

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE

PUBLICITY DIVISION · MINISTRY OF CULTURE · CITY HALL SINGAPORE 6

National Archives and
Records Centre, Singapore.

MO/SEP/9/78 (Istana)

11 SEP 1978

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT SHEARES AT THE 1978 ORCHID SHOW
AT THE NATIONAL STADIUM ON THURSDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 78
AT 6.00 P.M. TO COMMEMORATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ORCHID SOCIETY OF SOUTH EAST ASIA

Acc. No.

NARC

78	0044	64
----	------	----

I have had the pleasure of opening your annual Orchid Show several times previously but this function today has special significance in that it also celebrates the 50th anniversary of your society.

Singapore today is well-known for its orchids and is one of the leading exporters of cut orchid blooms despite the scarcity of available land for cultivation. This achievement speaks well for the ingenuity and skills of the Orchid growers of our country. I venture to say that this leadership would probably not have developed if pioneer botanists and horticulturists had not introduced into this country more than half a century ago the asymbiotic flask culture of orchids - a special technique of sowing orchid seeds in flasks for culture under sterile conditions. I have been informed that this method of growing orchids introduced the method of intensive orchid hybridisation and their mass production, which ultimately led to our present position as one of the leading orchid growing countries of the world.

As a result, an extremely large number of hybrids have been produced though one notes with surprise that Singapore herself is not endowed with rich and varied native orchid flora. Despite this disadvantage, the early pioneers of hybridisation resorted to the use of foreign species from countries of South East Asia and South America to produce a wide range of hybrids for which Singapore is today famous.

A majority of the commercially important orchids are hybrids, synthesized by man. Despite intensive attempts at Hybridisation to produce better and more beautiful hybrids, success has been only partial.

At the /2.

At the Botanic Gardens, out of a total of 14,578 pollinations attempted from 1931 to July 1978 only 1,864 were successful.

Orchid cultivation has no doubt become an economic activity in Singapore. Statistics indicate that over the past ten years the export trade in cut flowers, mainly orchids, has been growing by leaps and bounds from an export value of a little under \$1 million in 1969 to nearly \$12 million in 1977, and the cut blooms are sold to over a dozen countries. This healthy growth is due in the main to the following factors. Firstly, a tremendous interest exists amongst private growers and the Botanic Gardens in hybridisation research over the past two decades producing a couple of dozen hybrids which have as desirable attributes as cut flowers for export. Secondly, the climatic conditions in the Republic are very favourable for orchid growth because we have warmth, sunshine and high humidity - all required for orchid culture. Thirdly, we are privileged to be served by excellent airline links to many parts of the world. This last factor is of prime importance because of the perishable nature of the orchid blooms. Henceforth we may expect a boost in the export of orchids to the United States when Singapore Airlines makes its roads to the American continents.

The orchid industry however has as its main problem the scarcity of land. On the other hand, in recent months quite a large number of pig farmers, who have been prohibited from rearing pigs in the catchment area of Kranji, have changed their activities to, amongst other enterprises, orchid production. The creation of the Kranji catchment and the permission granted to non-pig farmers to remain there has also given a boost to orchid production by the smaller farmers.

Before I reach the closing stages of my address, I want to say how very happy I am to see Professor R.E. Holttum here this evening. It will perhaps surprise you when I state that he was the first appointed Professor of Botany of the College of Medicine, Singapore, and that I was in the first batch he taught at his first class of medical students in 1923. I was struck by his illuminating exposition of the subject. The present outstanding position of the Orchid Society of South East Asia would not have been reached had it not been founded 50 years ago by enthusiasts, especially Professor Holttum, a world renowned Botanist and Horticulturist.

I must however /3.

I must however compliment the research contributions made by the Primary Production Department, the Botanic Gardens and the University of Singapore whose data have proven to be of significant benefit to farmers and hobbyists. I must also congratulate the executive committee members of the Orchid Society of South East Asia for the persevering efforts in promoting orchid growing in this area and wish them every success in their 50th Anniversary celebrations.

I now have great pleasure in declaring the Orchid Show open.

~~#####~~