

Singapore Government **PRESS RELEASE**

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Ministry of Culture, Singapore

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SPEECH BY MR FONG SIP CHEE, MINISTER OF STATE (CULTURE),
AT A LUNCHEON IN HONOUR OF ASEAN SCULPTORS AT THE ORCHID
ROOM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, ON SATURDAY, MAY 9, 1981 AT 12.30 P.M.

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This is a very happy occasion for me, not only for the honour you have given me in this first official function in the new assignment of my new duties, but also because, I must confess, of a personal interest I wish to stake a claim in your success. Personally, the successful conclusion of the Asean Sculpture Symposium is the realisation of a long cherished dream which was shattered some 12 years ago.

Cultural and social development must command comparable importance to economic development, if society is to maintain its sanity. This is even more so in a young society like Singapore with an increasingly higher educated populace.

The need is universally recognised. The irony is that both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of social-cultural development cannot be easily measured as those of the economic expansion. There is no definite gauge in the appreciation of the arts in the same way as the GNP or GDP.

Very often, therefore, social-cultural activities have been relegated to secondary importance. In a way, and yet another irony, is that that must be the order of things - one can hardly speak of the appreciation of the finer things in life when his first priority is to provide food and shelter for himself and his family.

We are fortunate here in Singapore in that we have by and large managed to hurdle over these problems. Socio-cultural development must assume its right of place if our people is to enjoy a more gracious living.

It was for this reason that the idea of commissioning a local sculpture to do a piece of work to be exhibited at the National Theatre grounds, for want of a better location, was mooted. Hindsight wisdom tells me that the proposal might be too untimely at that point of time, hence it was promptly shot down by the Ministry. I have no

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regret, for today, five distinguished Asean artists have given Singaporeans not only the right impetus in our search for a better living, but have also brought the rich Asean heritage right down to the common men.

With your finishing touches on your works, we have been endowed with a richer and wider cultural heritage on which the Asean spirit can be further fortified.

Our special tributes go to Mr But Mughtar from Indonesia, Mr Ariffin Mohd. Ismail from Malaysia, Professor Napoleon V Abueva from Philippines, Mr Vichai Sithiratu from Thailand and Mr Ng Eng Teng from Singapore. Each of them has a distinguished career in the creative art, both nationally and internationally acknowledged.

Of course, it is difficult for an ordinary person to understand the importance of such cultural interaction, being more preoccupied with the need for economic and other co-operation. But the Asean spirit must not be confined only to officialdom. It must transcend official contacts and reach out to the peoples of Asean.

We are honoured to play hosts to this symposium which has been made possible through the Intra-Asean Cultural Programme administered by the Asean Committee on culture and information. In this connection, I should also like to place on record our appreciation for the committee's farsightedness in actively promoting wider cultural interchanges, ranging from TV and radio exchanges, seminars and workshops for the performing and visual arts and other festivals which will foster closer tie and better understanding for the common good for Asean solidarity.

Few people engrossed in tackling the immediate social and economic well-being of the people are conscious of the need for cultural posterity. I am pleased to note that the symposium has been documented by the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation. I have been told that this will form the substance of a TV exchange.

It will be invidious for me to single out any particular person for mention for their invaluable contribution to the success of this symposium. However, I should like to specially thank the Singapore

Polytechnic for allowing us to use their workshop. The readiness of the staff and students in rendering cheerful and prompt assistance during the symposium goes to show that a deeper appreciation of the fine arts has been firmly implanted in our young population.

We are also grateful to the Parks and Recreation Department for the choice of the excellent site at the Central Park for the permanent display of the works.

May I, on behalf of the people and the Government of Singapore thank you all for your efforts, and through you, we convey to your governments and people our very warm greetings.
