

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • TEL: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 3362207 / 3362271

04-1/82/10/22.

SPEECH BY MR S DHANABALAN, MINISTER FOR CULTURE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AT THE COURTESY CAMPAIGN BUFFET DINNER AT THE ISTANA
ON FRIDAY, 22 OCTOBER '82 AT 7.30 PM

The Courtesy Campaign, in its fourth year, continues to enjoy wide support. This has been made possible by the enthusiasm shown by the campaign organisers in Government departments, private organisations, and grass-roots institutions. Courtesy has been seen as important in work situations, on the road and in fostering better neighbourliness. It is not surprising therefore to find more than 300 activities organised by Government departments and 190 activities organised by Citizens' Consultative Committees, Residents' Committees and the People's Association this year.

The workforce continues to be an important target group. Last year, the unions launched the campaign and planned programmes for the workforce. This year, the managements with help from the two employer federations, Singapore Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (SFCCI) and Singapore National Employers' Federation (SNEF), were invited to reach out to the workforce with the campaign message. While the managements of the banking and retail industries continue to give the campaign wholehearted support, the managements in the industrial and manufacturing sectors are still not organising enough in-house programmes. The reason may be that these sectors have less dealings with public - they make and sell a product which often does not involve direct contact with the public. But a courteous atmosphere can do much to improve the working environment. The two employer federations can do much to prod their members and encourage them to learn how to integrate courtesy programmes with teamwork and higher productivity.

Courtesy cannot be legislated. You can legislate to ensure that people conduct themselves in such a way that law and order are preserved. But courtesy goes beyond the preservation of

law and /2.

law and order. It goes beyond the mechanics of good interpersonal relationship. Courtesy is the quality that determines the tone of the community and the society. It shows a consideration for the feelings of others, a respect for others that goes beyond keeping within the law or keeping within rules.

The foundations for courtesy must therefore be laid early in life - in the homes and the schools. In the schools courteous attitudes must be implanted by the example of teachers as well as by imaginative lessons. I have often wondered what the impact would be if a school had a year-round campaign asking all its students to show special courtesy - a smile, using the words "please", "thank you", "I'm sorry", etc. - in their daily dealings with the school attendants, tuckshop hawkers, drivers and conductors of buses serving the school, etc. It cannot leave the attitudes of these harassed adults untouched. Such an attempt will teach children to consider these people with whom they come with daily contact as persons and not as part of the furniture and fixture in the school or the bus.

While we must lay the foundation in the early years of the children, we must do what we can to change the attitudes of the adults with us today who have not been educated in the finer aspects of inter-personal behaviour. Apart from appealing to whatever latent finer sensibilities they may have, we have to also unfortunately show the material advantages and disadvantages of being courteous and even punish the discourteous.

Let me take one example - courtesy on the roads. Much of the rules of courtesy are in fact rules and regulations in our traffic laws. Thus courtesy on the roads can be achieved by strict and effective enforcement action, by the ROV and Traffic Police.

That these efforts have borne some fruit is indicated by the Times Organisation survey conducted in May this year. The survey showed that over two-thirds of the respondents considered drivers, conductors and taxi-drivers as being more courteous compared to 12 months ago. It is quite evident that sustained efforts will pay off. For next year's campaign, we need to look into the courtesy levels of motor cyclists and lorry drivers as they have not been given good ratings in the latest survey. With

the increase of heavy goods vehicles on the roads much more need to be done especially by the management of the enterprises which operate these vehicles. Singaporeans have long suffered and put up with the dangers posed by the construction truck drivers on our roads. I notice that these trucks have grown to behemothian sizes while passenger vehicles on our roads have become smaller because of energy costs. Truck drivers thus pose a serious road hazard. One can see, for example, truck drivers of Resources Development Corporation tearing up and down Bukit Timah Road with scant regard to other road users. The management of the company has obviously a very important role to play in improving the situation - a role that is even more important than that of the law enforcement officers. Methods of payment, scheduling of trips, etc. are integral parts of a programme to promote courtesy on the roads. In the case of retail business, management pays for the discourtesy of the employees through poor image and loss of business. The same motivations do not exist for the truck operators. Perhaps we should have a system of publicly identifying the good and the bad companies among those who operate more than 10 vehicles. Public shame or approbation may have an effect.

In the public sector, departments have been looking into ways to improve and simplify their rules and procedures so as to lessen annoyance to the public. I also understand, and I find this encouraging, that several departments that were singled out in last year's **Straits Times** and **Nanyang** surveys as lacking in courtesy, have now instituted continuous programmes to improve levels of courtesy. But one must expect that the staff of Government departments which have to give negative answers to the public will have their patience taxed to the limit. Unfortunately, life being what it is, the breaking point often comes not with a difficult and unreasonable member of the public but with a more reasonable but ignorant member who follows one who has already given the Government official a difficult time. Thus the impression is given that Government officials bully those who are not aggressive. There was a time when Government servants were constantly reminded that they were just that - that is, servants of the public. They even ended letters with "I remain, your obedient servant". This was dispensed with sometime ago. Perhaps we should reintroduce this form.

All in all, we have made progress. I want to thank you all for your contributions to the campaign. Please continue your good work and sustain it throughout the year. I wish you a pleasant evening.