

Speech by Inche Sha'ari Tadin, Senior Parliamentary  
Secretary to the Minister for Culture at Parliament  
on 17th October, 1972

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Mr. Speaker, Sir,

I rise to support the motion in the name of the Member for Bukit Bedok to express our thanks to the President for the speech which he delivered on behalf of the Government at the opening of the Third Session of Parliament on 12th October, 1972.

The President has outlined some guidelines for Singapore. When translated into practical terms, it will mean a better life for the mostest number of people at the expense of marginal sacrifices by those able to bear them.

Already living conditions in Singapore have been kept stable and non-inflationary since 1959.

The developed nations have not fared well in this respect. There, galloping inflation is the order of the day. Irresponsible trade unionism is another menace, so much so that one wag says that the unions may succeed in abolishing the working week altogether. In those countries, the status quo has been defined as the mess they are in, which includes pollution and all the rest of it. It is easy to understand that the soil there is conducive to the development of hippiesm and other hedonistic philosophies.

Those who have travelled abroad find the contrast between Singapore and other societies evident.

In the developing societies, they will find that there is no economic take-off simply because the governments and the people do not pull together and make the necessary sacrifices. Many a developing society is left far behind in the race for economic development.

In Singapore, nobody starves if he is able-bodied and prepared to accept any job offered, even if he is unskilled. It means that the correct formula for nation-building has been found by us.

The cornerstone of nation-building is a realistic policy of from each his best, to each according to his ability. This means whether in business or in the Government Services, each man finds his way to the room at the top only on his own merit.

Singaporeans will have to continue to be economic animals. In fact, any halt to Singapore's economic development will be a national catastrophe. But from time to time, there have been pleas that we be not an ugly society of people who know the price of everything but the value of nothing. It simply means that dollar-worship should be matched by aesthetic appreciation. It is good for Singaporeans to make money, but in doing so, they must advance the national interest and better still, cultivate a love for beauty. This way, we become better Singaporeans.

The stress on the appreciation of beauty is timely. This is the best time for such a clarion call to be made. It would have been premature during our earlier period of economic development. Now that we are sharing the fruits of national development, we should apply ourselves seriously to the arts since most of us can afford it. And if at such a time we should fail to place the right emphasis on cultural development, then we are to blame if ours becomes a gross and crude society.

The President has said that Singapore's limited land resources means that we cannot seek fame for sheer size. But we can be synonymous with human excellence. This means, among other things, that we can be world-known as a society of cultural refinement. We can achieve this because we possess the cultural resources of all the major races on the globe.

The other related point I wish to make is the necessity to work hard in the national interest. So long as the economy is kept buoyant, our prosperity is assured, not forgetting the need for national defence.

Since we have an unfavourable man-land ratio, we have to plan the use of every inch of this resource very carefully. We have to compensate for this unfavourable man-land ratio by acquisition in the national interest - in other words, land not economically used is acquired for public projects to benefit 1000 times the number of people who have to move out. Dislocation is caused to the affected few. But there should be no hard feelings if those affected understand that if Singapore were 10 or 20 times its present size, such would not be necessary. Yet unscrupulous politicians told those affected that should their parties be elected into power, these urban renewal projects would be reversed. Certain political parties

in Singapore will not hesitate to set back the clock of national progress in their efforts to win votes. This is very sad for them because the concept of an alternative government with a two-party system means that the alternative programme must be as progressive and constructive, if not more so than the ruling party's, if they are to have any prospects at a General Elections. However, their empty promises did have some effect during the last General Elections. The electors in Singapore must be taught to be more critical and analytic.

17th October, 1972.