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SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

Acc. No.	NARC	
68	0026	335

Speech by Inche Sha'ari bin Tadin, M.P. for Kg. Chai Chee and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Culture, in Parliament on Monday, 13.5.68

Mr. Speaker,

Sir, we have heard divergent views and criticisms by honourable members of the House for the last two days in their reciprocals to the President's Address at the Opening of the Parliament. Some who delivered their speeches were making their debut in Parliament. In this respect, Sir, I am one of those who are making their maiden speeches so to speak.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not in a position to reply to some of the references made by one or two of our Hon. Members with regard to my Ministry, as I have only been appointed to my present office only a few days ago; I therefore do not intend to reciprocate but shall leave the replying to my colleague, Mr. Fong, the hon. member for Stamford or my Minister.

What I propose to speak, Sir, in the next 20 or 25 minutes is on a subject which none has touched on before, although reference has been made here and there: I am referring to the third objective outlined in the President's speech, i.e. enhancement of national consciousness of the problems that will come upon us in the next few years. I consider, Sir, this objective as important as the other two in creating a modern, democratic multi-racial Singapore which is, Sir, our national goal.

As we are all aware, Sir, in the addendum to the President's Address, when outlining the policies of the various ministries as a whole, he said in his reference to Ministry of Culture, that TV/Radio would be elevated into a separate division with a separate Permanent Secretary. This step, Sir, is taken in view of the greater and more effective role our TV/Radio has to play "to inform-entertain and educate" but will also stimulate loyalty and patriotism and the importance of increased productivity in order that the Republic will be able to pull through these difficult years. I have not the slightest doubt, Sir, in the light of the ability shown by our leadership in the past, we shall be able to surmount every difficulty, provided every one of us - those in the Government, and the people adopt the right attitude. It is to inculcate this correct attitude in facing the problems ahead of us that TV/Radio must play its due role. Every community in this island-Republic of ours, Sir, whether, they be Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians, Europeans and others must be made to realise that they are part of multi-racial Singapore and that they have a role to play in contributing towards the success of Singapore. We cannot allow any community to lag behind in this rat-race for survival, or else that particular community will have to face problems which are bound to create a lot of social unrest in the years

ahead. Thus, it is very vital that no community should feel that they are being discriminated against for it is the Government's policy to accord equal treatment to everybody.

Mr. Speaker. Sir, this right attitude and thinking is vital in order to achieve our national goal - that of creating a multi-racial Singapore.

I shall now dwell on the subject of national integration which I think, Sir, can well be instrumental in achieving the third objective as set out in the President's speech. I feel, Sir, the people must be made to feel as ONE people before we could proceed. Without this solidarity through consolidation of efforts and the pooling of resources, it would be impossible to achieve the other two objectives, namely, greater economic growth and higher productivity and adequate defence capability.

Sir, what do we mean when we speak of national integration? One definition is the bringing together of the disparate parts of society into a more cohesive whole.

There are several approaches to this problem and whatever the techniques that we have used in the past, we should not deviate from our bearings and objectives. We know, too, Sir, that this process of creating a multi-racial Singapore and the sense of Singaporeans will take at least a generation before we could really see the fruits but believe me, Sir, that our integrated system both in the schools and in the army have attracted both attention and criticism from experts all over the world. I know Sir, we have to be patient on any experiment that we have undertaken and should not expect to see the results overnight. Sir, we should give credit to those who have been responsible for the planning, for they have done a marvellous job.

Sir, Singapore has been described as the melting pot of three great cultures - namely Chinese, Indian and Malay, and it has attracted a lot of tourists to this part of the world whose desire is to see the exotic Eastern culture in its various manifestations. Our Government's cultural policy is to create a blend of the three but with a typically Singaporean flavour, with some European pepper here and there to make it feel hot. Thus, in the process of national integration, we have to integrate our cultures so as to be able to evolve our own identity and character.

Coming back to the subject of national integration, Sir, our motto should be - Unity in Diversity. The people of Singapore who come from various ethnic groups find their real loyalty and sense of oneness not within the nation, as yet (for Singapore is still in the process of creating a nation) but within their special small ethnic, language or religious groups. National integration will lead to drawing together of these diverse elements into something more cohesive, with the parts linked more closely together. The trend to be foreseen is aptly described by the phrase "from many small societies to one large society."

All these while, Sir, our leaders have been making speeches, urging the people to live as a united people and stressing the importance of unity amongst people of various races, religions, which make up our polygot society.

