

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF STATE (PMO)
TUAN HAJI YA'ACOB MOHAMED AT THE OPENING
CEREMONY OF "COMBAT INFECTIOUS DISEASES"
CAMPAIGN AT DEWAN KG UBI ON 7 DEC '76
AT 8.00 P.M.

The People of Singapore should be proud of the fact that the standard of health in Singapore is generally high and it is considered as one of the highest amongst countries in this region. However, we should not be satisfied with the standard we have achieved as long as there are still certain serious infectious diseases plaguing our people.

In the "Combat Infectious Diseases" campaign launched in September, six infectious diseases were selected, not only for special attention by the community concerning their dangers, but also to impress upon them to do all they can to eradicate the diseases. The six diseases are venereal diseases, tuberculosis, food borne diseases, leprosy, dengue haemorrhagic fever and malaria.

The incidence of venereal diseases has been rising over the past 10 years. There were a total of 4,499 cases of syphilis and gonorrhoea reported in 1975 as compared with 2,997 cases in 1965. It is estimated that the actual incidence of syphilis is probably twice as high as that reported and gonorrhoea 4 to 5 times the number reported.

The number of new cases of tuberculosis notified in 1975 was a high figure of 3,097. A survey carried out in 1975 showed that about one in every 100 persons above the age of 15 years in Singapore has tuberculosis. There were 420 deaths due to tuberculosis in 1975.

Among the food borne diseases, typhoid and food poisoning continue to occur in our population mainly because of poor personal and food hygiene practices among the hawkers and food handlers in restaurants. There were 500 cases of typhoid in 1975.

73 new cases of leprosy were reported in 1975. This shows a declining trend compared to the 230 cases reported in 1965.

Malaria and dengue haemorrhagic fever are mosquito-borne diseases. Although there were no major outbreaks of these 2 diseases in the past few years, 443 cases of malaria and 59 cases

of dengue haemorrhagic fever were reported in 1975. Continued vigilance and preventive measures are essential to control these diseases.

All these diseases impose heavy social and economic costs on the people who catch the diseases, on their families as well as on the community. The continuing prevalence of these diseases not only poses a continuing danger to the public but also imposes a heavy burden on the economy of the country because of the many man hours of work wasted as a result of prolonged periods of sickness absenteeism.

The immediate objective of the "Combat Infectious Diseases" Campaign is firstly to promote early detection and treatment of these diseases, and secondly to motivate the public to take preventive measures. This can be achieved by educating the public on the complications of the diseases if left untreated, on how these diseases are spread, and what preventive measures can be taken. The longer term objective is that the incidence of all these diseases will fall.

Every member of the public has a role to play in the control of these infectious diseases. In the first place, whenever signs and symptoms are suspected, early diagnosis and treatment should be sought from the doctor. This can help to prevent later complications of these diseases.

Secondly, preventive measures should be taken to avoid these diseases, e.g. children should be given BCG injections to prevent tuberculosis, hawkers and food handlers must practise good personal and food hygiene to prevent typhoid and food poisoning and householders must prevent mosquito breeding in their premises.

All the above diseases can be prevented, but there are still many amongst us who refuse to take preventive measures. Therefore, in order to make Singapore a strong nation, prosperous, peaceful and happy, our people must be healthy and strong and we must, in turn, leave behind a healthier and stronger generation because healthy and strong people are contributions to the national development, and a prosperous and peaceful nation.

In short, we must adopt as a slogan of our way of life, "PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE".