

SPEECH BY MR LIM CHEE ONN, MP FOR BUKIT MERAH, ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SINGAPORE LIM SEE TAI CHONG SOO  
KIM LEONG TONG FAMILY SELF-MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION ON 22 DEC 88

Decades ago when the first settlers arrived on the shores of this island, their main concern was to find a job, save enough money from their toil and then return to their families from wherever they came. The environment they faced on their first arrival was a harsh one. They were amongst total strangers in a foreign land. But they laboured mightily, overcoming many obstacles and hostile conditions. Many succeeded in securing what they set out to achieve, saved enough from what they earned and returned to the land of their forebears. Others decided to adopt this new land as their home, settled down and raised their families.

One important development that helped these early settlers in their struggle to eke out a living was the setting up of clan associations and other similar groupings. It was logical and natural for persons with one form of links or another in their original home country to band together. Not only did they find solace and comfort in one another but more importantly they also put into practice the principle of mutual help. Members who were relatively better off assisted others simply because their forebears came from the same village or province, or because they spoke the same dialect, or bore the same family name. Similarly, the early arrivals helped the late arrivals to settle down quicker. This need to institutionalise such ties for the benefit of the individual as well as the group is not unique to our history. It is a common feature in most migrant societies and

could be deemed to be an important factor that contributed significantly to development of these societies. The Irish and Italians, or the Scots and Anglo-Saxons have set up similar associations wherever they settled.

The strength of these clubs or associations can be clearly seen in places such as the United States and Canada. The network and ties that go way back a few centuries are still very much in evidence. In fact ethnic groupings in some countries are not only alive and thriving but also often wield quite a lot of power in the societies in which they operate. Their influence in commerce and politics is rivalled only by religious groupings, trade unions, professional bodies, and old boy networks such as the Ivy League and Oxbridge societies. As <sup>these</sup> ~~such~~ associations cut across political affiliations they are often courted by those who seek to secure a political base. [Consequently they become important power brokers.] In other instances some ethnic associations exercise tremendous control over certain sectors of industry. <sup>For these reasons, associations</sup> ~~Consequently, they~~ have an immense influence on the lives of many today as they did in the past.

It is clear that clan associations and other forms of groupings of whatever origin <sup>continue to</sup> ~~do~~ have an important role to play in modern society. It will be wrong to believe that clan associations have outlived their purpose simply because they were formed for a specific purpose at a time when conditions were totally different from today's. The nub of the problem is how should clan

associations conduct their activities and what course should they set for themselves in a modern society. By the very nature and structure of these associations, their membership is restrictive and narrow. In view of this historical feature what role can a clan association play in a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural society that Singapore is?

The clear direction is for our clan associations to make a quantum leap in the guiding principle that governs ~~their~~ <sup>their</sup> function. <sup>They must now apply</sup> ~~(They must strive consciously to build on)~~ the principle of "unity is strength" <sup>not just</sup> for their clan members <sup>but for their nation as a whole. I would suggest that they</sup> and adopt the tenet ~~that~~ "Whatever is done to promote the interest of Singapore and other Singaporeans will also benefit our members in the long term." <sup>as a guiding principle.</sup> This conscious effort to reach out beyond the boundaries of membership will help clan associations to find their roles in modern Singapore.

These efforts must be more than the occasional scholarships, bursaries and other forms of assistance given to the poor and needy who are not members. Reaching out effectively requires deliberate and systematic attempts to link up and work with other associations and groupings from other races and cultures. ~~[It is only by so doing that our clan associations can be said to be helping in the further development of our nation.]~~ In fact the present search for a national ideology presents an excellent opportunity for clan associations to put into practice this new tenet and reach out beyond the natural boundary of their association.

As a start they could include representatives from other associations in their discussions and dialogues on the national ideology for Singapore. Alternatively they could discuss such matters jointly with other associations. Such exchanges of ideas, views and perceptions of our national identity will help immensely in developing an ideology that is truly representative. In this way our national ideology eventually adopted will be the result of an evolution of ideas reflecting truly the sentiments and feelings of members and Singaporeans.

This is an exciting and interesting challenge for our association. It should take this up and be amongst the first to lead the way in showing the new direction for clan associations. This is befitting our association whose past contributions are well known and respected. Moreover, the celebration of its diamond jubilee is a suitable occasion for our association to set itself firmly on a new course of helping our nation enter the 21st century.

This then is the task before us. We have helped our clan members in the past as they struggled against overwhelming odds to eke out a living. That our association has succeeded in this noble task is clearly seen by all. Let us now evoke this same spirit that drove our forefathers to form this association and use whatever resources we have to help all other Singaporeans so that finally it is Singapore, our nation, that will continue to thrive

~~finally it is Singapore, our nation, that will continue to thrive~~  
and prosper. The goal and spirit of our association have not  
changed. The circumstances have. It is up to us to take these  
new circumstances into account. If we do our clan association  
will continue to have a meaningful and purposeful role in our  
society.

Today is a happy occasion when so many members and friends,  
including those who have come from afar, are present to celebrate  
our clan's 60th anniversary. I am proud to say with confidence  
that our clan association the Singapore Lim See Tai Chong Soo Kiu  
Leong Tong Family Self-Management Association can and will rise to  
the occasion. We will continue to serve our members, fellow  
citizens, and nation well thereby realising the hopes and  
aspirations of our clan's founding fathers.

In closing I wish all of you a very happy and enjoyable  
celebration, and success in your endeavours.