We can see, Sir, differences in attires worn by the girls of various races - the Malay in their sarong kebaya, the Chinese in their tantalizing cheongsam, the Indians in their beautiful saris. With the latest craze for mini-skirts, our youths seem to be falling for this type of dress. However, Sir, what I am trying to suggest is that these visual contrasts between Malay, Chinese, Indians or others are only superficial differences, that make up our mosaic society, made up of countless pieces, each neatly defined and separated from all the others.

Everyone, Sir, in this House, is familiar with language conflicts in other countries: India has over 200 languages. Even Nepal with only 10 million people, has some six substantial language groups. In Ghana with only 7.5 million people, there are over five major languages. Yet we in Singapore have well adapted ourselves to speaking English besides using the National Language and our mother tongues. Thus fellow feeling is difficult to develop when language differences isolate one another. But this is not the case in Singapore in which everyone no matter whether he is Chinese, or Indian, is able to make himself understood through the use of bazaar Malay which is the lingua franca in this part of the world.

I have said earlier, Sir, that the army is one important nationalizing agent, pulling our young men into a strenuous training in which differences of ethnic background, religion, and so on are minimised and where men are infused with a patriotic zeal for the nation. In this respect, Sir, those responsible for the training of our National Servicemen and the Army should be given full commendation for the wonderful job they are doing in turning out rugged young equipped not only with military skills for armed combat but more important still the spirit of patriotism and public spiritedness, self-discipline and high standards of integrity. It will be wonderful to watch in the not-too-distant future disciplined young men taking over the leadership not only in the army but also in all spheres of activity and organisation. One day we can be assured that all the efforts put up by both the Government and ourselves will bring heavy dividends.

The other approach is through our school system through the integrated educational policy which has indeed not only been instilling a growing sense of national identity amongst our children but also inculcating the spirit of the true Singaporean. The suggestion put forward by the Hon. Member for Joo Chiat on Thursday that all communal schools should be abolished could be given serious thought if we really were to achieve our objective. The Government recently announced that the integrated policy has now been extended to missionary schools, and the schools which are untouched are those which are completely privately financed over which the Government has no say.

The third and most effective approach I think is by accommodating peoples of various races, status and background under the same roof, so to speak. Peoples from different walks of life such as civil servants, businessmen, the squatter farmers who have been resettled, etc. are brought together as one community. There can be no faster way of changing the attitude and mentality of the people and at the same time modernising their way of life. At the moment nearly half a million of the population are living in Housing Board flats in Queenstown and other areas and very soon when the new Toa Payoh satellite town will be ready for use. More and more people will have the opportunity of living in these flats. I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we could achieve our national integration through making the people live in this urbanised society of flats. It is through constant personal contact and inter-action that they come to live as a people and in this respect, Sir, I must give the Housing & Development Board a pat on the shoulder for making Singapore's reputation high on the list of countries in the world that have solved their national housing problems. Praiseworthy comments have been made by experts from all over the world on our housing achievements and I can confidently say, Sir, that this pride should be implanted in the minds of our peoples that although Singapore may be small in terms of space, but it has evolved many good ideas and set examples to the rest of the world on how we tackle the many problems facing this country by careful planning, thinking and intelligent action. We are prepared to share our expertise and know-how with any country which cares to seek our advice. In fact, Sir, we hope in the near future to export not only commodities which now are getting well known, but most probably also our human made-in-Singapore expertise to help other countries in their development programmes. In fact, Sir, we are already a donor country under the Colombo Plan by offering scholarships, training courses in the field of telecommunications, etc. Thus, by human resources and proper leadership we not only achieved for ourselves a high standard of living but are also able to help others who require our service. In fact, Sir, we have already sent a team of housing experts to Christmas Island on the invitation of the Australian Government to give the benefit

of low-cost housing to the people there. Endeavours like this, Sir, help project Singapore's image throughout, and I think it is very important that we inculcate the spirit of national pride into our children and our people. They must be made to realise if they want to see this state of affairs continue then they must play their part.

Role of Mass Media - TV/Radio

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now elaborate on the role of TV/Radio in creating a multi-racial outlook.

All over the world, it has been statistically discovered that individuals and villagers who have access to the printed word or the radio medium have more modern attitudes, are much more progressive, and are in a position to play more positive roles than those who are denied access to these mass communication media. This shows how important the mass media are in changing the people's attitudes. Even in the communication systems of highly developed societies, there is a complex interaction between the modern mass media system and the traditional mode of interpersonal word-of-word communication. A modern society is not an amorphous depersonalized mass society free from primary groups. It is an elaborated systems of families, clubs, ethnic groups, classes, political organization and friendship groupings.

