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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT,
LANDS AND HOUSING, CHE ABDUL HAMID BIN HAJI
JUMAT, AT THE OPENING OF THE CHANGI COMMUNITY
CENTRE, ON SATURDAY, FEB. 22, 1958 AT 4.30 P.M.

First and foremost I should like to thank the Rural Board for inviting me to open this very fine Community Centre. I was pleased to accept this invitation not only as Minister, rural matters come under my portfolio, but because the welfare of rural dwellers and the development of the rural areas is of deep personal interest and concern to me.

The Chairman of the Rural Board, has mentioned some of the many functions and projects undertaken by the Rural Board. Besides these there are, of course, other Government projects, some completed and others in the course of execution which are also designed to improve the livelihood and welfare of rural people, as for example, the drainage schemes at Bedok and elsewhere, the various land resettlement schemes along Tampines Road and Jurong/Bukit Panjang, and something in which I have been very keenly interested namely, the new extensions to the Malay Settlements at Jalan Eunos, Ayer Gemuruh and 8 m.s. East Coast Road. As regards the extension of the Malay Settlement at Jalan Eunos, it should be possible to start making allocations of lots in a few weeks time. Meanwhile plans for the extension of Ayer Gemuruh are proceeding. I think it is no exaggeration to say that all future major developments on Singapore Island will take place in the present rural areas of Singapore - more intensified farming and resettlement, the bulk of the industrial development, new towns and housing schemes, road development including more agricultural roads, and all round improved services whether they be health, education or domestic supply. In other words, the rural areas still undergo a great transformation in the next five to ten years.

I should like to say my thanks to the Rural Board and its staff for their many years of service on behalf of the rural people and to congratulate them for their achievements. As Mr. Meadows has said, local government functions and activities are rarely spectacular. Nevertheless if a comparison is made with say the rural areas only five years ago, it can honestly be said that very solid and worthwhile developments have been accomplished. The Rural Board can be proud of its record and past performance.

It is only fitting that I should pay this tribute today since, in the very near future, the Rural Board will itself undergo the first of the major transformations affecting the rural areas. I refer, of course, to the three new District Councils which are to be established shortly, namely the Katong District Council, the Serangoon District Council and the Jurong/Bukit Panjang District Council. As you are aware these three new Councils will then take the place of the Rural Board and each will have a Council of 12 elected Councillors and three nominated Councillors presided over by a Chairman who is a Government officer.

This transformation represents a great constitutional advance, being the first time that rural affairs have been placed under the direct control of the rural people themselves. In other words you the adult males and females of the rural areas will now have an opportunity of taking a direct interest in the ordinary day to day affairs which affect your welfare and daily life - such as major roads, agricultural roads, drains, footpaths, bridges, health, markets, water and electrical supplies, bus shelters, and a hundred and one other things.

/However.....

However, I must remind you that it is not just a matter of saying I want this or that and expecting that it can be done. Finances are limited and at present of a total of \$15,000,000 to be spent in the rural areas in 1958, only \$2,000,000 is derived from Rural Board revenue - in other words Government contributes \$11,000,000 to expenditure. As a comparison, expenditure in the rural areas in 1954 amounted to only \$5½ million. As money is limited some projects will have to compete with others and priorities will have to be drawn up so that important things are dealt with first while others will have to be deferred. Grandiose schemes will have to be trimmed. All these day to day matters affecting your welfare and influencing the future development of your village will be the responsibility of the leaders who you elect to represent you on the District Council - the leaders in whom you must place your trust and who are entrusted to look after your welfare and everyday affairs. Your future welfare in local government matters is therefore in your hands. I urge you to use your new won privileges with the greatest care and forethought. Ensure stability in the future by exercising the utmost discretion and responsibility when it comes to casting your vote. Choose your representative prudently.

In conclusion - and to come back to the immediate present, I should like to say that I sincerely hope that the rural people in this locality - the children, the youths and the adults - will make the fullest possible use of this Community Centre and that it will become the focal point of your interests, of a strong and healthy community spirit and of civic consciousness.

I would like to end my address with a word of warning and advice - that is to keep politics out of your group activities in the Community Centre. Otherwise social harmony will be lost and your Centre will not prosper.

Feb. 22, 1958.

(Time issued 1200 hours)