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Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG, FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE PAP YOUTH WING CHARITY NIGHT,
AT NEPTUNE THEATRE RESTAURANT ON FRIDAY,
28 OCTOBER 1988, AT 8.00 PM

OUR NATIONAL ETHIC

YOUTH WING

Youth Wing launched on 27 Sep 86. It has done well. Membership has grown to more than 2000. But it should still strive to do more. Set target: double membership. Not difficult. If each recruits one new member, the target of 4,000 members will be achieved rightaway. On a branch basis, this means only 50 Youth members per branch.

QUALITY

There is quality in the Youth Wing. Members are able, committed and unselfish in contribution. You have organised a good mix of political, community and social projects. You have your fair share of enjoyment - organising campfires and family gatherings. But you have not forgotten that you are members of a political party. So you have organised seminars and participated actively in the National Agenda discussions. You also organised the pre-GE Party Convention in August. You have also done some social work, eg. tonight's dinner is not just for us to have an enjoyable evening together. It is also in aid of charity. I gather you have raised \$70,000 for seven charities.

MPs

Youth Wing has also contributed to the country. Last GE: 17 new candidates, excluding Mah Bow Tan and Ng Pock Too. Youth Wing produced five:

Choo Wee Khiong
 John Chen
 Nasser Kamaruddin
 Davinder Singh
 K Shanmugam

Among the five, some were spotted after they started their Youth Wing activities while others were spotted first and brought into the Youth Wing. More future candidates will be identified and developed via the Youth Wing route. Does not mean that future candidates from the Youth Wing would all be under 35. Some could still be considered even after they have left the Youth Wing, ie. even when they are older than 35.

SOCIETY CHANGING

Our society is changing. Our main preoccupation now is to determine what kind of society Singapore will be in another 25 years' time. Singaporeans have become more affluent. We have become more English-educated. We travel widely, read foreign newspapers and journals, listen to BBC and watch American TV programmes. In short, we are assimilating outside influences daily. What kind of values will our children have? Malay, Indian, Chinese or western values? What if our values are western? Will they strengthen us or weaken us?

VALUES CHANGING

Our values are already changing. Compare Chinese Singaporeans against Chinese in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or the PRC, and we can see how westernised we have become. The

same is true for the Malay and Indian communities.

Anecdote 1:

Some years ago, in Taiwan, I attended a "Golden Horse" Presentation for the Best Actor, Best Actress Award. This is Taiwan's equivalent of Hollywood's Oscar. Without fail, every award winner, thanked his or her parents, particularly the mothers, for their part in his or her success. Very Chinese, very Confucianist. Watched American Oscar Award on TV. Did not see many of the award winners thanking their mothers. Singapore - not sure, because for many years, we did not teach Confucianist values through school text books.

Anecdote 2: School text-books

Chinese: "ba ba zao, ma ma zao"

English: "A is for Apple".

SHIFT TOWARDS INDIVIDUALISM

Over the last decade, there has been a clear shift in our values. Dr Aline Wong, who lectures in NUS and sees successive generations of young people noticed this. Dr Ow Chin Hock confirms her observations. There is a clear shift towards emphasis on self, or individualism. If individualism results in creativity, that is good, but if it translates into a "me first" attitude, that is bad for social cohesion and the country.

Now, why should we be concerned whether our value system is shifting towards individualism and away from group interests or communitarianism. (This is the word used by two Harvard Professors as the counterpart of individualism). We are concerned because it will determine our national competitiveness, and hence our prosperity and survival as a nation.

I have just started on a book by the two Harvard Professors, George Lodge and Ezra Vogel (Vogel also wrote "Japan as Number One"). It is called "Ideology and National Competitiveness". Their thesis is this: the national competitiveness of a country is affected by whether its people are more "communitarian" or "individualistic". Every society has both these elements, but each differs in the dominance of one over the other. In Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, communitarianism dominates over individualism. This has allowed them to catch up economically with the industrial west in the last 20 years. Japan, because of its communitarian value, is unbeatable, according to Ezra Vogel.

SINGAPORE IN 21ST CENTURY

We have to determine the sort of society we want to be in the 21st Century - more communitarian or more individualistic? The answer, of course, depends on which is better for our national competitiveness or survival.

The Prime Minister provided the answer when he addressed the Global Strategies Conference on 24 October:

" What are the key factors that made the Japanese, the first of the East Asian peoples to catch up with the industrialised West? The Japanese have the right attributes for high group performance. They are hardworking, business oriented, highly competitive and pragmatic. But the other East Asians, Koreans, Chinese, Vietnamese, are not inferior in these qualities, as their histories bear out.

They share many characteristics derived from a common cultural base, Chinese in origin. Some observers have attributed this emphasis on hardwork and thrift to the "Confucian ethic"...

The history of these countries has also resulted in strong social cohesion within their societies. They have learnt the valuable lesson that to make the greatest progress in the shortest possible time, it is necessary for a people to move in unison. And this implies the need for individuals to make sacrifices for the good of the country and its progress."

Like Japan and Korea, Singapore is a high-performance country because we share the same cultural base as the other successful East Asians, ie, Confucian ethic. We have the same core values which made the Japanese, Koreans and Taiwanese succeed. If we want to continue to prosper we must not lose our core values such as hard-work, thrift, and sacrifice.

NATIONAL IDEOLOGY

The question is how to preserve them when daily we are exposed to alien influences. My suggestion is: formalise our values in a national ideology and then teach them in schools, work-places, homes as our way of life. Then we will have a set of principles to bind our people together and guide them forward.

The Indonesians and Malaysians have their national ideology, Pancasila (Five Principles), and Rukun Negara (Pillars of the Nation) respectively. These are formal statements of the key axioms and premises on which their society is based. We should have a clear statement of our national ethic to prevent our society from drifting aimlessly into the 21st Century.

This is the next challenge for the Government and the Party - formalising our national ethic and inculcating it in all citizens. Then we can determine what Singapore will be

in the 21st Century. We are part of a long Asian civilisation and we should be proud of it. We should not be assimilated by the west, and become a pseudo-Western society. We should be a nation that is uniquely multi-racial and Asian, with each community proud of its traditional culture and heritage.

YOUTH WING'S ROLE

The Youth Wing can play an active part by organising activities and projects that contribute to a better understanding of the importance of retaining our traditional culture and heritage. You will be around in the 21st Century. You want to retain your Chineseness, Malayness and Indianess within the framework of a tolerant, multi-racial Singaporean society.

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