.

Thank you.