

15 OCT 1984

Singapore Government

# PRESS RELEASE

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

84-GCT-13

Release No: 59/SEP  
05-1/84/09/28

**SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG, MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND SECOND MINISTER FOR HEALTH AT THE OPENING OF THE SEMINAR ON "TOWARDS A MORE EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF MALAYS IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY" ORGANISED BY THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF MALAY CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS IN SINGAPORE (MAJLIS PUSAT), AT PUB AUDITORIUM ON FRIDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 1984 AT 8.30 PM**

---

When I was approached to open this seminar, I hesitated before accepting. There were two reasons for my hesitancy. Firstly, I possess neither depth nor breadth of knowledge of a very complex subject. Secondly, if I were to apply a logical, analytical mind to the subject, I risk offending sensitivity with the cold conclusions.

Later, I felt that so long as one is sympathetic to problems, honest in his intentions, and sincere in his desire to help resolve them, he should not fear criticisms. It is with this attitude and frame of mind that I decided to make this keynote address. I hope my remarks will be received in this context.

Are Malay Aspirations different from other Singaporeans?

Malays in Singapore have the same types of hopes and aspirations as other Singaporeans. They want freedom of worship. They want to preserve their language and culture. They want to live with others in peace and harmony. They want their children to move ahead. They want to achieve progress.

Malays, compared with other Singaporeans, may be less strongly motivated by economic considerations and material gains, but I believe they too want to do well in life. They want to own a good home and they want to furnish it well. They, too, want to have comfortable jobs that pay well.

Thus, though the Chinese, Indians and Malays believe in different religions and speak different mother tongues, in reality, their spiritual, cultural and material aspirations are not different.

#### Do Malays face the same problems as others?

In trying to realize their aspirations, do Malays face the same problems as other Singaporeans?

I believe they do. Freedom of religion means tolerance of other religions. One cannot be allowed to push out another. It must accommodate one another. Their language and cultural heritage, like the Chinese' and the Indians', are exposed to outside influences. It cannot be insulated. To get a place in university, the students must do well in schools, including Malay students. To land a good job, the Malays must compete with others. To set up their own homes, they must queue up for HDB flats like others. These are common problems and the same set of rules must apply to all, regardless of race, language or religion. This even-handedness is necessary if our multi-racial society is not to founder.

#### Malays have similar but bigger problems

However, though Malays have similar problems as other Singaporeans, theirs seem heavier and bigger and, therefore, more difficult to overcome. They, therefore, require and deserve more attention than other communities. Let me illustrate from my experience in Marine Parade.

### Experience from Marine Parade

Marine Parade has four types of HDB apartment blocks - two-rooms, three-rooms, four and five rooms. The two-room blocks are rented out. The others are owner-occupied.

It will have some 23,000 voters in the coming General Election. My Marine Parade Branch has just completed an analysis of the voter profile from the Electoral Register. Twenty-four per cent of my voters are Muslims, or people whom we think are Muslims, going by their names.

They are concentrated in the two-room rental blocks and the smaller, three-room sale units. On average, each two-room rental block has about 30 per cent Muslims. The three-room blocks have about 34 per cent each, followed by 21 per cent for the four-room blocks, and only seven per cent for the five-room units.

My Muslim constituents had the same opportunity as the others in buying their flats in Marine Parade. But they rented or bought the smaller two or three-room types.

The reasons are not hard to find. They simply have less money than the other Singaporeans. But why?

There are two principal reasons why the Malays are relatively poorer than the other residents of Marine Parade: larger family and lower level of education. I come to this conclusion not from statistics but from eight years observations working as an MP meeting constituents on house to house visits, or during Meet-the-People sessions.

Until last month, the household with the largest number of members sharing the same roof to my knowledge was 17 - adults, teenagers, children, old and young, competing for sleeping space in a three-room flat.

That record was shattered three weeks ago. A young couple sought my assistance to get her HDB flat as quickly as possible. Her reason for the hurry? Twenty persons in a three-room flat. I must have shown an incredulous look because she hastened to explain that the figure included babies and many small children. Both cases were Muslim families.

