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MC/MARCH/2/79(Social Affairs)

SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS,
AT THE CHARITY DINNER IN AID OF THE DARUL IHSAN LILBANAT
MUSLIM GIRLS' ORPHANAGE AT THE NEPTUNE THEATRE RESTAURANT
ON SATURDAY, 3 MARCH 1979 AT 8.00 P.M.

There is no doubt that our family planning programme has been a success. With our emphasis on a two-child family, children become more precious not only to the parents but to the nation. We cannot afford to have children who will grow up to be misfits in society as it will be a strain on the parents as well as on the society which needs them.

Children constitute the potential resource for Singapore. We do not have natural resources and all that we have are human resources for which we must have the best within the limitation of a small population in order to thrive and survive. Singapore's child population is falling in both absolute as well as relative terms. It is projected that children will form 27.7 per cent of the population in 1985. Children up to the age of fourteen years constituted 38.8 per cent of the population in 1970 and 31 per cent in 1977. Although the child population is falling, problems relating to children are increasing.

Statistics from the Social Welfare Department show that the number of children with behaviour problems and the number of delinquents have increased. The number of pre-delinquent and delinquent children supervised, without admission into residential institutions, increased by about 25 per cent from 495 in 1976 to 621 in 1977. Although the statistics of juveniles below sixteen years of age arrested and charged in court have shown a fall in the last three years, this is explained by the fact that a large number of them were arrested for drug offences and admitted into the drug rehabilitation centres. In the last two years there were 2150 arrests of young persons below sixteen years of age who were

suspected to be /2

suspected to be on drugs. Of these 795 were admitted to the drug rehabilitation centres.

The number of children who have to come into the care of the Social Welfare Department is a matter of concern. 111 treated and neglected children under supervision increased between 1975 and 1977. The figure of 227 cases of child abuse reported in 1978 reflects an increase of about 91 per cent over the figure of 119 cases reported in 1977. The greater social awareness and concern among members of the public may account for the increase in the number of cases reported. However, it is estimated that there are many more cases especially those of emotional neglect and abuse that are not reported.

In Singapore, every child should be brought up in a happy home environment. While this is the ideal, it may not always be possible because parents have to work and it is difficult to get domestic help, besides other factors. Nevertheless, every parent has the responsibility to ensure that the child is given the love and concern that he is entitled and should be given the best opportunities for development.

There is an increasing trend among young working couples to foster their children out to nannies. Some parents bring their child to a nanny in the morning and collect the child after work. The child is with the parents every evening, over the weekends and public holidays. In such a situation, the parents make the best of the situation and they make sacrifices to ensure that the child is not deprived of parental love and care. Another category of parents is those who leave their children to nannies and are happy to let things be. At the beginning, the child may be visited every evening and weekend. However, as the young parents cherish their freedom more and more the child is visited less and less. A point is reached where the child is ~~more~~ attached to the nanny and has no affection for the natural parents. This situation is aggravated through the passage of time. What I would like to stress is that parents should not neglect their responsibilities.

This evening's function is to raise funds for the Darul Ihsan Lilbanat Muslim Girls' Orphanage. The sending of children to

orphanages or welfare homes should be the last resort in any situation. Wherever possible, if there are orphans, relatives and others should extend assistance and orphans should be brought up in their own home environments. There is no substitute for a good home environment and institutionalisation is not a solution. Although it may not seem conceivable, there are widows, widowers and divorcees who abandon their children into orphanages and other welfare homes so that they can enter into another marriage. Since the children are not orphans, welfare homes should not readily take on these children from wayward parents unless it is purely for the protection of the children. In such situations, such parents should surrender their rights to their children.

Services for the care and development of children will always be welcome. Efforts of service organisations towards assisting such projects should be supported. Let me congratulate the organisers who have hosted this charity dinner for yet another community effort. The Lions Club of Singapore (Host) can chalk up another contribution to the community to its long list of credits.

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