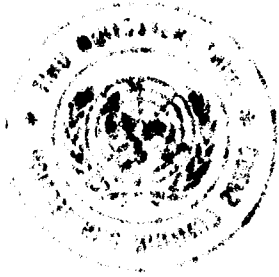




Report
on
A visit of inspection to Malaysia and Singapore
by
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MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE

In the course of this tour, I spent nine days in Singapore, eighteen days at Kuala Lumpur and ten days in East Malaysia. During that time, I met sixty expatriate members of the United Nations family, some of their counterparts and members of their clerical staffs, government servants at various levels and private citizens, to all of whom I am grateful for the time they kindly gave me and for the insight they afforded me into the technical co-operation work of the United Nations in their area.

2. My aim, as during earlier inspections of this type, was to bring an independent eye to bear on as many UN activities as I could reasonably cover, form a judgement on their utility and efficacy from my own observation and from the opinions of those working in and with them, and bring to the notice of those responsible for them such points as might seem to call for comment or question.

3. In both countries, UN aid appears to be well programmed, that is to say that, by and large, it fits in well with the national authorities' own ideas on development strategy. The task of UN planners in this respect is of course relatively easy in Singapore and Malaysia, since the Governments of both these countries have a clear vision of the economic course which they have charted for themselves. In Malaysia, the First Malaysian Plan, 1966 - 1970, has been supplemented by a Mid-term Review of the ground covered and of adjustments required. Singapore may perhaps be said to have guiding principles rather than a formal plan - principles, be it said, toward the formulation of which the UN can reasonably pride itself on having contributed.

4. I was led by my experiences on this tour to speculate whether, for the sake of greater efficiency, the UN family might not do well to attempt, in carefully selected instances, the difficult operation of trying to accommodate itself to the economic pulse of countries which, through the existence of successive, timed development plans or of set governmental periods, may be said to have an established rhythm. This effort would apply, perhaps, to the timing by UNDP and Agencies of the appointment and terms of service of their representatives and to the concentration of projects so as to coincide to some degree with the country's own cycle. I have expanded somewhat on this idea in an informal note to the Administrator of the UNDP and I believe that the Commissioner of the UNDP Capacity Study may be thinking on similar lines.

5. The following paragraphs contain brief remarks on most of the UN operations which I saw in Singapore and Malaysia. The list is by no means exhaustive, omitting as it does most completed projects, some projects still in preparation and certain current projects which I had no time or opportunity to visit.

6. Information

Malaysia and Singapore were the first countries which I had come across in the course of my inspections where there was no formal UN Information Centre. This in no way meant that no information activity was being undertaken. News about technical co-operation work in the field was given to the press by the office of the Resident Representative of the UNDP on the initiative of officers working on the individual programmes concerned or - at some periods in the past - by a supernumerary volunteer working under the supervision of the Resident Representative. In co-operation with Government Information Services, opportunity was also taken of particularly suitable occasions, such as the signature of

agreements, to utilize wireless, television and other media of dissemination. The coverage obtained by such methods appeared completely adequate and I heard no complaints in government, UN, or private circles that the activities of the UN were insufficiently publicized. It would in my opinion be a waste of international funds to have more complicated and expensive machinery for the dissemination in these two countries of news about the UN and the reflexion is inevitable that there may well be other posts at which savings could be effected without loss of efficiency by the adoption of similarly unsophisticated information methods. These, it is true, leave no lee-way for UN Information Libraries or Reading Rooms, but the cost effectiveness of these at some posts might not stand up well to close scrutiny. It could also be objected that there are countries where the political activities of the UN might not be adequately covered by commercial news agencies; in such cases the local distribution of Weekly News Letters by the ~~office of the~~ Resident Representative could often fill the bill satisfactorily without recourse to the expense of a formal UN Information Centre with a Director, a supporting staff and the administrative costs entailed.

7. UN Office of Technical Co-operation (OTC)

The OTC is executing agent for a potentially very valuable Special Fund project on urban renewal and development in Singapore. The importance of the subject in a limited territory with two million population requires no emphasis. The matters of general principle were illustrated by my contact with this project:-

- a) The importance of co-ordination in the field, without which understandings between headquarters can all too easily remain a dead letter. During my visit, a meeting between the WHO representative in Kuala Lumpur and the project manager in Singapore resulted in complete agreement on the balance of WHO participation in the operation.