But there is hope. In both cases, young couples were waiting for their HDB flats. They have registered to buy them.

It is my habit, when I meet my constituents at my weekly Meet-the-People sessions to mentally observe how they are doing by asking about their homes, whether they were bought or rented, their family-size and occupation. I also assess their educational level from the way they speak and the language they use.

I find that most older Chinese can manage some Mandarin, but not English. Most older Malays speak only Malay. The younger Chinese will speak to me in fluent Mandarin or English. I find, however, that many younger Malays are still uncomfortable in English.

From my experience in Marine Parade, I thought there was a correlation between the size of the family and the level of educational attainment. So I asked the Education Ministry for data on educational results by family size. (See 2 Tables attached). The correlation is obvious - the bigger the family, the poorer the results of the pupils.

It will be some time before we can narrow the gap in educational attainment between the Malays and the population as a whole. But we must try.

### Our Tasks

The Malay leaders are already trying, through MENDAKI, MUIS, Majlis Pusat, LBKM, the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union, the Malay Youth Literary Association (4 PM) and others. Such self-help is important. The Government can do its utmost, but only the Malay leaders can provide the emotional leadership to get their community to climb higher, not just in education, but also in business and the professions, and in the cultural and social fields. What we can do, is to coordinate our energy and not dissipate them in numerous un-coordinated directions and wasteful duplications.

The task is enormous, and progress will inevitably be slow. It is not confined to education. It must take in social and economic issues. But for those who are prepared to undertake the altruistic journey of helping others, there will be fulfilment along the way.

The Government wants the Malays to take part in the mainstream of national life. The Malay leaders want the same thing. The Malay community also wants it. We, therefore, have the same objective. But our perception of the way to achieve this may not be the same. It could be the same, but I don't know until we sit down to discuss the subject.

I suggest, after the General Elections, we form a Special Committee to come to grips with the main problems facing the Malays. I see the following as the main problems: (a) how to improve the educational attainment of Malay students, (b) how to alleviate social problems of those who find it difficult to keep up with the fast pace of life in a modern society, and, (c) how to quicken the socio-economic development of Malays in Singapore. The Special Committee will have to, firstly, understand fully

the extent and nature of the problems faced by their community, secondly, map out a practical plan of action, and thirdly, translate the plan into results. The problems are not difficult to identify, whether they are external or internal to the community. To solve them, requires energy and effort, understanding and encouragement, time and patience. It also requires the full involvement of the Malay leaders and the Malay community.

The Special Committee can be made up of Malay MPs and leaders. But it will not be narrow-based. It must set out to involve as many Malay intellectuals and community leaders as it can find and motivate.

The Special Committee will receive full support from the Government. The Government can help with financial and manpower resources, in the same way as it has done for the Mosque Building Fund, and more recently, MENDAKI. With total effort by the Malay leaders, fully supported by the Government, we can make significant progress towards a more effective participation of Malays in National Development in the 21st Century.

On this note, I have now great pleasure in declaring this Seminar open.

- - - - -

TABLE 1

PSLE RESULTS OF MALAY PUPILS VERSUS  
FAMILY SIZE OF PUPILS - 1983 PSLE

Family Size (No. of Children)	% Pass	% with at least 4A's
1	74.83	5.96
2	81.53	14.78
3	78.38	11.22
4	71.45	5.41
5	70.09	4.96
6	67.99	5.52
7	67.12	3.84
8	67.74	2.82
9	66.09	4.02
10	63.70	3.70

**TABLE 2****'O' LEVEL RESULTS OF MALAY PUPILS VERSUS  
FAMILY SIZE OF PUPILS - 1983 'O' LEVEL**

<b>Family Size (No. of Children)</b>	<b>% with 3'O' Level Passes</b>	<b>% with 5'O' Level Passes</b>
1	51.43	21.43
2	59.49	21.54
3	55.30	23.34
4	52.38	18.50
5	51.31	15.61
6	50.61	15.10
7	45.71	11.83
8	52.87	16.38
9	52.16	16.08
10	45.07	16.20