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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH, MR. A.J. BRAGA,
AT THE LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE OF THE HOS-
PITAL FOR THE CHRONIC, AT THOMSON ROAD, AT
5.15 P.M. ON MONDAY, JUNE 3, 1957.

I welcome you warmly this afternoon to this time-honoured but simple ceremony of the laying of a foundation stone for the new hospital for the Chronic Sick. We may quite literally call this foundation stone a mile-stone on Singapore's firmly laid and wisely planned road to health.

We have already travelled a long way and our standard of health is one of which we are, and have every right to be, proud, but there is no room for complacency. For with our growing population the problem of building up the health of one of the most youthful populations in the world will always be a challenge to us.

In building up a health service, the problem is not only that of providing more of the same services. If it were only that, it would be difficult enough to expand at the pace which is required of us. But we must broaden and diversify the services. This is in the first place a matter of policy, for the welfare state which it is our aim to build up must remember that we are not serving some abstraction which we call the masses, or mere units to make up the statistical tables which are published in technical journals.

We aim to serve Mr. Lim and Mrs. Ramasamy and Che Abdullah not to mention Mr. Smith, and all their children and their health problems are as varied as their personalities. Men and women before they go sick don't decide which medical category they will come under. They fall sick and it is for the doctors and nurses to treat them as individual cases in order to restore them to health. This is not only the common humanity of the welfare services, it is also the inevitable development of the science of medicine.

The growing body of medical knowledge in the study and service of men requires specialisation of study, specialisation of equipment and specialisation of treatment; and demands it not only for scientific satisfaction but in order to make the fullest use of the knowledge and techniques available to us. There was a further consideration in our mind in planning this hospital, and that is this. No matter how great our provision for health services, there must be the best possible use of the resources available. Health is not the only social service; and no community can afford the maximum we dream of making available to give the fullest possible guarantee of health. Having decided how much we can afford - how much of our trained skills and how much of our resources - we must then make the fullest possible use of the resources allotted to us. That is real economy.

The "house-keeping" which the word originally means - what a prudent housewife would do in running her home within her means to the best advantage of her family.

While we are proud of our achievement that we have been able to make 30% more beds available for treatment of the sick, there is still a shortage in relation to the calls made on us and we must therefore make the best use of the beds and the skills concentrated on them.

Today the General Hospital is the only Government hospital available in Singapore for the treatment of acute medical and surgical cases. Although there are about 1,200 beds in the General Hospital, this falls far short of the number necessary for a population which the Registrar of Statistics now suggests numbers nearly a million and a half. In addition, the cost of maintaining
one bed 2/-

one bed in the General Hospital is about \$26/- per day.

This high cost reflects the concentration of highly skilled specialists and expensive equipment which we are now able to provide. It is essential, therefore, that every bed in the General Hospital is used to the best possible advantage.

At the present time a proportion of these beds are occupied by patients who are suffering from chronic complaints and for whom the specialist staff at the General Hospital have done everything possible. The suggestion that such patients should be discharged from hospital and looked after and medically treated in their own homes is not a practicable one, as in many cases their home conditions are such that it is impossible for their relatives if they have any to accept the responsibility. Such being the case, on grounds of humanity alone such chronic cases are kept in the General Hospital and occupy beds which could be used for the admission of patients suffering from curable acute conditions.

The present Government has been aware of this problem for some time, and decided that the solution of the problem was the provision of a hospital for the chronic sick. The foundation stone of this hospital has now been laid, and it is planned that it should be open by the end of next year. When completed it will have beds for 394 patients. As these patients will not require the same concentration of medical care, the cost of maintaining a bed in this hospital will be considerably less than the cost of maintaining one at the General Hospital. And the beds at the General Hospital will be available for patients for whom attention is urgent while the less acute cases can be comfortably looked after in the hospital to be built on this beautiful site.

Your invitation cards describe this hospital as one for the chronic sick. This is a strictly scientific description but it is one which will not be used when the hospital is open. Psychology too is a branch of medicine, and it would be as poor psychology as to have the motto "All hope abandon ye who enter here" set up on the lintel of the door. It is as harsh as the description of a hospital as a Hospital for Incurable Diseases which comes from the time when concentration was made on the disease rather than the patient.

Before the Hospital is formally opened we will have a name which will identify the hospital yet give it the more humane approach which in a home of this kind is all the more necessary, for were it not for considerations of humanity here would be no purpose in making this special provision for what will become the "home" for a group of the less fortunate of our community.

In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen, this foundation stone is another firm guarantee that it is the aim of your government, to the fullest extent that resources of skill, materials and funds allow, to provide a service which will maintain Singapore's reputation of being one of the healthiest cities of the world. Here is a new challenge to us, and a new cause for that pride in effort and achievement which is the basis of loyalty among our citizens old, new and about to be registered.

JUNE 3, 1957.

(Time issued 1430 hours).