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SPEECH BY MR HO CHENG CHOON, MP FOR GEYLANG EAST AND
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT, AT THE GEYLANG EAST CONSTITUENCY NATIONAL
DAY CELEBRATION ON 17 AUGUST 1978 AT 7.30 PM

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I am happy to be here this evening to join you in celebrating
our Republic's 13th anniversary.

Thirteen years have elapsed since we attained our independence in
1965. We have come a long way. We have surmounted the trials and
tribulations of a young nation. There is political stability in the
country today. There is full employment. There is a clean and green
environment. There is affluence. Most importantly, there is renewed
confidence to meet the challenges that lie ahead in the 1980s. What we
are today is mainly due to the character of our people.

Thirteen years have transformed us. We have become more closely
knitted as Singaporeans. We are known internationally for our pragmatism
and hardheadedness. We are not static, but moving relentlessly forward
all the time. We are achievement-orientated. We live in a society
which has no prejudices against the minority groups. Everyone, regardless
of his race and creed, has equal opportunity to rise to the top. These
are things worth preserving, for now and in the future.

Thirteen years of transformation has, unfortunately, also produced
a new breed of so-called ugly Singaporeans. This small group of people
who think of themselves all the time and give a bad name to Singapore.
They have become too selfish and individualistic to the extent of not
caring for the community at large. They are not fully committed to
society which has nurtured them. Worse, they think that Singapore owes
them a living.

These "ugly Singaporeans" seem to forget that what they are or
have achieved today is due in no small measures to the combined efforts
of other people. They are still bent on pursuing materialism which, to
them, is the prime objective. Events in the last few months have shown
that this trend is becoming more and more apparent. It is pernicious and

has to be checked.

I would urge these people to be more committed to the society in which they live. Let me elaborate how an individual can be more committed to the society. A society is like the roots of a tree. The people are the leaves. The leaves flourish and enjoy the sunlight because of the roots. So are people and society. They are inseparable. Hence the people ought to make positive contributions to the society in which they live. There are better things in life than the mere pursuit of materialism like nurturing the young to become caring and responsible adults. This is one area where teachers, parents, and community leaders can do a tremendous lot which will benefit the nation in the long run. They have to blaze the trail for the young to follow.

I would also like to urge the people to cultivate an interest for the arts and culture which have more intrinsic value than materialism. It makes for gracious living. This is what we are lacking in Singapore today. I think the time is opportune for the ugly Singaporeans to develop a more balanced personality. Otherwise, we will not get very far in projecting ourselves as good citizens of Singapore.

Thirteen years of independence have given us a better standard of living in terms of housing, medicine, education and employment. These have been achieved through sheer hard work. We must not be complacent but continue to work hard and constantly improve ourselves.
