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SPEECH BY MR S DHANABALAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AT THE 1988 TOWNER PRIMARY SCHOOL PSLE CONVOCATION CUM
SPEECH DAY AT THE KALLANG COMMUNITY CENTRE HALL
ON 29 DECEMBER 1988 AT 9.00 AM

The description of your school crest says that the four white lines meeting at a point represents the four aspects of a child's educational development (intellectual, physical, social and aesthetical) gearing towards a focal point which represents a balanced character.

Towner Primary School has quite rightly placed emphasis on intellectual development. It is a school, like most schools in Singapore, whose Primary One intake is reflective of the general population with a mix of slow learners, below average, average and a few bright pupils. The school caters basically to the population in the immediate vicinity of the school. This is unlike the premier schools whose catchment is the whole of Singapore and where the majority of the pupils belong to the above average and very bright groups. It is therefore quite natural for Towner School to concentrate on programmes to develop the intellectual potential of the pupils.

I read, with interest, programme such as the Maths Camp and PROP, the acronym for Progressive Reading Opportunities for Pupils which is aimed at pupils who are not so keen to read and improve themselves. Children have to be strong in basic literacy and numeracy if they want to be able to earn a decent living in a modern economy. Every effort must be made to bring out the full intellectual potential of the pupil. It is therefore very commendable that the principal and staff of the school have directed their efforts towards improving the intellectual potential of their pupils.

But this morning I want to talk about another aspect of a balanced character described in your school crest and that is the physical aspect. This deals with your body - how healthy it is and how strong it is. Lately, I have had cause to look into this aspect in some detail as I am the Chairman of the Advisory Council on Sport and Recreation. I have had an opportunity to talk to other members of my Council as well as with others who have made representations to the Council. The basic finding of the Council is that there is little shortage of facilities for sport and activities in Singapore. The government has made massive investment in sports infrastructure and sport programmes and is continuing to do so. Our conclusion is that people are not taking full advantage of these facilities and do not participate actively in sport because the foundations for a healthy strong body were not laid when they were children. In time to come, our people will be more affluent and there will be a greater awareness and desire to be physically fit.

Physical fitness is more than the ability to jog for one hour or to do aerobic exercises. For those in our population who are older, it may not be practical to aim for anything more than this type of exercise that is good for the heart and lungs and gives body flexibility. But for our younger population, we should aim higher and lay the foundations now for them to be able to enjoy more active sport and recreation when they become adults and earn enough to pursue sport and recreation.

Laying such a foundation means more than building up stamina. It means developing balance - eye and hand, and eye and foot coordination, ability to break a fall, and having the confidence to participate in activities involving grit and daring. We should particularly encourage sport that instil physical and mental courage and build confidence such as rugby, gymnastic, rock-climbing and certain types of sea sports. We must not excessively curb the exuberance of youth but provide outlets for such activities as skate-boarding, BMX cycling and so on.

In our desire to make things safe for our children, parents and schools have tended to curb some of the natural exuberance of children. Anything that has the slightest danger of injury raises alarm and calls for action to stop such activities. Parents are quick to complain to schools and the government when their children get injured in the course of play. Certain types of sports are more prone to physical injury than others and there is a need for proper training, to follow rules, and to be protected with the proper equipment to indulge in such sports. Our approach so far has been to avoid or dissuade children from indulging in some such past-times. How can we build a rugged society if we continue to adopt this approach? Being rugged means more than having stamina or muscles. It means having a certain grit and daring in mental attitude together with a healthy and strong body.

Our defence strategy is a Total Defence Strategy which involves the preparation not only of those in the Armed Forces but involves men and women in the Civil Defence Corps and a psychologically prepared general population. A fear of any activity where one suffers the shock of physical contact or where there is a possibility of injury, is not conducive to such a strategy.

Schools should therefore allow and encourage, with proper supervision, activities that build up such physical courage and confidence. This means that first, there has to be change in the attitude of parents. With most families having one or two children, it is natural for parents to be very protective of their children. They must be made to realise that by being over-protective, they are depriving their children of the advantages and joy of sport and active recreation. We do not want to develop a population of "couch potatoes" whose gymnastics and activities are confined only to the mind and whose fingers are only nimble at pressing buttons. Secondly, schools have to develop programmes that will expose their children to different types of sport and recreation. This has to be done within the time allocated now

for PE and during vacation. Schools need to emphasise new themes and follow new directions in their sport and recreation programmes..

On a broader plane, our national sport and recreation programme for the future should have certain clear directions. We have succeeded to a large extent in our Sport for All policy. We need to now introduce certain qualitative themes. One important theme is to promote sport and recreation activities that promote physical courage and confidence in our youth so that we can be a truly rugged society.

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