

EMBARGO : SATURDAY - 4 P.M.

SPEECH BY MR. S. RAMASWAMY, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (LAW) AND M.P. FOR POTONG PASIR AT THE SINGAPORE YOUTH FESTIVAL, MUSIC AND DANCE PRESENTATION HELD AT THE SANG NILA UTAMA SECONDARY SCHOOL ON 27TH JUNE, 1970 AT 4.00 P.M.

National attention is being focussed on the young citizens of our Republic as they celebrate the Festival of Youth. It is an appropriate time to ponder over some of the problems and opportunities of our youths.

It is well-known that Singapore has a young population of which half are below the age of twenty-one. Since they form such a large portion of the community, it is logical to assume that they are an important factor in determining the quality of the nation. After all, the quality of the nation as a whole is but the qualities of its individual citizens.

More than ever before, young people have an increasingly important role to play in the affairs of their community and country. Gone are the days when children sat back in silence while their parents had to do all the thinking and problem-solving for them. The new brood of Singapore's young must never become a passively timorous lot of people who fear to think for themselves and hesitate to do what is good for themselves.

Nothing teaches like experience. It is on the basis of this dictum that the growth of young people in Singapore must be guided. Growth is more than just a biological process. A boy can grow up into a man without having imbibed the qualities of mind and character that go to make him a useful digit in society. While intellectual development can be effectively carried out in the classroom, the formation of character in a young person depends on the influences of parents, teachers and the environment in which the boy or girl grows up.

Leadership's qualities while they can profusely be described in books cannot be acquired without practice. That is why the stress on extra-curricular activities in schools has been so strong. We believe that in school clubs and societies, and in the playing field, the student comes into face-to-face contact with problems he has to solve with the decisions he has to make, and with new ideas he has to put forward and implement.

The faculty of the mind to discern and distinguish, to assess

and evaluate, to accept or reject, to adapt and innovate - all these can only gain dexterity through the task of courageously facing up to the day-to-day problems as and when they crop up. The student organisations in schools - where students are allowed to play a responsible role in the management of their own affairs - is one such place in which this practical exercise is available. The student who takes a keen and active interest in his school's extra-curricular activities, and sacrifices time to contribute towards the success of his club or association is the student who will, when he becomes a man, be more equipped and more ready to serve his community by participating in its affairs.

To forgo a national identity and to sustain the continuity of capable leadership, Singapore needs this broad stratum of socially committed young citizens from which the future leaders of the country must emerge.

Our present fortune is no automatic guarantee of its continuity in the future. As the present generation of nation-builders and thinkers move away when the time comes, a fresh, more imaginative, equally capable set of leaders must emerge and hold the reins of government to maintain the tempo of growth and progress. The challenges of survival in the next few decades, into which the young of today will be thrown, will demand new and untested methods of applications and solution.

As our nation continues to move ahead on the wheels of industrialisation along the road to affluence and modernisation, the helmsman must possess the skill and the judgement to keep the going steady.

Remember that there is no second childhood. Youth is a passing and irrevocable phase. This is the "time and tide" of your life when you can either float in the flood of opportunities, or sink in the morass of indifference. Your choice is obvious. Make full use of this golden period of your lives when your mind are fresh and flexible, receptive and resilient. Never allow your young years to pass by without reaping immense profits from it.

This Music and Dance Presentation represents a facet of youth activity in our Republic. Social graces and cultural appreciation are the first few steps towards growing refinement in society which is our common objective. A lot of time and effort have been spent in rehearsals and planning and I must congratulate all involved for their sacrifice and generosity which are desirable values for our citizens.

I hope that everyone present will have an enjoyable evening.

DATE: JUNE 26, 1970.

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