

SPEECH BY MR LIM KIM SAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE INSTALLATION DINNER OF INCOMING PRESIDENT OF ROTARY CLUB OF SINGAPORE, WEST HELD AT ISLAND BALLROOM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL ON 26TH JUNE 1975 AT 7.30 P.M.

I am very glad to have the opportunity this evening to renew acquaintance with the Rotary Club movement in Singapore for it was at a luncheon meeting of the Singapore Rotary Club that I first spoke at a public function. That was many many years ago. The lunch meeting was held at the Adelphi Hotel, one of the two premier hotels in Singapore then.

The Adelphi Hotel is being demolished now and will soon remain just a memory, while the Rotary Club has, on the other hand multiplied from one to five Clubs. Your activities have increased to keep pace with the increasing needs in the Republic for humanitarian and welfare services. Your expansion is a testimony to the resilience and adaptability of your organisation. You have passed the test of time - a test as stringent, if not more, than your own four way test.

Your outgoing President has provided me with a copy of your Club's activities in the past. These numerous and diverse activities are laudable but sometimes one is apt to confuse the desire for publicity with charity.

Looking through your welfare programme for the last year, it appears to me that perhaps your energies and resources may have been diffused over too wide a range of projects.

I would like to suggest that each Club concentrate on fewer projects each year. These projects can be rotated among you so that in the course of time each and every Club will complete the range of subjects which you now try to cover in one year. This concentration of effort and resources must result in a more productive and effective service and will enable you to attack the core of the problem instead of glossing over it.

Your welfare programme for the aged is one that attracts my attention most. I feel more could and should be done for these old folks not only by Rotary but by other organisations dedicated to serve the human need. The aged have in their time contributed to society. We are the beneficiaries of their service, sacrifice and suffering and now it is their turn to receive help and kindness. They deserve a place of

honour among us. More than an obligation it is our duty to help them maintain their dignity. The least we can do is to help them spend their autumn years in serenity and contentment.

In 1956 I visited Sweden and the highlight of our tour was a visit to the town of Vallingbe, the forerunner of the concept of satellite town. Vallingbe was proud of its special facilities for the aged of the community and of course the Old Folks Home was included in the tour. I remember making a fervent wish that such a situation would never reach Singapore, that our aged would always have their own to care for them. Unfortunately, the problem is now with us and it is growing with the increasing number of aged persons in our society. In 1957 there were 92,793 persons aged 55 years old and above. This figure increased two-fold to 183,652 in 1970. In absolute terms the number of those above 60 is expected to be more than doubled from 118,600 in 1970 to 266,800 in the year 2000.

Initially, only those with no relatives are placed in old folks homes since it is the tradition for people in this part of the world to provide for their aged parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles or even distant cousins. But in recent years, even those with families have found their way to these homes for the aged. The family unit is breaking down and the process is hastened by increasing industrialisation and urbanisation. As the family unit disintegrates the old folks are likely to be discarded first.

Ironic as it may seem the process of industrialisation may in the long run help to arrest and perhaps reverse the erosion of traditional veneration and respect for the aged.

The success of our industrialisation programme has made it difficult and costly to find domestic help. More and more young working couples are finding it convenient to leave their children with their parents instead of unreliable domestic help. This is mutually beneficial. The children will receive the love and care they need. The parents can carry on with their occupation and their occasional social activities with a free mind. The old will not be made to feel useless and unwanted. Soon I hope the young will realise that they need the aged as much as the aged need them.

The H&DB has implemented a pilot scheme for old folks. Ten

improved one-room flats are rented out to the Council of Social Services to house old folks at Henderson Estate.

I am convinced, however, that there is a need now for housing for the aged. I have therefore directed the H&DB to plan for suitable accommodation for them in the housing estates. This is to enable the old folks the opportunity to continue to participate in communal life and to enjoy the companionship which they are accustomed to while living apart from their relatives in the same estate. Mothers who have to leave their children for a few hours can avail themselves of the baby sitting services of some of the old folks.

While occasional drives and outings will break the tedium of the residents of old folks home, a regular schedule of personal service will definitely lessen their burden and brighten their lives.

Your membership is made up of people from diverse trade, different professions and occupation. The doctors among you can give regular medical service. The architects can help design alterations to their quarters and the contractors can carry out the work if not for free at least at cost. The interior decorator can help brighten the houses. Members can pay regular visits and organise outings and other recreational activities for them.

I am confident that with your enthusiasm and the vigour with which you pursue your projects, much more can be done by members of your Club.

JUNE 26, 1975.

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