

18 SEP 1982

**PRESS RELEASE**

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11-1/82/09/08.

SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS,  
AT A NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION DINNER, AT SHEARES HALL,  
KENT RIDGE ON WEDNESDAY, 8 SEPTEMBER '82 AT 7.30 PM

Your invitation to me to be the guest-of-honour of the National Day dinner of your hall of residence brings back memories of my undergraduate days in the former University of Malaya in Singapore. I am told by your Master, Prof Lawrence Chia, that most of the senior students among you came from the old Dunearn Road Hostel (DRH). This again brings back nostalgic memories of my stay in DRH. Just as you are the first batch of undergraduates to stay in Sheares Hall, I was among the first batch of students to occupy DRH when it was first opened in October 1952. That was nearly three three decades ago.

At that time the University of Malaya was new, having been founded in 1949. The student enrolment was small compared to the National University of Singapore (NUS). So almost all of us knew one another. Those of us who stayed in the University hostels knew one another even more closely. Many lasting friendships were struck. This became a matter of great political significance later because the students in those days came from both sides of the causeway and it was among this group that many of the top leaders in the government and administration of Singapore and Malaysia came from. Many of our permanent secretaries and their counterparts in Malaysia known as secretary-generals of ministries knew each other well as students in the University hostel. This has been a great help in maintaining close relationship between the two countries.

To quote a few examples. One of my former permanent secretaries, Home Affairs, the late Mr Tay Seow Huch was a contemporary of mine in DRH. So was Mr S R Nathan who was until recently Permanent Secretary, Foreign Affairs. The present Secretary-General of the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs was

also a contemporary of mine in DRH and so also was his immediate predecessor. The present Secretary-General of the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Malaysian Chief Secretary were also my contemporaries in DRH.

During my undergraduate days both Singapore and the Federation of Malaya were in the midst of political turmoil. There was the Malayan Emergency with the shooting war going on with the Communist Terrorists in the jungle and the Communist United Front agitation in the towns. The constitutional struggle among nationalist groups for self-government and independence was gaining momentum. Inevitably those of us who were politically minded were drawn into and became involved in the struggle for independence. Although only some were actively involved the rest of the students were deeply conscious of its significance. They knew that being among the student elite the time would come after their graduation that they would be called upon to shoulder the political and administrative responsibilities of self-government and independence.

Among the politically-minded students the challenge was not only the struggle for independence but after attaining it, what form of political, economic and social system would emerge. To determine and shape this was something that had to be fought for. In February 1953 the first political club, the University of Malaya Socialist Club was formed with the official approval of the then Vice-Chancellor. The politically-minded students joined it. It gave the impetus to political activity among the students. Members of the Club had varying ideas of socialism and how to shape the future of the country. But all were ardent nationalists. Two main groups of members began to emerge in the Club: the Marxists who believed that to bring social and economic change in society, violent revolution should not be excluded and the non-Marxists who believed in gradual change through constitutional means and in parliamentary democratic processes somewhat similar to that of the British Labour Party. In the former group there were amongst them communist sympathisers. But there was tacit understanding by all that the fight against colonialism should take precedence over those ideological differences.

It was also understood that at some point of time as the common enemy Colonialism was ousted there would be a crucial fight

between the non-communist nationalists and the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) and their supporters to determine what kind of government and social system our country should have. In fact even at that time three main political forces were emerging in the political arena. They were (1) the Colonial Government and those locals who collaborated with it to protect their personal vested interests, (2) the CPM and their sympathisers, and (3) the Nationalists who wanted genuine independence with free elections under a parliamentary democratic system of government. As it later turned out, the Nationalists won but not without going through very trying situations such as bloody riots and mass agitation organised by the Communist United Front. In Singapore it was a fight not without its anxious moments when at times the outcome was touch and go. For those who took part in it and won, it was a highly worthwhile and satisfying task. They were able to lay the foundations of a sound economic and political system of government upon which our present political stability and economic prosperity has been built.

To our younger generation of Singaporeans, there are many lessons to be learnt from our struggle for independence, the fight against the Communist United Front, against the communalists who could have caused racial disharmony and how we went about building up our economy and a credible defence capability, and made what Singapore is today. It is therefore most apt that you have chosen the occasion of the first National Day celebration of Sheares Hall to organise an exhibition on the theme "Singapore - Since Independence". It is said that "history repeats itself" and "there is nothing new in history". Thus it would be extremely foolish of us not to benefit from the lessons of history and avoid possible disasters. You are also organising a forum on the theme "Singapore - The Next Ten Years". This shows that you are fully conscious and concerned for the future of Singapore. This is most gratifying as you form a large proportion of the elite among our younger generation on whose shoulders must lie the responsibility of providing continuity.

Providing continuity on what had been achieved by the older generation and to build an even better future for our people is just as difficult and challenging task as that of fighting for and laying the political and social foundations of our present

stability and prosperity. This is because Singapore is a small island Republic with no natural resources. Our entire economy has been built upon our human resources and strategic location. We earn our living by rendering services whether in providing facilities to ships, aircrafts, or through our financial institutions or to tourists. For whatever goods we produced we have to import the raw materials. Thus if our services are not patronised because they are not provided efficiently or the goods we produce cannot be sold because they are not competitive enough and there is a prolonged world economic recession, then we would have no money to buy even food which we must also import. Our people will then have to starve because we have no land to grow our own food.

Our economy and closely related to it, our political stability, are very vulnerable to any adverse world economic situation or any political disaster that would affect oil supplies. These are stark realities of our Singapore situation which should bear repeating because they are often lost sight of particularly when we are enjoying conditions of prosperity. This is the reason why the government has been going all out to improve work ethics, training and skill of our workers so that we can be more competitive. It is for the same reason that the government is encouraging savings by increasing CPF contributions so that our people can have something set aside for the rainy day. The government is also discouraging state welfarism for the same reason.

Thus for Singapore to continue to survive and prosper, we cannot afford to relax the strict management of our finances. To sustain our economy our people must continue to work hard. Thus those of you of the younger generation who will be called upon to shoulder the responsibilities of providing continuity in the government and the administration of the country must not only bear in mind this crucial fact of life but must also be able to convince and move our people to practise it. That is the only way by which we can preserve what we have built and continue to be prosperous in the 1990s and beyond. Any relaxation and reversal of such a policy would mean disaster. And this would be as difficult and challenging a task as that faced by the older generation in the struggle of the 60s and early 70s, for our younger workers who have not known hardship, would tend towards complacency. To

accomplish it, will require as much gumption, determination, dedication as well as political sensitivity in winning the hearts and minds of the people as that displayed by the older generation of leaders. I, however, believe that you will rise to the occasion and strive to do what is necessary and not waver in order to protect and preserve your heritage.

Since your hall of residence is the successor to DRH, you have already built up a tradition of service to the community from the record of years of welfare and community projects organised by the Duncarn Road hostelites. I understand that there is a plan to set up an NPCC Unit within the University and that it had been spearheaded by members of Sheares Hall. This is most commendable and is one more example of your concern and commitment to serve the community. I have no doubts that you will live up to your motto "Dare To Reach The Highest". May I wish you every success in all your endeavours in the years ahead.

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