The dissemination of any new idea or practice in such a society, Sir, depends not only on the publicity it is given through the mass media, but also through conversation and discussion of the topics by the people face to face. That is why the setting up of CCC in all the constituencies has bridged the gap between the Government and the people. In this way the Government encourages participation by an identification with the citizenry. All the hon. members appreciate the service that is being contributed by these people who are serving on the C.C.C.

We know full well Sir that mass media alone can have profound effects on what people pay attention to, the information they have, their taste, and their impressions of the world. On the other hand, the mass media by themselves are less effective in changing attitudes or efforts towards action. I have noted several hon. members making references to the need to change the attitude and thinking of the people if we hope to survive through these difficult years ahead and yet Sir, none has been able to put forward any concrete suggestions as to how this could be done.

The subject of changing and influencing the, ATTITUDES, Sir, as everyone knows, is rather complex. The trouble is that most people have rather weak or ill-defined attitudes. I believe, Sir, something could be done towards changing the attitude of our people through the use of our Radio/TV in their programmes. But Radio/TV alone cannot achieve this target in the absence of personal reinforcement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I can still remember, the hon. member for Katong has mentioned that besides Radio/TV, adult education agencies could also be brought into play in changing the people's attitude.

To get people to act in ways that conform to new values requires that mass communications be reinforced by the personal touch. We must try to reach people from all walks of life, if possible at grass-root level.

Our goal, Sir, is to create a democratic, modern and multi-racial Singapore, and it is essential that every community in the Republic, be they Malay, Chinese, Indian, Eurasian etc. should be equipped with the right attitude towards the problems in the crucial years ahead brought out by the accelerated British withdrawal. The problems as they are now may be small but in the 1970's they may rise to such a magnitude that we will have to face very tough times. As I said earlier just now, Sir, that we could attack this situation by a two-pronged method - via Radio/TV and mass media and through personal reinforcement.

Singapore, being small in size, is advantageous for the practice of mass media for the masses. Thus it is important that we should make our people become problem-orientated and problem-conscious. When their thinking is geared to this, then they will be able to adapt themselves to the situation when the time comes.

Sir, we are moving towards ^a technological society and in such a society we want our people to be not only scientific-minded but also analytical and critical in their outlook. This can only come about if they participate in group discussions, discussing on the problems facing Singapore. Thus, it is very important, that our Radio/TV and other mass media like newspapers, magazines be infused with ideas that will stimulate the thinking and instil in the people the sense of patriotism and public spiritedness and the importance of increased productivity. Small dosages of medicines if taken everyday will have a beneficial curative effects. Similarly through the media of Radio/TV programmes, ideas could be infused into the dramas, forums, guest of the week programmes and so on. It is only through constant and regular programmes of this nature that people will slowly accept new ideas. Such programmes should aim and equip the people to meet the new challenges ahead.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I now dwell on these objectives set out in the President's speech not yet touched on by my colleagues both from the backbenches or members of the Government. I would like to quote what the President said " We must all learn to place national interest above personal or sectional interest." It seems to me, Sir, that this third objective has a social relevance to the question of changing the attitudes of the people. Unless we effectively reorientate the thinking of our people to the problems that lie ahead we could achieve very little by way of implementing the other two objectives. In his closing paragraphs of his address, he said that he would expect Hon. members to speak in forthright terms to lend more importance to local thinking and feeling in the country, to ensure that everyone understands the challenge and gives of his best.

The Prime Minister in his address on the Opening of Parliament, Sir, in congratulating your re-election to the Chair, said that under guidance, this House "will keep the parliamentary machine in good shape, and also sustain and cultivate the attitudes of tolerance and calculated deference to opposing views", and has for the last two days been hearing criticisms levelled against government policies by the Hon. Members of backbenchers, who in fact were playing the role of the opposition. The position of our one-party Parliament in Singapore by consent, Sir, is rather unique; there are countries in Afro-Asia where the temptation is to establish single party constitution tendencies. Some countries have evolved political parties whose major purpose appears to be to moderate communal, ethnic and other conflicts, without insisting on a full monopoly of power. Certain parties, such as the Alliance of Malaysia, the Congress Party in India, and the Party of Revolutionary Institution in Mexico consciously subscribe to the integrated system of politics. These political parties contain a number of diverse and often competing groups.

