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SPEECH BY MR S. RAJARATNAM, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, 6 AUG 1977  
AT THE OPENING OF THE SENOKO POWER STATION ON SUNDAY,  
31ST JULY, 1977 AT 11 A.M.

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You may be wondering what possible connection there could be between electricity and foreign affairs. I have been puzzling over this myself and have stumbled on one possible explanation. The Public Utilities Board is, among other things, involved in the power business. The Senoko Power Station which I have been asked to open will be the largest electricity project the Board has undertaken so far.

And so what could be more logical than getting a Minister also involved in the power business. It is true that as Foreign Minister I have made a number of speeches dealing with such topics as balance of power, the power game and great power politics. It is possible that an admirer of mine in the P.U.B. must have been filing my speeches under the heading of "Power" and so it was quite natural that, the list of obliging Ministers having shrunk, my name should have commended itself when it came to choosing a Minister to open the Senoko Power Station.

I think this may be the reason why I am here on a Sunday morning. Though I am glad to be here to launch a project likely to be more enduring than many projects launched in the field of foreign policy, I am nevertheless haunted by the suspicion that I might one day be also called upon to open some ambitious gasworks project the P.U.B. might be contemplating.

After all if a Foreign Minister's speeches could reasonably be filed under "Power", there is no earthly reason why they should not be filed under "Gas" as well.

All this .... /2.

All this is by way of preface to explain why I am happy to be here to open the Senoko Power Station. My colleague, Mr. Lim Kim San, assured me that in return for my efforts this morning my name would be inscribed in a plaque. Now most politicians cannot resist seeing their names on plaques. May be this has something to do with the fact that they live in perpetual fear of one day being forgotten. So a plaque is an insurance against total oblivion. At least they have the consolation of knowing that in some wall, in some structure in Singapore their names would shine in marble, bronze or brass long after they are dead and gone and what they did and failed to do are also forgotten and forgiven.

If this is so then I am happy that my name would be associated with Senoko Power Station. In this respect I will be more fortunate than some of my colleagues whose names are unfortunately inscribed in buildings which are likely to be far less permanent because these would sooner or latter attract the attention of those concerned with the unending process of Urban Renewal.

The Senoko Power Station I think will have a greater measure of immunity against the visitations of zealous urban renewalists. No urban renewalist is likely to trifle with a project which will cost over a billion dollars.

The second reason is that the Senoko Power Station is a symbol and measure of modern Singapore. When this power station is completed through three stages in 1983 it would have a capacity of 1610 megawatts and will enable the P.U.B. to meet all Singapore's power requirements up to 1986.

The construction of this power station will additionally provide employment for some 1300 workers in the first stage and for more in subsequent stages.

It will further upgrade local technical skills. I understand that though the major components will come from overseas things like turbine condensers, deaerators, tanks, structural steel and most of the civil engineering works will be done locally.

Electricity consumption in Singapore has increased largely as a result of our industrialisation programme. Average growth rate in terms of maximum demand since 1964 was about 15 per cent until the oil crisis when it declined somewhat. However the growth rate has recovered, reflecting the economic recovery of Singapore.

Some of the P.U.B. officials tell me that it is possible to give an ASEAN dimension to generation and use of electricity in our region. It is possible, they say, to interconnect the ASEAN countries through electrical networks. This concept has been implemented in many European countries and in North America to the benefit of participating countries. It is possible to conceive of a common network between Singapore and South Malaysia and between the northern half of Malaysia and Thailand.

These officials also tell me that it is possible to link Singapore and parts of Indonesia through submarine transmission cable.

There are obvious benefits to all concerned in such a concept. A pooling of generating plants in the ASEAN region can lead to better utilisation of expensive equipment, give greater flexibility of operation, great reliability of supply through mutual assistance and reduction of capital expenditure over the long term.

I do not know whether an imaginative concept such as this would evoke the right response but as a Foreign Minister I believe that all great achievements start off as fanciful dreams and a good politician is one who dreams with his feet firmly on the ground. In fact, electricity had its genesis in the propensity of politicians to fly kites. I refer to the American politician Benjamin Franklin, the father of electricity. You all know the story of Benjamin Franklin flying a kite during a storm and the birth of a new idea about electricity. From kites to Senoko Power Station is a remarkable chain of logic and achievements.

So the concept of electricity as a way of strengthening regional interdependence is a sort of kite flying and who is to say something worthwhile might not emerge if we try.

So the official who filed the speeches of a Foreign Minister under "Power" may not have been all that wrong after all.