- b) The possibility of continued active interest by executing agencies in certain types of completed projects. I believe that, subject to the agreement of the member state concerned - indeed dependent on its expressed wishes in the matter - some continuing contact could be valuable in many projects as a means of maintaining momentum and perhaps suggesting minor alterations of course. Obviously, there would be financial implications; a short mission (or even a passing visit) by a former project manager or expert would have to be paid for from some source, but I imagine that this should not prove a major difficulty, given reciprocal good will. Some understanding about such future contacts in suitable cases could presumably be reached before the end of the project. I emphasize again that such continuing interest must rest solely on the wishes of the government concerned, and must have no hint of interference after completion of an operation.

8. From several sources I heard praise expressed for the work of the handful of UN TA experts in Malaysia engaged in the dual work of statistical compilation and training. At the present stage of preparation for the Second Malaysian Plan, this work assumes special importance.

9. In a final word on work under the aegis of the OTC, I wish to mention the completed TA project aimed at advising on the establishment of a Ports Authority in Sabah, for the purpose of underlining the satisfaction of the relevant authorities with the methods of the expert concerned, who, instead of following the all-too-frequent

method of studying the subject and leaving a report, had meticulously worked over the problem step by step with his contacts, thus achieving a satisfactory degree of identification between them and the project.

10. UNICEF

As I have come to expect, I found UNICEF doing quiet, useful work in all parts of the area. I myself saw more of the Fund's field work in East than in West Malaysia, with assistance, in co-operation with W.H.O., in the local malaria eradication and tuberculosis control campaigns as well as in the general improvement of basic health services. The provision of clean water to rural kampongs is a useful activity on which sufficient momentum has probably been generated to enable the programme to go on rolling after the departure of the WHO expert concerned, provided UNICEF is prepared to continue to contribute some of the necessary imported hardware. In Singapore, I spent two days visiting school dental clinics, dental nurses training establishments, community centres, kindergarten classes and the T.B. control centre, all of which had received support - often crucial - from UNICEF. I should like especially to mention the Fund's modest, but nevertheless catalytic aid to Singapore's successful family planning operation, not only on the audio-visual side, but also in the important aspect of computerization. This aid has played a part in the achievement of the Singapore authorities in reducing the crude birth rate in their territory from 4.27% in 1957 and 2.59% in 1967 to an estimated 2.1% in 1969 with every prospect of reducing this to the target figure of 2% by the target date of 1970.

11. Family Planning

The President of the Economic and Social Council at the close of its 47th session summarized the situation now confronting the world in the matter of family planning. The facts, the fears and the main opinions for and against are well known and I do not propose to repeat

them. I should, however, like to throw in two ideas:-

- a) The acceptance of the principle of family limitation in Singapore brought home to me that a wide section of its inhabitants have realised that modern medicine has made unnecessary, for man, Nature's frequently lavish provisions for the survival of species. This acceptance is not the result of high education, but of common intelligence applied to observed facts. Singaporeans have now seen with their own eyes that small families no longer represent a serious threat of childless old age; this is something that others may be brought to understand tomorrow. I deduce, however, that, although it would be preferable that the reduction of birth and infantile mortality rates should be simultaneous, prior conviction of the reality of the second may be required before the first becomes generally acceptable. In addition, the Singapore example has satisfied me that truly effective maternal care services are an essential preliminary to family planning, because of the indispensable opportunity they give for explaining to women the possibility and nature of birth control techniques.

- b) Many aspects of family planning remain controversial. In particular, as so many have stressed, family limitation cannot and must not be imposed from above. This is a matter on which men and women must make up their own minds and on which governments must themselves decide whether and to what extent they will encourage the organised provision of enlightenment to their peoples. But, for any government in similar geographical and demographic circumstances that may be thinking in practical terms of instituting a family planning movement, Singapore offers a good example of what can be achieved with existing knowledge and techniques.

12. UNIDO

In Singapore, UNIDO is continuing the work of assistance in economic planning inaugurated by the OTS and is undertaking the task of giving advice, through technical experts, on the development of specific industries. At Kuala Lumpur it is providing assistance in the general field of commerce and small industry, in encouraging local handicrafts and in the establishment of a pilot tannery and shoe factory, all under the aegis of the state organisation MARA - People's Trust Council.

