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12 NOV 1977
Acc. No. NARC
77 0051 59

MC. NOV.5/77 (FOREIGN AFFAIRS)

SPEECH BY THE SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ENCIK A. RAHIM ISHAK, AT THE SIGLAP COMMUNITY CENTRE KINDERGARTEN GRADUATION CEREMONY ON SATURDAY, NOV. 5, 1977 AT 7 P.M.

Kindergartens in Singapore have in the past been established and run by private individuals, organisations, churches and political parties. The Social Welfare Department ran what it called "Children's Centres" which were in fact kindergarten classes in community centres. These have now been taken over by the People's Association. The Siglap Community Centre Kindergarten is one of those which is under the charge of the People's Association.

At the moment the Education Act has limited jurisdiction over kindergarten education. It takes care of the formal registration of the kindergartens. It would appear to me that the time has come for their closer supervision. To some extent, this process has already taken place in some of the new kindergartens. It could be further enhanced and developed. I am not suggesting that the Government should take over the kindergartens in Singapore. It would be too expensive to do so, not only from the financial view point, in terms of the training of teachers, salaries and so on but also in turn of logistics such as manpower allocation, evaluation of the new projects and the acquisition and utilisation of lands.

Yet the absence of certain policy link-ups between kindergarten education and that at the higher levels has certain drawbacks. There is a need, for example, to upgrade the methods of teaching, the curricula, school hours, etc., in the kindergartens. Although there are two kindergarten inspectors in the Ministry of Education, their roles are more advisory in nature.

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On the surface of it, it might appear that children of pre-school age do not need that kind of guidance for moulding attitudes related to nation-building. This is a fallacy. There is, I believe, a strong case for all concerned to help in ensuring a continuity, from pre-school age, in the general process of up-bringing our children and in the nurturing of positive values among the very young. Our education and cultural policies have been formulated with the multi-fold purposes of racial integration and harmony, the inculcation of racial, religious and cultural tolerance, and understanding. Even if these ideas could not be easily understood at pre-school age, there is at least a need for the children to be exposed to and consciously guided in such an environment. This would have lasting impact.

Teachers in the various kindergartens in existence may not have the certain qualifications. This aspect of the problem, I believe, was taken care of by the Adult Education Board and lately by the Institute of Education which runs courses for kindergarten teachers. However, there is also a need for kindergarten teachers to be able to carry out their duties parallel to their counterparts in the schools. I realise that it is not possible for all these to be accomplished in a short space of time but at least an attempt could be made to achieve the objectives I have mentioned, gradually and wherever possible.

I wish teachers, pupils of the Siglap Community Centre Kindergarten continuing success and also that the residents in this area would make full use of the facilities provided in this community centre.

NOVEMBER 5, 1977.