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SPEECH BY MR SIDEK BIN SANIFF, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (TRADE AND INDUSTRY) AND (SOCIAL AFFAIRS), AT THE KOLAM AYER CONSTITUENCY 18TH NATIONAL DAY DINNER AND OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE NEW COMMUNITY CENTRE HELD AT 3188 GEYLANG BAHRU
ON SUNDAY, 28 AUGUST 1983 AT 7.30 PM

We have two reasons for rejoicing tonight. Firstly, we are celebrating our 18th National Day. With our economy doing quite well, the second quarter showed a credible 6.1 per cent growth. Our prudent policy and hard work have paid off. With the present economic scenario it would be only wise for us to be cautious, keep ourselves trim, fit and disciplined. Secondly, we are witnessing the official opening of the Kolam Ayer Community Centre - our community centre.

Eighteen years of independence in a situation of peace and tranquility is no mean accomplishment, more so when we are living in a world that is subjected to constant and ever increasing friction which mostly culminates in bloodshed. The mere mention of countries or places like Arabia-Israel, Iran-Iraq, Vietnam-Kampuchea, Afghanistan, Libya-Chad, Argentina-Falkland Islands, Nicaragua-Honduras, Sabra-Shatilla, Belfast, Assam in India and, more recently, Sri Lanka, automatically stirs up within us feelings of sadness, disgust, enlightenment and gratitude - we are grateful in the sense that we have been spared from the cruelties and atrocities such as those perpetrated in those places. Bloodshed, which inevitably results in the loss of many lives, brings about a considerable drain in a country's assets and resources, for it affects the country's political stability, social harmony and economic structure. Worse, such

turmoils invariably cause the younger generation - the children - to be deprived of their fundamental rights, their right to equip themselves with education that will stand them in good stead to face their future. In the final analysis it also means the future of their countries since education is closely linked with the development of modern industry and the social changes that accompany it. And countries, especially countries with no natural resources must ensure that their most important natural resource - human beings - is fully exploited through education. And it is worth our while in reminding ourselves as workers that upgrading oneself from time to time and re-training are part and parcel of education. This is the only way to keep pace with the ever changing technological era.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like you to pause and ponder, and just imagine how at a time when our own children sling their school bags over their shoulders, the unfortunate children of these troubled countries sling guns instead over their shoulders. While we go from one hawker centre to another to enjoy the food sold there, many of the famished people of these countries would scurry from one trash bin to another in search of discarded food to relieve themselves of indescribable hunger. While we, as our economic position improves, upgrade from two- to three-room or four- to five-room flats, move from one constituency to another, these unfortunate souls would be seen moving from one village to another or even seeking refuge in other countries to escape from the hardships and sufferings in their own countries which they can claim as their own but hardly theirs anymore.

To this bleak scenario, I am sure we can add a host of other basic needs for decent living which these poor people are unable to enjoy - necessities like clothes, drinks, transport system, places of worship, medical facilities and centres of recreation. On our part, we enjoy modern life with

its fundamental human rights such as a democratically-elected government whose term of office is clearly spelt out in the Constitution, freedom of speech and, of course, personal security - security that is provided by the government machinery whose job is to protect the people.

We are aware that in many matters concerning material issues, the problems of tomorrow cannot possibly be solved by the methods of today, least of all by the methods of yesterday. Ironically, when we discuss non-material issues, issues concerning moral and value systems which encompass qualities of characteristics like conviction, sincerity, honesty, belief, respect, cooperation and courage which strengthen our spirit and our minds to face the unpredictable future, we have to go back to the values of yesterday or yesteryear. We are indeed fortunate to inherit the value systems of the Chinese, the Malays and the Indians of hundreds or even thousands of years ago. These are the pillars of our strength. The plural composition of our races, religions, languages and cultures has served to create a positive bond that binds us together. The fact that our children are mixing under a common school roof, together undergoing training during their national service stint, living in the same area and playing at the same playground and that many of us are active and involved in the same mass movement through grassroot organisations like the CCC, CCMC, CSC and now RC is but our way of maintaining and sustaining that strength.

