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Address by the Parliamentary Secretary (Education) on the occasion of the Prize-giving Ceremony of the First Inter-school Tree-planting and Gardening Competition held at 5.30 p.m. on Monday 28th October, 1968 at St. Joseph's Convent.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to have been invited to address you this evening and to present the prizes to the winners of our first Inter-school Tree-planting and Gardening Competition.

I feel that it befits an occasion such as this, to dwell upon some of the antecedents of the competition and so put the purpose of such a competition in its proper perspective.

The idea of tree-planting as such is by no means recent, and was, in fact, suggested as far back as March 1961 in connection with the construction of the new schools, the means by which this Government sought to provide each child with its inalienable right — a free primary education; so much so that by May 1964, only a year after the Prime Minister planted a tree on Holland Circus to mark the beginning of an island-wide tree-planting campaign, some 2,962 trees had been planted in schools in the Republic. The figure now stands at about 6,500.

It is not my intention, however, to tax you with the minutiae involved in the planning and development, year by year, of the campaign in schools to help make Singapore a garden city, the cleanest and greenest in South-east Asia, except that I wish to say at this point, that what has been achieved in the schools of the Republic might not have been possible without the advice and generous assistance of the Botanic Gardens, the Public Works Department, the Singapore Institute of Architects, the Singapore Gardening Society and most of all, the mounting enthusiasm shown by principals, teachers and school children alike.

Looked at in this perspective, then, this Competition, coming as it does, five years after the event at Holland Circus, may be considered as a means by which stock is taken of the progress and achievement accomplished over a necessary period of time. Or it may be that the purpose, as is the purpose and value of such competitions on the whole, is that it is meant to stimulate the participants concerned and to activate them towards the achievement of higher standards in the future. Now be this as it may, I think it opportune at such a time as this when we are taking stock of the value of past activities in these areas, to also remind ourselves of the educational and social implications of such activities,

It has been suggested that in Singapore, because of circumstances peculiar to itself, an education suited to the needs of the time is emphatically not one which ought to concern itself with academic excellence alone. And it is this line of thinking which has resulted in greater emphasis being placed on extra-curricular activities together with a concerted effort to improve the immediate environment of the schools than in the past, thereby providing, more effectively, for the nurture of the total personality of the child.

The social implications which flow from this begin to emerge when one considers the all important emotional drive which is so necessary in the developing and nurturing of such personality because, without acknowledging the inevitable interdependence between the individual and society and the need to create and sustain a sense of common purpose; without realizing the need to acknowledge the value of a sense of common heritage in our children - the generation of tomorrow, we shall only be preparing the ground for the collective identity - crisis which manifests itself in violent student unrest so apparent in many parts of the world today. I am convinced by what I see, that we in Singapore possess that all important drive and, what is more, I am convinced that we are, within our system of education as a frame of reference, successfully transmitting it to our children.

May I say, finally, that I am happy with the choice of the judges which deemed St. Joseph's Convent the champion school, because I do not think it is possible for anyone to pass through its gates without being overcome by the sense of an indefinable something which is best considered as "grace dissolved in place".

Thank you.

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