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SPEECH BY MR FONG SIP CHEE, MINISTER OF STATE (CULTURE) AT THE LAUNCHING OF CHAI CHEE'S GOOD NEIGHBOUR DAY CAMPAIGN AND THE COMMISSIONING OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH MOBILE DISPLAY BUS AT APT BLK 35 CHAI CHEE AVENUE ON MONDAY, 7 JUNE 82 AT 7.30 PM

Residents of Chai Chee are proudly gathered here tonight to pledge our involvement in one of our own innovative endeavours - our first Good Neighbour Day Observance. We are greatly honoured too for having been selected to be the Constituency to commission the Police Neighbourhood Watch Mobile Display Bus. It is not that we have a higher crime rate here: only that the two projects really move in tandem. Neighbourhood Watch has a definite contribution to make to our objective of a happier neighbourhood.

Good Neighbour Day, and what the Campaign sets out to achieve, may appear to some pessimists a futile crusade. The cynics may even dismiss it as being, at worst, an abstract exercise in fantasy and, at best, a quixotic indulgence. These people have little confidence in the goodness in mankind.

It is, in my view, a small but significant step towards a lasting ideal - its realisation all too crucial for our survival as a people. Of course, it is a bold pledge, but its goal is not unachievable. It might even take the life-time of a generation; but achieve it we must. No people, if inundated with conflicts within their own community, can thus pride themselves in the manifestation of any worth. It is a people's cohesiveness, manifest in a matured community, their social values and determination which make them rise above the challenges and crisis that might befall them.

Singaporeans have the tenacity to make the grade in the technological league. We have the grit too to mould a society in which every citizen will

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find his Shangrila, perhaps not always in wealth, but certainly in the mind and soul. The problem is: whilst everybody seems agreeable to the objective of happier community living in which better understanding, mutual trust, help and respect are the basic tenets, most do not quite know how to identify the problems, or put the finger on the right spot, so to speak.

The importance of a closely-knit, well-informed and gracious community capable of collective undertaking for the common good of fellow-citizens, cannot be better emphasized than in what the Prime Minister has recently said in his message to the RCs in honour of the President.

People form communities. Local communities are the cornerstones on which a nation rises. And people are what we are concerned with, in whatever we do to provide for their needs. The raw fact, however, is: Do people concern themselves with other people?

The Perfect Buah Kuini

To make the grade we must, but to ignore the human needs and to neglect community development is to inflict irreparable damage to our social fabric - a social disease we now incubate but which our children will have to suffer its outbreak. It is like a buah kuini - a fruit with tempting fragrance and promising sweetness with a near-perfect skin, only that when cut, it is often found to be infested with worms and has to be disposed of in haste. These worms find their way into the bloom, and grow with the fruit, nurturing themselves by sapping nourishment from inside without disfiguring the fruit's exterior. As a Chinese saying goes: "Gold and Jade without, decayed rags within". Examples of these societies are abundant.

We pride ourselves, perhaps too frequently, that we enjoy the second highest standard of living in Asia. We work hard for it, and of course we deserve the fruit of our labour. But let not the worms get in the Singapore blossom which will produce for us a fruit which also harbours in it worms and insects and social parasites.

Do we cherish a neighbourhood with the hostility of New York where the crime rate is frighteningly high? Even the most hideous crime is no

longer news, nor will it frighten the residents any more. Or do we cherish a neighbourhood with the same money-faced aggressiveness, vanity, selfishness and hypocrisy of Hong Kong, the tension of racial friction in many more cities, even in the developed world, or the indifference to fellow countrymen's suffering in disease and hunger in some Asian countries, and without anyone bothering to offer a paltry alm?

Many a crime could have been prevented had our residents been more concerned. Many a mishap, particularly those involving children, could have been avoided had we been more considerate. Many a quarrel amongst otherwise good neighbours could have been defused had we been more courteous. (Only a week ago I received a reply from the Divisional Police that two feuding families have been warned to stop their exchange of hostilities which disturbed other neighbours - one of them had acquired a blender in place of the ponder). Many a prejudice and misconception of one another's character would not have arisen, had we been bothered to make an effort in trying to understand our neighbours' traditional way of life; and many more acts of rudeness and disrespect could not have been developed into more serious disputes had we appreciated other people's religious faiths and cultural norms.

The Vertical Kampung

We often look back to our old kampungs and downtown neighbourhoods with nostalgia, and frequently bemoan that things and people are never the same again. Of course, they can be, if we start building for ourselves a new and even more lasting community spirit. Be friends with our immediate neighbours, and then the next and the next. In time, every block will be a 'vertical kampung'. Given more time, the spirit of camaraderie will permeate to other blocks. A true community spirit must emerge in the end.

The CCC has been taking a leading role in the preservation of our environment and improving our community wellbeing; the MC, WSC and YEC of the community centre are working their steam out to provide the facilities and organise activities to cater for the varied needs of the residents; the RCs have been particularly straining themselves to bring people together at social gatherings, launching projects for the benefit of those for

whom they have sacrificed their time, money and effort to serve voluntarily. The sum total of these efforts must contribute towards our basic objective of building a happy and gracious neighbourhood.

However, we have also been guilty at times of being unthinking in our work, more often due to financial and manpower constraint and expediency rather than the absence of commonsense. It is easy to fault these community functional groups, but they need to raise money and mobilise people in getting things done, and these are both difficult to come by. I know of a resident, fortunately for us he has moved out of the constituency, who was noticeably pleased when his child returned home from a children's party organised by the RC and having won a couple of prizes at this subsidised project, but complained to a RC member the very next day when approached for help. "What for I help the RC. What can the RC do for me?" he said. He belongs to the category of social parasite or neighbourhood pest whom Mr Toh Weng Cheong, our CCC Chairman had earlier described.

Our immediate task will be to give each zone a sense of belonging and identity. I suppose one way to begin is to give them a proper name rather than calling them by numbers. Most, if not all RCs are known either by numbers or alphabets - a dehumanising way in branding groups of human beings. I propose to name Zone 1 as Ping-An Zone, being near the old Peng Ann Road. Zone 2 shall be known as Ansar Zone, for its proximity to the Masjid Al Ansar. Zone 3 shall temporarily be called the Centre Zone, for want of a better name - it is almost in the centre of the Constituency and has in its neighbourhood the Community Centre. And for Zone 4, it shall be called the Fengshan Zone after the Fengshan Primary School.

Apart from the week-long programmes laid out for our residents, the Steering Committee has also published a commemorative book entitled: "Our Cultures - Yours and Mine". It is the first of a series. It is a very meaningful book and will certainly help us to understand one another's culture and traditions better. In this connection, I want to place on record my appreciation of the contributions made by our joint sponsors - the Nanyang Siang Pau and Sin Chew Jit Poh which donated towards the entire costs of the 15,000 copies. Every household will receive a copy free of

charge from their PCs in the next few days.

Many things more need to be done. With your support, we can do a better job. Be good neighbours, and let us all be proud residents of Chi Chee.
