

# Singapore Government **PRESS RELEASE**

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • tel: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354/3362207/3362271

Archives & Oral History Department  
Singapore

30 MAY 1981 16-1/81/05/22

Acc. No. NARC

81 0060 29

SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL  
AFFAIRS, AT THE 12TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF THE PAP KAMPONG  
UBI BRANCH AT BLOCK 11 EUNOS CRESCENT, SINGAPORE 1440  
ON FRIDAY, 22 MAY 1981 AT 2000 HOURS

Like other parts of Singapore, Kampong Ubi has undergone extensive changes. The predominantly traditional Malay kampong has given way, and will be giving way, to well-designed public housing estates with comfortable accommodation, modern sanitation, adequate shopping and recreational facilities.

On an occasion like this, a brief glimpse into the past will bring back memories of times gone by. I can still vividly remember the Kampong Ubi of the fifties. In fact I had relatives living in its different parts. I can remember the good as well as the not-so-good parts of Kampong Ubi. Speaking of the good part, I still have that sense of nostalgia when I think of the cosy 3- or 4-room attap- and zinc-roofed houses (or what they called "rumah lesak") with their equally cosy verandahs and beautiful compounds where both young and old, friends and neighbours would congregate especially in the evenings. On the other hand, I can also remember, just as vividly, the not-so-good part of the Kampong Ubi with its dilapidated and cramped houses. If you ask me, many of the houses were not only uninhabitable but constituted a hazard to life and limb. The area was, in fact, one huge slum in which structures originally meant for a single family were converted to house five or even more, without privacy, light, proper ventilation or sanitation - in short, without any of the basic amenities of life. It was not uncommon for several families to share a single tap, latrine and cooking space; and, for the lack of anywhere else more suitable, the "roads" (if I can use the word) became the meeting and working place, storage space and children's playground all rolled into one. Fires and floods were not uncommon. Such was the scenario of Kampong Ubi and its surroundings in those days.

...../2.

The only answer to the problem of overcrowding is a dynamic programme of urban renewal designed to rejuvenate and modernise the area for improved living and economic growth. And the vigour with which the PAF Government has gone about replacing the obsolete old with the well-planned new is an indicator of the priority assigned to the overall target of balanced national development - be it infrastructure or economic development. There is no other way if Singapore is to join the ranks of progressive and modern cities of the world.

There is nothing new about urban renewal, for such tasks have earlier been carried out in other countries. However, in many of those countries, it is not a statutory requirement for the government to rehouse affected families and businesses. In Singapore, all affected families are offered public housing with high standards of services and amenities and environment. In addition, factories are also built in these housing estates not only to resettle industries but also to create employment opportunities for the people living in and around them.

Admittedly, slum clearance causes temporary inconvenience to those affected but it results in bringing them the good things in life. It is as much a political problem as it is a socio-economic one. It requires judgement and timing on the part of the government to execute this bold, imaginative, complicated but necessary task. The government has to risk the displeasure and even disapproval of a few so that the majority may benefit from the fruits of slum clearance. Gone were the days where decisions were made based on popular appeal. We have to be hard-headed in confronting the realities of life. We have to sacrifice short-term pleasure for long-term security beneficial to all Singaporeans.

I am aware that people in Kampong Melayu (in Kampong Ubi Constituency) and in Kaki Bukit Constituency are in the midst of being resettled. Some, particularly the older folks, may lament the loss of the leisurely life-style and the close inter-personal relationship of the old days. But we cannot cling on to such a life-style. We have to accept change as a price for development. Whilst we cannot cling to such life-styles in toto, I am quite sure we can still recreate such atmosphere in the new housing estates we are moving to. The spirit of neighbourliness and camaraderie, like gotong-royong and team-work, can still be fostered in the new housing estates through the formation of

grassroot institutions like Residents' Committee. These Committees can work closely with other community leaders, such as the Citizens' Consultative Committee and the Management Committees or sub-committees of community centres, to promote neighbourhood activities. I understand that some progress along this line has already been achieved in Kampong Ubi. I have no doubt that, with the leadership provided by your MP, Encik Wan Hussin Haji Zohri, Branch Officials and other community leaders, a harmonious new relationship among the residents, irrespective of race, creed and income level, will be established in the constituency.

PAP Kampong Ubi Branch has also provided a wide range of services for the constituents. You help residents resolve problems connected with resettlement, and run kindergartens and tuition and religious classes for children and youths. Together with community leaders, you have also provided two sports centres within the constituency to cater to the recreational needs of the people. Annually, you also distribute "angpows" to the aged in the constituency.

As the composition of the population has changed, so have the needs of the people. One such need is in the area of child care. The breaking up of the extended family system and the increasing numbers of working couples have resulted in a greater demand for child care services. As you are aware, the Ministry of Social Affairs is co-ordinating the provision of child care centres provided by the NTUC, the People's Association and other civic organisations. We also administer a family day-care scheme whereby working couples needing child care service during the day are introduced to persons who are able to look after other people's children. These care-givers, as they are called, are carefully assessed by officials of the Ministry to ensure that they are qualified to give proper service. While satisfactory progress has been achieved, child-care services in Singapore are still not readily available. This is partly because of the limited numbers of child-care centres in operation now, and partly because of their localities which may not be convenient to all potential users. There is therefore a need for more child-care facilities in each constituency for the convenience of residents. Herein lies a rich potential for community service by Branch officials and community leaders. You may want to explore various alternatives to supplement what are already in existence. It is not

necessary for you to follow the existing pattern., You may devise your own pattern to suit your requirements. Of course, my Ministry's officials are always available for advice and assistance, where necessary.

Another possible area of service is the care of our aged and the less fortunate members of society. We should check the trend for people to leave their aged parents or relatives in institutions provided by the Government and social welfare organisations. Here again, community leaders can play a significant role in instilling a sense of filial piety and respect, especially among the young, so that the aged and the less fortunate are cared for by their families and live a normal life as far as possible. Institutionalisation should be confined to those requiring specialised care not within the means of the ordinary families.

I hope Kampong Ubi will take the lead to spear-heading the much-needed attitudinal change among the people towards community welfare. On that note, I wish you all challenging and fruitful years ahead.

-----