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SPEECH BY MR S RAJARATNAM, SECOND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
(FOREIGN AFFAIRS) AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD
WATCH SCHEME 3-TIER CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE AT THE
CRAWFORD COMMUNITY CENTRE ON WEDNESDAY
27 JUNE 1984, AT 8.00 PM

There is one very good reason why the people of Kampong Glam in particular should participate in the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme whose 3-Tier Co-ordinating Committee is being launched in our constituency tonight. Of the eight divisions which come under the jurisdiction of Beach Road Police Station we rank No. 1. We have beaten Geylang Serai, Geyland West, Jalan Besar, Kallang, Kolam Ayer, MacPherson and Mountbatten in this matter. However this is not a matter for rejoicing. In fact it is something to be ashamed of. We are No. 1 in that we have the highest crime rate as compared with the other seven constituencies. Last year Kampong Glam had 448 major crimes. According to police records Kampong Glam did better in the matter of crimes in 1983 than it did the previous year. In other words crime is unfortunately increasing in our constituency. If you want to know what kind of crimes took place here are some statistics. There were 155 theft of motor vehicles, mostly motor cycles. Seventy-six house-breakings, 41 robberies, 36 snatch thefts and 13 cases of outraging modesty. We are way ahead of our nearest competitor - Geylang West - whose crime rate was only about half ours.

The only silver lining to this depressing picture of a crime ridden Kampong Glam is that most of the crimes were committed by residents from outside our constituency. So Kampong Glam is crime-ridden but fortunately not its residents.

In other words Kampong Glam is a favourite hunting ground for criminals from outside our constituency. This is because, more than the other seven constituencies, our constituency has a high concentration of residential and commercial areas. There are more commercial shophouses and high rise commercial and shopping complexes than in the other constituencies. So there are plenty of opportunities and attractions for people who think that earning a living through crime is a quicker and safer life-style than earning a living than honest work.

So long as there are people who believe that crime is more lucrative and relatively safe so long will there be criminals. This is one reason why I think crime is steadily increasing throughout affluent Singapore. There are people who believe that criminals are unhappy victims of circumstances, that they are driven to crime through poverty, unemployment or unhappy homes. This in my view is only true of a minority of criminals but most criminals turn to crime through free choice. They are not driven into crime. In Singapore today any young man or adult can easily find jobs and earn money honestly. Yet in an affluent and increasingly prosperous Singapore crime is increasing and most of the criminals have no need to turn to crime to earn a living. So most criminals turn to crime of their own free will because they think that only mugs work. In other words they are self-made criminals.

There are two reasons why these self-made criminals are increasing in an affluent and prosperous Singapore.

One is the fact of prosperity itself.

There is not only more things to steal but there is also an increasing belief that it shows intelligence and enterprise if one can acquire the good things of life without the drudgery of work.

The other is that we offer the criminal what he thinks are safe and easy opportunities to commit crimes. Most criminals are by nature not brave or reckless men. They act only when they think there is little or no danger.

This is where the Neighbourhood Watch Groups come in. A primary function of such Groups is to maximise danger and reduce opportunities for criminals. Our police force do this everyday and every hour of the day. But our police, however efficient they may be, cannot be everywhere all the time. The Watch Group can by supplementing the efforts of the police reduce opportunities and increase significantly dangers for the watching criminal. Of course we cannot eradicate crime completely but the police together with the active co-operation of citizens in the constituency can reduce crime substantially. Unlike the police the residents are spread all over the constituency and they can serve as extra eyes and ears to keep a watch on a wandering criminal searching for opportunities to commit crimes. The Neighbourhood Watch Group can organise every citizen with a view to reducing opportunities for criminals to do mischief. For example citizens can be persuaded to have better locks for their doors, install strong metal grill on windows and ask their neighbours to keep a watch on their flat or house should they be away for any length of time.

Shops and factories should install sound security systems. Also people should make it a point to keep their money and valuables either in safes, security deposit boxes or in banks.

Equally important people should get to know as many people that live in their block and certainly all who live in the same corridor or floor. Then if they see any stranger they could be on the alert.

Of course all these measures will not eliminate crime completely but they will reduce it considerably.

The more preventive measures you take against the criminal the more aware would he become that the danger of his being caught and punished has increased considerably and that crime may not after all be a safe and easy road to wealth and other satisfactions.

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