In the P.M.'s speech, Sir, he expressed the hope that one day that Opposition would and must inevitably return. Before that day comes, Sir, we, the P.A.P. within ourselves in this House are already creating this "opposition" group in the form of the backbenchers. Although this form of opposition as the Prime Minister observed is not the same real opposition that he and his colleagues experienced in the fifties and sixties, nevertheless the new backbenchers who represent a wide cross-section of our society, will undoubtedly be able to keep the parliamentary machine going. We must let the whole world know that the one-party system that we have today in Singapore is merely an electoral accident and not because democracy is dead as some have said. During the last General Election the opposition parties could not win a single seat. The sweeping victory by the PAP in the seven contested seats was a clear testimony of the faith and confidence the people have in the present government. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can prove to the world that the one-party Parliament in Singapore provides an interesting study for those who are interested in doing research in the political upheaval in Singapore, which, has been said is unique and unprecedented in the world history. I observe that not many people take interest in parliamentary proceedings. This, Sir, I again attribute to the attitude of our people who take things for granted. However, I am sure, my Hon. Members of the opposite benches will take heed of what the P.M. said that they should speak their minds freely and forcefully and provide the lead in their thinking and feeling in the country.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the overwhelming support given by the people in returning all the 53 seats to the P.A.P. clearly shows that we have the support of the masses. The present leadership, with

the addition of new members, will work hard to ensure uphold parliamentary democracy in Singapore and at the same time provide the people with the means of security, peace, prosperity and I would like to make these appeals to the leaders of all the communities in the Republic to sink our differences and work together to make multi-racial Singapore a success.

I am sure whatever complaints the people have can always be voiced through their M.P.s in various constituencies who in turn could voice them in Parliament.

The Malays, in particular, Sir, also have a contribution to make towards the success of our multi-racial society and of the ideology of democratic socialism in Singapore. They must not feel that they are isolated or are being excluded. They must change their attitude and reorientate their thinking to suit the changes that are taking place around them. They must not live in the world of fantasy. We want our Malay community to have every opportunity to train and equip themselves to face the challenge for an industrialised Singapore. These efforts will succeed only if the Malays have the right spirit to face the challenge to work, study and train themselves in order to face the world in the future. They should not worry over trifling matters which will bring no benefits. The Government is giving every assistance to all the Malays in the Republic as provided for in the Constitution - especially in the field of education - and they must fully make use of the facilities and opportunities that are available for them to improve themselves.

"We are living in a society which from day-to-day assumes a more urban and industrialised character."

In the next few years with the rapid development in urban renewal, construction of the flyovers and other building complexes, Singapore will be transformed into one of the most dynamic cities in this part of the world and yet able also to maintain a high standard of living for its people. It has already become the UTOPIA - the land of plenty. By Asian standard, Sir, Singapore is prosperous, but this affluence does not mean any part of the society can afford to be inefficient or adopt lackadaisical attitudes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the lack of corruption in this Republic has made Singapore one of the few countries which have a clean government. Our people, Sir, have not only come to expect efficient and intelligent officials, they have also come to understand that a democratically elected government can and will eliminate corrupt practices.

"Undoubtedly, Sir, this has contributed to the image of a democratically elected government as an effective servant, which, in the process, can maintain high standards of conduct, and has dismissed the attractiveness of more totalitarian approaches to discipline as the sine qua non of progress. It has meant that political opponents

must be policy oriented."

The next five years, Sir, will in all probability, determine if Singapore will continue to have an opposition or will move towards a modified one-party system.

The Malay community must remain part of the growth and development of every aspect of the social, political and economic life of Singapore. They must develop self-reliance so that one day they can stand on their feet and compete with the others.

They must identify themselves with the symbol of progress as Singapore Malays. They must not say that religion hinders progress since Islam teaches us to be diligent, to work hard, to strive, for nothing is free. All the opportunities for improvement are before them and it is up to them to take full advantage. They must not have the false idea adopted by some of the so-called "leaders" that the government wishes to do away with the Malay language just because the two secondary schools are going to be integrated. Even Inche Khir Johari, Minister for Education for Malaysia, in many of his speeches recently has indicated that he had favoured integration and the use of English in the teaching of Science and Mathematics in Malay-medium classes. Let us be realists. It is no use trying to hide something bad and later on it is found that it is too late to do anything. The earlier we have the change in our school system, the better it will be for the generations that are to come. That is why the government is doing all it can to have the reorganisation of secondary schools and re-siting of the Universities to avoid duplication of work, so that maximum advantage could be derived from such changes which would in turn benefit Singapore. They must not think in terms of sectional interests for this kind of thinking is not healthy in the context of multi-racial Singapore. They must not be introductive in their thinking for this will only make them slide more backward into the past. They must be as forward-looking as the others and they should be proud of their mini-Singapore which may be small in size but not in spirit or wealth. It is the spirit of oneness, and sense of togetherness that the leaders must inculcate in the Malays: not a sense of hatred, prejudice and suspicion which are contradictory to the teaching of Islam.

PRESS SECTION
MINISTRY OF CULTURE
13th May, 1968

(Time issued: 2200 hours)