On account of all these, we have every reason to rejoice and be grateful tonight to have witnessed the official opening of our community centre - the nerve centre of our community - which was built at a cost of over two million dollars. This is indeed a proud moment for all the residents of Kolam Ayer and a significant milestone in the history of our Constituency.

Since the Centre was opened to the residents four months ago, the many facilities ranging from the health-and-fitness room to the two ultra-modern squash courts have been fully utilised. This shows that the community leaders were right when they decided to set up the Building Fund Committee four years ago to raise funds to build a modern community centre in the Constituency. Their tireless efforts, together with the generous support from the residents and many other well-wishers from all walks of life, have succeeded in achieving the target of almost half a million dollars as the community's share of the total building cost of the new Centre. All those who have contributed to the building of this beautiful Centre certainly deserve our most sincere thanks and admiration.

In Singapore, the development of community centres goes back to the days before the Republic gained its Independence in 1965. The People's Association was set up in 1960 by an Act of Parliament and it inherited 28 community centres and five youth clubs. Our community needs then were simple and community centres in general provided facilities for simple pleasures such as chess, basketball, table tennis, cooking, sewing and literacy classes.

This picture of simple needs has drastically changed as a result of the significant socio-economic uplift Singapore achieved over the last two decades. Our society has undergone a drastic transformation. From an economy threatened by collapse, we now enjoy a standard of living which is amongst the highest in the world. The computer age has also arrived in Singapore. This puts us on par with not many other countries who can claim to have achieved such a high degree of technological advancement in recent years.

However, rapid economic development and technological advancement have not led to any neglect in our efforts to develop a more cohesive community. In this connection, the

People's Association continues to play its important role of catering to the community needs of the people. To be effective in such a task, the Association embarked on an ambitious community centre development programme in 1977. To date, a total of 44 modern centres have been built with 18 such centres in various stages of construction. (See Annexe A). Excluding land cost which can run into millions of dollars in land scarce Singapore, each of these modern community centres costs an average of over two million dollars to build.

The success of a modern centre like this new Kolam Ayer Community Centre depends very much on how we succeed in meeting the interests and needs of the residents. In our Constituency, practically all residents live in HDB flats. Taking Singapore as a whole, up to 90 per cent of the entire population could be living in HDB estates by the turn of the century. Given such a scenario, it is fundamental that community centres in general plan their programmes and activities to meet the needs and interests of the residents living in HDB estates. It is of equal importance that the management of community centres establishes very close rapport and working relationship with organisations which represent the residents. This is vital if community centres were to remain relevant. My advice to all those who have a role in the management of the new Centre is that they must constantly think of updating whatever the Centre is doing as well as to be innovative at all times. Technological changes will continue to influence and alter our lifestyle and needs at an unprecedented pace. We must prepare and equip ourselves to take on changes.

In a nutshell, this ultra-modern building is a reflection of the forward-looking attitude of our society. This building should be the focal point where physical and

mental activities meet. The convergence of these two elements eventually will lead to the creation of a more organised society.

This is not an easy task. It requires precise, effective and sustained leadership. Our constituents have demonstrated the willingness to participate in the programmes all this while and have responded favourably to the activities conducted. This should continue. At the same time, we must find new activities to cater to the needs of the young and adults, without forgetting the underprivileged.

It is hoped that with such an attitude, we will fully understand that in the giving, we are receiving - really receiving. And the most meaningful recognition we could receive with pride is the existence of a responsible and cohesive society of which the future generation can be proud of. This pride will in turn induce further a sense of responsibility which should automatically pass on to our children and their children's children as the trustworthy trustees of our nation.

It remains for me to extend once again my most sincere thanks to the Building Fund Committee, the Community Centre Management Committee and other community leaders, and all those who have contributed to the building of the new Kolam Ayer Community Centre.

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