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SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS,
AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR BRICKWORKS AT THE BRICKWORKS
CONSTITUENCY NATIONAL DAY DINNER ON SATURDAY, 19 AUGUST 1978
AT 1930 HOURS AT BRICKWORKS ESTATE BLOCK 2 CAR PARK

In the past two weeks, we have heard and read of the various discussions on a new coinage called "the ugly Singaporean". This is a phenomenon which has slowly crept into the scene although it is not something which we were all unconcerned with or ignorant of. This is an inevitable development as a result of the fast pace of our living consequent upon the rapid economic growth in our country.

Whilst we take pride in the achievements of the present Government in the past thirteen years, there is cause for reflection on the state of our well-being as a nation and a people. The old values have been slowly eroded and in its place today, we have a new set of values which one may say is in keeping with the times. However, some of the age-old social and moral values which have been in our tradition and which are time valued, have regrettably been lost.

Much of our predicament is due to our fast economic growth. Economic progress has brought in its train a host of undesirable effects. The enterprise, resourcefulness, hard work and diligence of our ancestors are slowly replaced by a generation of young people who have not seen the hardships in life and who look for soft options. In the process, people have also become impersonal and there is a high degree of competition breeding insecurity and frustration when ideals are not fulfilled.

The rich and the educated are accused of being selfishly self-centred. The underachievers and the underdogs who are not able to do much to improve their lot resort to escapism and other undesirable social acts. Worse, they may seek ways of destroying

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themselves because of unfulfilled dreams. There is, therefore a need for us to re-examine our values and recognise people for their own intrinsic worth.

In this technological age, people are often seen as digits in the whole process of development. We are seen as factors of production and caught up in a whole social and economic process. We are tagged with a number from the time we are born till the time we pass from this world. We are statistics for most purposes and except for some who make the public scene, the rest are just nameless and faceless. There seems to be a danger that we are lacking warmth in our human relationships.

People should be seen as individuals who have needs, feelings and emotions which have to be recognised. It is only when we show concern for people as people that we can hope to have a healthy population which can bring us to new heights in our nation-building. It is important that we nurture the healthy well-being of our people especially in a country such as ours where our only resource is human resource.

The concern for people and the individual should start from the time of childhood. Parents, guardians and all who have children under their charge should show concern for them and bring them up in the best way possible because on them rests the future. At every stage of a child's development, parents should be concerned for their all round well-being.

This concern for people should extend also to all who are socially handicapped, including the aged and the infirm. The need to show warmth, kindness and understanding to those in need should not be confined to the authorities but should be part of our daily living. We should cherish the virtue of compassion and the love for our fellow beings.

In our day to day existence, we should also not neglect the importance of the little courtesies in life. We should bring back some of the warmth of living which had existed in our previous village settings.

Finally, let me wish you all the best for another year ahead. Based on our current economic predictions, we can look forward to another good year. We should, however, not let success go to our heads. We can be successful without being different from what we are.