

Release No: 07/NOV

05-1/90/11/04

**SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG, FIRST DEPUTY PRIME
MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE LAUNCHING
OF “CLEAN AND GREEN WEEK . . . GREEN FOR LIFE”,
AT ESPLANADE PARK
ON SUNDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 1990 AT 10.00 PM**

CHANGE SOCIAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENVIRONMENT

Nineteen years ago, on 7 November 1971, Dr Goh Keng Swee as the Acting Prime Minister launched Tree Planting Day. He planted a Rain Tree at Mount Faber Park. The Prime Minister, who was away, subsequently planted a Yellow Flame at the Tanjong Pagar Community Centre the following month. The planting of these two trees marked the beginning of a sustained effort to beautify our island city. Since then, we have planted over 100,000 trees on Tree Planting days in November.

The Tree Planting campaign is an unqualified success. The greenery around us has made Singapore a most pleasant and comfortable place to live in. It provides the much needed shade from the sapping heat. The different species of trees also add colour and variety to our environment. We are, going by the remarks of visitors, probably one of the greenest cities in the world.

But greenery alone is not enough to make an environment attractive. An attractive environment must be artistically landscaped with clean streets, clean parks, clean rivers and clean and fresh air. It must also be free from intolerable noise. An artistically landscaped park strewn with broken bottles, rotting and smelling left-overs, and food wrappers is not pretty. A clean and green neighbourhood that is noisy does not allow us to relax after a hard day's hardwork.

We want an environment that enchants us. Not one that turns us off. As in defence, we should adopt a total approach. Every aspect of our environment must be made beautiful, and everyone must play his part.

We have done well on the green part. But there is plenty of room for improvement on the clean part, despite the praise heaped by many visitors about our city's cleanliness.

Visitors' assessment is based mainly on what they see at Orchard Road, Shenton Way, and the popular tourist spots. Undoubtedly, these places are very clean. But take them to a Housing Board estate, or the East Coast Park after a weekend. After that, I think they will want to moderate their praises.

HDB and the Ministry of Environment once experimented with "No Sweeping Days" in several housing estates to gauge the extent of littering. The results were deplorable. They proved that many people were not playing their part in keeping their environment clean.

The experiment shows that it is still not our second nature to- keep our environment clean. We tend to lapse to a less considerate behaviour when we think no one is looking.

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We can, if we want to, adopt stricter and harsher measures to keep our environment clean. Fines for littering can be increased sharply. The pool of Environment inspectors can also be expanded to cover the key areas at more frequent intervals. These measures will certainly reduce the number of litter offences. But that is no great achievement. The challenge is whether we can keep the environment clean without the threat of punishment.

We have been independent for 25 years. Those last 25 years were growing-up years. Like the Yellow Flame and the Rain Tree, planted by the Prime Minister and Dr Goh Keng Swee, our country has matured. The first phase of our development is behind us.

We are now entering into the next stage. We are no more worried as to whether the sapling will grow. We are concerned with its flowering.

Our social behaviour must reflect this flowering. We want to be a cultivated and gracious society. That means we have to be naturally refined, without being told to be, or worse still, forced to be. Continuing to focus only on the physical aspect of planting trees, of keeping clean, will not get us there. A total approach to shape and change our attitude towards our environment is needed. We are still not yet a gracious, refined people. But we can be. Through diligent tree planting and keeping the country clean, the right habit can be conscientiously cultivated. When it becomes our second nature to keep our environment clean and green, it would also be in our nature to be considerate to others by maintaining the environment noise-free, stench-free and irritation-free.

I am confident we can succeed because we all keep our homes neat, tidy and clean even though the anti-littering laws do not apply there. We have it in us to keep a place clean. The problem is that we make a distinction between what is ours and what we think are not. The perimeter of our house has become a mental divider between a clean home and a dirty environment. We may not have title-deeds to the public areas and the environment, but we do own them as Singaporeans. Knock down the mental wall. Regard every square inch of our country as our home. Extend the cleanliness of our home to the entire country. Apply the same self-imposed standards of tidiness in our home to our environment.

Shaping and changing attitude towards our environment is a long process. Good social behaviour has to be taught by parents and grand-parents at home through both example and exhortation. Schools will have to teach it through formal lessons and practices. Peer influence will get it firmly rooted as a social norm. This process can take generations. But if we mount a sustained effort, we can probably achieve our goal in 20 to 25 years. For we are not starting from scratch. We have had "Keep Clean" campaigns. The Tree Planting campaign is already 19 years old. The inauguration of the Clean and Green Week is a continuation of our past efforts. It marks a new phase in our aspiration to make Singapore the most enchanting equatorial city state, a city within a park. It

marks a shift in emphasis from just greening Singapore and cleaning Singapore to a total approach to shape and change our attitude towards the environment.

The Clean and Green Week will continue until we can have a clean, green and beautiful environment without the need for a forest of anti-litter signs. Only then, can we consider ourselves as socially gracious. Only then, do we stop the campaign.

Like the Yellow Flame and the Rain Tree, I am optimistic the Kuras that I will be planting will mark another phase of our environmental development, one that will inspire the next generation to keep up with the task of making Singapore more beautiful and charming.

It is now my pleasure to launch the Clean and Green Week and also to declare open the re-developed Esplanade Park.

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