13. ILO

Industrial expansion enjoys high priority in the plans of both countries and ILO is helping in the herculean effort to progress in this direction by setting up establishments for training in the skills required. At Kuala Lumpur, a Special Fund project is just beginning to face the task of developing apprentice training in the existing Industrial Training Institute, where it inherits an existing building and equipment. One of the fundamental tasks will be to raise standards of instructors without exposing them to irresistible attraction from private industry. This thorny problem, widespread if not universal in countries in similar circumstances, is one that must be tackled ruthlessly if UN co-operation in this field is to be truly effective.

14. The compound and buildings of the new Singapore Metal Industries Development Centre, also the seat of a Special Fund project, are now sufficiently far advanced to show that this has all the makings of a magnificent institution, conceived on a scale commensurate with the problem posed and now in full development. Delays which were not explained satisfactorily to me have however reduced the value of UN co-operation in this project, rising prices having appreciably reduced the quantity of machinery and equipment which it was originally intended to supply. There appears to be little substantive difference between the Singaporean proposal of 1966 and the agreement finally reached after the despatch of no fewer than three missions of enquiry and it is hard to understand why such expensive delay has occurred.

15. A pending SF project for Singapore is that to expand and develop the existing National Productivity Centre. - Training in management techniques, wage policies, labour relations, workers' education etc. is of the first importance in the early stages of a switch over to an industrial economy and it was inspiring to see the eagerness of the young students at work in their present inadequate accommodation. It is planned that the TA operation which I saw in action should be dove-tailed into the proposed SF project which, presumably, will be carefully calculated to benefit by the lessons learnt from similar projects undertaken in other parts of the world.

16. The problem of creating sufficient employment opportunities to occupy the rising generation is widespread in the developing world and in few places more acute, I imagine, than in Malaysia and Singapore. The ILO is no stranger to this conundrum and will no doubt be open to suggestions how its advice and experience can be recruited to help in specific instances.

17. I visited the Cheras Rehabilitation Centre, some ten miles from Kuala Lumpur, at which an ILO technical assistance expert is working. Quite apart from the economic value of restoring the power of production to a human being, the psychological miracle of redemption from utter uselessness is a most heartening sight. I sincerely hope that the Government will soon be able to make a start on the proposed establishment in other states of institutions on the lines of the pilot project at Cheras.

18. FAO

I made some contact with six SF projects for which FAO is or is to be the executing agency:- Two fishing projects in Singapore and Penang respectively, two forestry projects in Malaysia, Food Technology activity near Kuala Lumpur and the Pig and Poultry centre at Serdang on Singapore. In addition, I saw veterinary and tissue-culture activity in Singapore under the UNTA umbrella.

19. The two forestry projects are of great potential value for Malaysia. That concerned with the development of forest industries, the taking of specimen forest inventories, the raising of the conversion factor and the establishment of the real place of Malaysia's forests in the economic life of the country appears to be off to a good start in spite of the appalling difficulties of some of the terrain to be covered - especially in East Malaysia. I was impressed by the use of network analysis to plan the whole development of this five-year operation and, looking back on the projects which I have seen, believe that this technique could with advantage be used more widely for the control of some types of UNDP field work. One cloud on the horizon of this project at the moment is the failure of associated bilateral aid to come up to the starting line in time, consequently threatening the final composition of the overall picture, which is a UN responsibility.

20. The second forestry project, on quick growing species for industrial use, requires close attention. It is at present at a T-junction requiring thought as to its future direction, the choice lying between greater stress on research and advance on more practical lines from an uncertain scientific base. There is also a subsidiary question whether to continue to concentrate exclusively on timber for pulping or to branch out in a direction not provided for in the plan of operations and look closely at the possibly rewarding side-line of the plantation cultivation of species valuable for carpentry, veneers etc.

21. The Pig and Poultry project is staffed by experienced men qualified to turn local breeders into hard, calculating business men with knowledge of every trick in the pack. Given time, this operation promises well, but there is still much to be done to alter the existing premises into proper shape for research and demonstration. This is another example of a project which took an unconscionable time to reach the point of agreement between the three parties concerned.