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SPEECH BY MR. CEVA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HEALTH, Acc. No.
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE FAMILY PLANNING
CAMPAIGN 1972 AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL
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It has been six years since the National Family Planning Programme was launched in 1966. Since then Singapore has achieved some measure of success in family planning and population control. We have been able to bring down the high birth rate of 28.6 per thousand in 1966 to 22.3 per thousand in 1971.

At the end of 1971, 174,305 women in Singapore have accepted family planning facilities offered by the Family Planning & Population Board. This represents about 70% of all married women aged 15 to 44 years. In addition, another 9,791 women underwent sterilization. Of the remaining 63,918 married women not registered with the Board, a few may be practising family planning under the supervision of private medical practitioners. But the vast majority of this remaining 30% of married women have not taken to family planning. They belong to the low income, high parity and older age group of women whom we have termed the "hard core". This group have so far remained impervious to the widespread publicity and intensive motivational work carried out by the Family Planning & Population Board.

The other major problem we are facing now is that as a result of the post-war baby boom a large number of men and women are now entering the reproductive age group. In fact, the number of women in the reproductive age group now is about double that of five years ago.

Although the crude birth rate for Singapore fell from 28.6 per thousand in 1966 to 21.8 per thousand in 1969, that is, actual number of births fell from 54,630 in 1966 to 44,807 in 1969, the total number of births increased to 45,934 in 1970 and to 47,088 in 1971. This brought about the rise in the crude birth rate to 22.1

per thousand in 1970 and to 22.3 per thousand in 1974. This is the direct result of the impact of the post-war baby boom. Our projections indicate that this impact will continue to be felt for the next 10 to 15 years.

We have therefore reached a crucial stage in our Family Planning Programme. Unless we immediately go for an all out push forward in our programme, all the ground that has been won in reduced birth rates will gradually slip away. The Government is therefore determined that birth rates must be further reduced at all costs.

The aim of our Second Five-Year Family Planning Programme (1971 to 1975) is to achieve a moderate fertility decline leading to a crude birth rate of 18 per thousand by 1975. With a crude death rate of around 5 per thousand, this will give a rate of natural increase of around 1.3% which is quite close to the 1.0 or 1.1% of the developed countries. This we are determined to achieve by intensifying and channelling our efforts on two priority target groups.

Our first target group is comprised of youths of marriageable age and the newly weds. They will be motivated to accept family planning as a way of life. They will be made to understand the concept of family planning and responsible parenthood and what the advantages are and how life will be that much easier for them if they plan for small families. On the other hand the disadvantages to themselves as well as to the country of having too many children will also be emphasised including Government's policy of disincentives for large families which may be expected to be more and more stringent in the future. I am confident that after proper explanation each one of our youths will accept family planning for our youths today are much better educated than those of 10 or 20 years ago.

In fact, about 90% of all married women below the age of 30 years do practise family planning. But the phenomenon here is

that while the better educated young women have one to two children the lesser educated young women have more than 3 children though they do practise family planning. Our aim here is to get the lesser educated and lower income groups to have only 2 children so that their children will have a better chance in life.

Our second priority group is the "hard core" women who have not so far accepted family planning. Statistics show that only 36% of all married women in Singapore above the age of 30 years practise family planning. It is likely that some of these women and their husbands still cling to age-old concepts that large families meant prosperity and security in their old age. It is our intention to make them realise that times have changed and the circumstances now are different. The tragedy of it is that by having far too many children than they can afford to feed and nurture they have as a consequence given their children less chances in life.

Although it is the intention of Government to invest more and more by way of better health, better education and training on our younger generation, if more children are produced each child will actually receive less or at least less than what he would otherwise receive if so many children have not been produced. This is unfair to parents who produce a small number of children. To be fair the Government may be forced to introduce policies to penalise those irresponsible parents who produce more children than they can afford to feed and upbringing.

For the "hard core" couples or for others who have completed their families we strongly advocate sterilization as the answer. Sterilization is a permanent method of birth control requiring no continued effort on the part of the individual. It is a method which can be carried out either on the man or woman. It is a safe, effective and permanent method of birth control.

I am glad to say that more and more men and women are coming forward to undergo sterilization. Culdoscopic sterilization, a method of female sterilization recently introduced in Kangang Kerbau Maternity Hospital, is a much simplified operation requiring no abdominal incision or hospitalisation. As such, it should be most acceptable and suitable to many women who find it difficult to leave their families at home for any length of time.

Male sterilization or vasectomy has been widely accepted in many parts of the world. Men in Singapore are now becoming aware of this method and are coming forward for vasectomy. The Family Planning & Population Board has set up a Male Counselling and Vasectomy Clinic at the National Family Planning Centre at Dunearn Road. Men may consult the staff on any family planning matter and those men whose applications for sterilization are approved may have their operation done as outpatients at this Clinic. Vasectomy is a very simple and safe operation and no hospitalisation is necessary.

An important point about sterilization of either male or female that must be publicised is that the only procedure made during the operation is that the tube conveying either the sperms in the male or the eggs in the female is tied or cut so that fertilization is prevented. There is no interference in normal sex relations nor is there premature ageing. It is important that misconceptions and prejudice on sterilization must once and for all be banished.

With a view to encourage sterilization as a means of family planning the Government has recently decided to waive the \$100/- accouchement fees for those with 3 or more children if they agree to undergo sterilization.

The theme of our National Family Planning Campaign for 1972 is "Plan Wisely For A Small, Healthy And Happy Family". We are therefore also emphasising in our theme the fact that health is one

of the benefits of family planning. It not only benefits the health of the mother who does not become physically exhausted with the bearing and upbringing of too many children but also the health of the children themselves. I would like to mention here that it is a medical fact that the incidence of women dying as a result of child birth rises sharply after the 4th pregnancy. The tragedy of mothers dying as a result of child birth can therefore be avoided if they stop having repeated pregnancies.

It is indeed heartening to see the tremendous support and co-operation given by voluntary organisations especially the Citizens' Consultative Committees, the People's Association, the Trade Unions as well as Government Ministries which are actively participating in this Campaign. I would like to thank them for the support.

I am confident that this Campaign will bring home the message to all sections of our people that family planning, and in a wider context, population planning has far reaching benefits and should be accepted by all. Our ultimate aim is not only to ensure continued economic progress for Singapore but also to promote small healthy and happy families.

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