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Speech by Dr. Lee Chiaw Meng, Minister of State for Education, at the Opening of the 8th Meeting of the Central Coordinating Board of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation on Tropical Medicine and Public Health Project on 4th November, 1970, Saturday at 9 a.m. at Allen Lecture Theatre, Faculty of Medicine.

On behalf of the Government of Singapore may I extend to you a warm welcome to this the 8th Meeting of the Central Coordinating Board of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation on Tropical Medicine and Public Health Project.

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation is another manifestation of the desire of all of us living in this part of the world to extend the principle of regional cooperation to attain the maximum benefits for our people taking advantage of the experiences of individual countries and harnessing all the available knowledge for the advancement of the people in the Region.

It may appear strange that the subject of Tropical Medicine and Public Health should come within the purvey of the organisation of Ministers of Education. However, we must accept that education is involved with the development of human resources, and the robust state of a nation's population is a necessary concomitant of its economic and social development. Many nations of Southeast Asia are hampered in their economic and social development in many ways by the existence of indigenous tropical diseases and unhygienic environment.

While the ecology of the environment may provide the conditions in which diseases develop, it may be pertinent here to reflect on the role of Man in contributing and increasing the scope of diseases, whether tropical or otherwise. The disturbance of natural ecological balance by Man is two fold: (a) the explosion of population and the necessary development to serve the need of this population, (b) the solution is therefore not just the advancement in Technology but the education of the people. It is Man who must be educated to work for his own benefit if we are to eliminate or reduce the scourge of diseases which have such a debilitating effect on the rate of progress. Urbanisation and industrialisation compound the problem by bringing together concentrations of population in which diseases can take toll with such dramatic speed.

In this connection we in Singapore have achieved some measure of success in two areas concerned with public health - first, environmental control to check disease-bearing conditions and secondly, family planning to check population growth with a view to achieving a suitable sized population to which it is

possible to give the best social and economic benefits available in the country. In this way, we hope to raise quality people who understand themselves and their environment and will work towards maintaining and improving the high standards of living they already achieved.

As our contribution to regional cooperation, we put at the disposal of the Region, the knowledge and experience we have gained in two areas of health training, namely (a) training of basic professional health personnel with emphasis on urbanisation and industrialisation and (b) family planning.

In conclusion, may I wish you success in your Board Meeting and look forward to reading your learned deliberation for the advancement of health in these parts of the world.

Thank you.

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