

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE'S ACTION PARTY  
AND SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
AT THE OPENING OF THE P.A.P. BRADDELL HEIGHTS  
BRANCH ON 10TH DECEMBER, 1976

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This is a new branch set up by the People's Action Party following the re-allocation of electoral constituencies because of urban renewal and increase or decrease of population. Our purpose of establishing this Braddell Heights branch is to serve the people of this constituency.

Although the branch is new, the party was formed 22 years ago. Since 1954, one year before the historical Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian nations, the party has undergone various trials and tribulations. Those of us who have been associated with the party from the earlier periods will remember the various difficulties we have gone through and overcome. It was an exciting and valuable experience. At the time when the party was formed, countries in Asia and Africa were actively involved in anti-colonial struggle. Like all anti-colonial forces in Afro-Asia, the P.A.P. co-operated with all forces including the communist and racialist in driving out our common target - the colonial rulers. The years of 1954-59 was a period when anti-colonial slogans had a magnetic power in harrassing the energy and resources of the people towards ending the evils of colonialism. But once independence or self-government was attained however, every country in Afro-Asia invariably faces the problem of power-struggle between non-communist or anti-communist national forces on the one hand and the communist forces on the other. In most cases, racialist or tribal forces joined in to further complicate matters. A large part of the time and energy of the leaders and people of most Afro-Asian countries were dissipated in such wasteful but sometimes inevitable struggle for supremacy and powers left vacuum by the withdrawal of colonial forces. Meanwhile, the ordinary folks who thought that the ending of colonial exploitation would bring about better living conditions and human dignity were disappointed. Slogans have lost their magical power as people became more realistic and less emotional. Experiences have taught them to differentiate between realities and empty promises.

The P.A.P. came into power at a time when Singapore was saddled with serious economic problems, growing unemployment and social unrest. During the past 17 years, despite the fact that we had to dissipate some of our time and energies to deal with destructive forces of communist subversion and communal disorder, our government has through realistic and pragmatic policies and hard work delivered to the people the fruits of independence. Before 1959 when we took office, our citizens had to pay coffee money to get even a poorly constructed one-room flat. I remember that in 1958, the then Manager of the Singapore Improvement Trust who was a British colonial had publicly stated that Singapore's housing problem could not be solved for the next 50 years. Today, nearly 50% of our population are living in our HDB flats and by 1980 some 70% of our citizens will be housed in HDB flats and half of them will be owning their own flats. Before 1959, it was a common sight to see uneducated children roaming the streets. Today, not a single school-going child is not in school. In 1959, unemployment was rife. Opening of a cigarette factory was front-page news as it was a rare event. Today our industrialisation has developed to an extent that we have issued some 150,000 work permits to foreign workers to cater for our needs.

Since independence, we have through the effort and co-operation of our people developed our defence forces to give our citizens a sense of security. This sense of security and political stability was also an important factor in our success in attracting foreign investment here to provide employment for our people. We have since independence in 1965 established friendly relations with our neighbours, helped to strengthen Asean, made friends with many nations of the world, communist and non-communist on the basis of mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

We have not solved all our problems. No nation however powerful and invincible can claim that it has solved all problems. But we have done better than most nations, including countries far more developed and advanced than ours.

It is easy for opposition parties, especially during election time to make wild promises because they know that they do not have to fulfill their promises. Unless they can become the government their promises are empty words. On the other hand, what our party has promised it has done. It is true that we still have to overcome some old problems and many new ones such a possible further increase in oil prices, the impending economic recession and the security problems facing us in Asean after the communist victory in Indochina. But, with the usual pragmatic approach, careful planning, and most important the continued support and hard work of the people, we can solve most of the problems. And we can further improve the quality of life of our people and provide them with a sense of security.

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