

Speech of Mr. Yong Nyuk Lin, Minister for Health
at the Annual Presentation of Prizes and Certificates
to Nurses at the School of Nursing, General Hospital
on Tuesday, 29th September, 1964 at 1600 hours

May I begin by expressing how very pleased my wife and I are to be with you this evening, on the occasion of the Annual Presentation of Prizes and Certificates to 1963 and 1964 graduates of our School of Nursing. I understand that you belong to 6 recruitment groups, namely P.T.S. 33 to 38. Whilst I extend to you my heartiest congratulations, especially the 2 Prize winners, I am, however, a little disappointed to learn that the Prize-Giving Committee is of the opinion that there were no outstanding candidates this year as being worthy for 3 Medal awards (Gold, Silver and Bronze) and the Book Prize for Surgical Nursing.

There is no doubt whatsoever that our Senior Nursing and Medical Staff are insisting on very high standards during the whole course of your 3 years' training and that they are most conscientious in instilling the best traditions for our Nursing Service. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to them for their excellent work in the past and that they will continue with their good work for the future. It is not whether individual nurses should carry away Prizes each year, which determine the success or failure of our training system but whether our Nursing Service, as a whole, will rise to the occasion should an emergency arise and this I am proud to say they have proved in no uncertain manner, not once but 3 times within the last 10 weeks! Singapore is indeed fortunate that our trained Nurses are a truly dedicated lot and that I am most happy to be associated with you and your outstanding work in the service of the community.

When the first disturbances took place on July 21, we were caught unprepared, as our re-organisation plans to close down the Outpatient Dispensary and replace it with an Emergency/admission Unit at the General Hospital was 10 days ahead of time. Despite

the confusion which arose out of the sudden imposition of the curfew and the lack of alternative transport arrangements, our staff of all grades, however, rallied strongly in support in maintaining the medical services until relieved, so much so that we were able to look after 478 casualties, without a break-down.

On 1st August, I was very pleased to receive a letter from the General Hospital Nursing Staff Branch of the Amalgamated Union of Public Employees (A.U.P.E.) assuring me that "the A.U.P.E. is doing its best to unite the multi-racial society of Singapore" and that as soon as the first few casualties began to arrive on 21st July at the General Hospital the Union immediately called upon all its members to rise to the occasion" and concluded that "this Union will always co-operate and assist your Ministry in all its future undertakings and programmes for the public".

Learning from the bitter experiences of the July riots, we decided to draw up an Emergency Civil Disturbance Plan which was finalised and distributed to Heads of Departments by 1st September. When the 2nd disturbances came to pass on 4th September, not only did our Emergency Plan come into operation immediately but with the re-organisation of our Outpatient Services and establishment of the Emergency/Admission Unit at the General Hospital already in operation for one month, we were fortunately well geared to meet the second disturbances, and this time, the number of casualties were also fortunately much reduced at 116.

On 11th September, I was happy to receive a second letter, this time from the Singapore Government Medical and Dental Officers' Association which stated that "we appreciate fully the implication of the threat facing our national security and we pledge our loyalty and support for the Nation. We assure you of our fullest co-operation and if there is any assistance our Association can give your Ministry during this period of preparation we will gladly do so".

On 12th September, we were "alerted" again to "stand-by" for possible casualties arising out of an attempt to hold an illegal demonstration against National Service at Hong Lim Green by the pro-communist and anti-national Barisan Socialis. Thanks to the full co-operation of the public in Chinatown to appeals made by our Police to keep clear off the streets, there were only 6 minor casualties to deal with that day.

On 22nd September, yet a third welcome letter was received by me, this time from the Singapore Medical Association conveying the unanimous decision of its Council "to offer the professional services of the members of the Singapore Medical Association to assist Government in whatever way we can, in the event of any grave emergency arising from the present situation". This patriotic gesture from the Singapore Medical Association, the majority of whose members are in private practice is a milestone in the medical history of Singapore. I am glad to disclose that I shall be seeing their delegation on Friday, 2nd October, to discuss ways and means as to how to implement their kind offer of assistance.

I have spoken at length because I am convinced that our Medical service is at the forefront in serving the people of Singapore and that as trained Nurses you have lived up to your Nurses' Pledge taken at the impressive ceremony held at our National Theatre on 15th July (11 weeks ago) namely "with loyalty will I endeavour to aid the physician in his work and devote myself to the welfare of those committed to my care".

At this critical period of our young nation's history, in the face of enemies within and without - namely Indonesian aggression against our nation's honour and integrity, I do call on you to go yet further not only to be good Nurses but in your role as responsible citizens of Malaysia, to remain united in purpose, to scorch rumours whether on-duty or off-duty and to place national interest above own personal interest. Let us together resolve to serve our people to the best of our ability and also help towards preserving the well-being and happiness of our people in Malaysia!