

29 JUN 1982

Singapore Government**PRESS RELEASE**

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

01-1/82/06/19

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT C V DEVAN NAIR AT THE OPENING OF THE 48TH
ROTARY DISTRICT ASSEMBLY OF DISTRICT 330 AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL
ON SATURDAY 19 JUNE 1982 AT 10.00 AM

It was with some trepidation that I accepted the kind invitation to speak to Southeast Asian Rotarians today. Not because I dislike Rotarians. That is not possible, for you belong to an international organisation with highly commendable aims, and with a notable record of social service. There are also several Rotarians of considerable distinction and attainments in their separate fields of endeavour.

What inhibited me was a certain disquiet about whether I had anything relevant to say to such a distinguished gathering. For there is a risk on such occasions of uttering meaningless platitudes, of everybody indulging in mutual back-slapping, and returning feeling smug and virtuous.

Two factors helped in making up my mind. First, with the exception of Brunei, this is a gathering of Rotarians from the ASEAN countries, of which Singapore is a member. But our friends from Brunei are more than welcome. For Brunei has close economic and other ties with the ASEAN countries.

Second, I decided I did have something relevant to say. I have just returned from a holiday in West Malaysia, and I felt once again, with powerful impact, how interdependent Malaysia and Singapore are.

The ASEAN community of nations makes good sense, for the simple reason that regional collaboration has a high survival value for all our countries. It is our good fortune that the political leaders of the nations of Southeast Asia appreciate this. To wish one's neighbours well is not merely good ethics. It is also sound politics - the politics of

mutual/2.

mutual survival in a dangerous and predatory geo-political milieu.

You now have the theme of my address today: the survival value of a good conscience, and of goodness. There is no need to quote scripture to justify the noble aims Rotarians, among others, have set for themselves. In addition to the teachings of the saints and prophets of all the great religions of the world, which all of us revere or respect, there is the survival value of goodness and good works, for individuals, communities and nations. All of us may well live longer and better, if we do not consume ourselves with the negative and deleterious passions of envy, hatred and self-centredness. The medically qualified persons present here will readily concede that this is better for your physical and mental well-being than all the pills they can prescribe.

Lest I be misunderstood, I had better take the precaution of entering a caveat here. Slushy, sentimental and soft-headed do-gooders, prone to turning the other cheek to murderers, drug traffickers, and the like, do not satisfy the criteria of goodness which I advance. There is no survival value in such an approach. The net result of turning the other cheek to evil is that you will end up with both your cheeks swollen, and have your teeth kicked in as well. In the political field too, it would have been fatal folly if ASEAN had decided to turn the other cheek to Vietnam after its invasion of Kampuchea. Soft-headedness has clearly no survival value in a dangerous world.

What I do suggest, however, is that goodness and good works are best practised by the level-headed, and not by those who go for soft options. Individual, societal and national well-being and security are best served by honest and level-headed men, who appreciate the survival value of goodness, and of the sense of community, neighbourliness and team spirit. Aggressive self-assertion on the part of tribes, clans and nations may well have had a survival value in our evolutionary past. They no longer do. Hence the global commitment, at least in words, if not always in deeds, to the United Nations Organisation and its Charter.

Given the kind of world we live in, with big power rivalries and the messianic ideologies of totalitarian states, the ideal of human unity

would appear/3.

would appear to be a remote one at this point of time. The millennium is not just round the corner. Nonetheless, it is an ideal worth striving for. Not merely because the founders of the great religions had said so, although their teachings have been of considerable survival value to the societies and nations which espoused them. But also because the promotion of the ideal of human unity and of international concord, has considerable survival value. Friends and foes alike on this benighted planet of ours know that there is enough nuclear weaponry around to blow up the entire globe. Nobody in his senses can therefore relish the idea of an Armageddon in which there can be no victors. Let us hope and pray that the survival value of international good sense and goodwill will achieve for mankind the desired goals of international peace and co-operation, rather than through the force of shattering circumstances, which could well prove universally fatal.

These were the thoughts which occurred to me when I read the high ideals of your organisation. The general objectives of Rotary Clubs in every country are the same - the development of fellowship and understanding among business and professional men in the community, the promotion of community betterment endeavours and of high ethical standards of business and professional practices, and the advancement of international understanding and world peace. You therefore play a very useful role.

The Rotary movement is 77 years old. Rotary came to Singapore in 1930. You celebrated the Golden Jubilee in 1980. I am told that there are six Rotary Clubs in Singapore and more than 400 Rotarians. Many of our charitable and social organisations have benefitted from your generosity. Your services to the aged and the sick, to the handicapped and the infirm, in all your respective countries, are well known. Many are the recipients of Rotary Scholarships and Educational Awards every year. It is my hope that you will continue your good work with even greater dedication.

One final word. There are wrong reasons as well as good for ones for doing good. The Lebanese poet, Kahlil Gibran, captured these subtle truths in memorable words, which are worth quoting. The lines speak

for/4.

for themselves, and there is no need for me to interpret them. I quote:

"Then said a rich man, Speak to us of Giving.

And he answered:

You give but little when you give of your possessions.

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

There are those who give a little of the much which they have - and they give it for recognition and their hidden desire makes their gifts unwholesome.

And there are those who have little and give it all.

These are the believers in life and the bounty of life, and their coffer is never empty.

There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward.

And there are those who give with pain, and that pain is their baptism.

And there are those who give and know not pain in giving, nor do they seek joy, nor give with mindfulness of virtue;

They give as in yonder valley the myrtle breathes its fragrance into space.

Through the hands of such as these God speaks, and from behind their eyes He smiles upon the earth.

It is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unasked, through understanding;

And to the open-handed the search for one who shall receive is joy greater than giving.

And is there aught you would withhold?

All you have shall some day be given;

Therefore give now, that the season of giving may be yours and not your inheritors."

It is now my pleasure to declare this Assembly open. May your deliberations be relevant to your ideals. May I also wish our foreign guests a pleasant stay in Singapore.