

++++
+ EMBARGOED TILL AFTER DELIVERY +
+ PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY +
++++

SPEECH BY MR. ONG SOO CHUAN, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(FOREIGN AFFAIRS) AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR NEE SOON
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE FAMILY PLANNING SEMINAR
FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS OF THE JALAN KAYU, NEE SOON,
SEMBAWANG AND THOMSON CONSTITUENCIES AT HOTEL EQUATORIAL,
BUKIT TIMAH ROAD, ON SUNDAY, JULY 6, 1975 AT 9 A.M.

Rapid population growth is the root cause of many problems confronting mankind. More than half of the world's population lives in Asia. The population growth rates of Asian countries are generally higher than the average growth rate of world population. Asia can therefore be described as the core area facing acute population problems.

The Republic of Singapore has a total area of 584 sq.km (225 sq. mile) and her population density averages 3,675 persons per sq. km (9,400 persons per sq.mile). Singapore, with a population of more than 2.2 million, is one of the most densely populated country in the world.

In any country, a rapid population growth together with high population density would have serious repercussions on the people's livelihood. The most damaging effect is the erosion of the country's economic resources. The social and economic problems brought by over-population are those relating to education, housing, employment, welfare of children, medical care, transport and communication, food supplies, etc.

The Government has recognised the urgent need for population control and has launched a nation-wide family planning campaign since 1966. Apart from providing young women with educational and professional guidance on family planning, the Government has also created more employment opportunities for them in the public service and the industrial and commercial fields. Women are as competent as men at their jobs. The women in Singapore are now also very cautious in deciding the age of their marriage. They are also aware that their earnings would help improve the financial standing of the family and that too many children will increase their financial

burden and lower their productivity and performance in their jobs. For this reason, the Singapore women's traditional concept of fertility is changing and this is evident from the fact that the birth rate in Singapore had dropped from 2.9 per cent in 1966 to 1.9 per cent in 1974.

Family planning is well accepted by almost all Singaporeans. Nearly every married couple has used contraceptives to plan the number of children they would like to have and when to have them. Sterilisation has also gained wide acceptance amongst those who have decided to set a limit to the size of their families. What, therefore, seems to be the problem?

The objective of the National Family Planning and Population Programme is to convince couples to have no more than two children irrespective of the sex of their children. Unfortunately, this objective has not been fully realised. Although many people in Singapore have accepted the two-child family norm, there is still a minority who wishes to have three, four, or more children. For example, last year, of 43,268 babies born, 14,566 or 34 per cent were of the third or higher birth order. There is thus a need for more motivation work to convince couples that they should stop at two children.

Population projections indicate that zero population growth, a state where the number of births is equal to the number of deaths, will only be reached about 50 years after replacement level or a two-child family on the average has been attained and maintained. By then, the population in Singapore would have reached four million. Furthermore, if we were to stabilise our population at four million, we will have to maintain a two-child family norm for all time. Even a three-child family on the average means a 50 per cent increase over a two-child family. This must mean a much larger population in Singapore which it cannot accommodate and support.

Although Singapore has a very high density population without any natural resources, we have been able to maintain an annual economic growth rate of 14 per cent. This is the result of efficient utilisation of our human resources for economic development. More than 50 per cent of our population are young people. If they reproduce without restriction as their parents did to have many children and grandchildren,

Singapore will3/-

Singapore will be beset with numerous problems such as housing, food shortage, unemployment, environmental pollution, education problems, inadequate health and other social facilities.

Therefore, I consider that the school is the ideal place to begin with the promotion of demographic studies. This is very important because with the acquisition of a sound knowledge of demographic education, the students will be better equipped to adopt a more rational fertility behaviour in future.

The promotion of demographic studies should not be confined only to the dissemination and imparting of knowledge but it should be done systematically so that the students can acquire a knowledge which would be relevant to them and Singapore. This task requires not only time but also a specialised body charged with the responsibility of organising a systematic course on demographic studies.

The reason for including population studies in the school curriculum is very simple. Although most of the current population control programmes are aimed at bringing down population growth, their emphasis is on medical service relating to methods of birth control. It is therefore important to emphasize that other than medical service, there is a need to have a change in attitude and behaviour among the people. Apart from the schools, many civil organisations can be called upon to promote demographic studies so that young men and women can be fully equipped before reaching fertility age.

I would like to emphasize that the promotion of demographic studies in schools has the following advantages:

- (a) The school offer an ideal environment for learning. By making use of the schools, there is no need to set up new institutions.
- (b) The students whose ideas and concepts have yet to take shape are at the most impressionable age.
- (c) In schools, learning is more or less "compulsory." This will enable us to overcome the difficulty of persuading them to learn. In fact, the key to the success or failure of any social education programme depends on the willingness of the public to learn.

The theme of this Seminar "Girl or Boy, Two is Enough" pinpoints the current objectives of the National Family Planning and Population Programme. I am told that this theme incorporates three important concepts:

- (a) Two children is enough.
- (b) The sex of the children is not important.
- (c) It is better to have a girl than to have a boy in many instances (this is evident from the phrase "Girl or Boy" instead of "Boy or Girl").

Community leaders in Citizens' Consultative Committee and Management Committee of Community Centres, by virtue of their position of leadership in our society, can exert great influence in the life style of the community. Even those older members of our society with many children reflecting a fertility behaviour of the past, can actively promote the two-child family norm for our future generations. They can speak with conviction, derived from experience, the problems of many children. Their own fertility behaviour in the past, in an era of different technology and environment, not to mention of different norms and social values, should not preclude them from engaging in promotional efforts for future generations to adopt a national fertility behaviour befitting today's modern Singapore.

I call upon all community leaders, old and young, to devote their time and effort to assist in achieving our national goal --- a two-child family norm in Singapore.

I have great pleasure in declaring open the Family Planning Seminar for Community Leaders of the Jalan Kayu, Nee Soon, Sembawang and Thomson Constituences.
