

Singapore Government **PRESS RELEASE**

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SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR POTONG PASIR AT THE SENNETT ESTATE
RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL DINNER AT THE SENNETT ESTATE
COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SATURDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER '79 AT 7.30 PM

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Tonight I wish to touch on two subjects. They may be of interest to members of the SERA who all of us know are the relatively better off members of the Potong Pasir Constituency. You do not have any of the common constituency problems relating to jobs, housing, resettlement, hawkers stalls, and others. These problems normally require the assistance of the MP. Your problems, if any, are what I would term the more pleasant ones. They do not concern your livelihood but rather relate to security and orderly society. Your problems are like luxuries as against the necessities of your poor neighbours. In this light the two topics I have chosen: (a) Defence and (b) Opposition in Parliament, will appeal to you.

It has been variously suggested that Singapore cannot be defended. This being so we need not spend much time, effort, and money in building up our defence forces. My predecessor, Dr Goh Keng Swee, had on many occasions debunked this view. His most easily understandable example can be recalled with benefit. When you own a store full of valuable goods, you will not leave it unprotected. You will strengthen the walls, the gates, or the vaults, even though you know that a determined gang of robbers using the latest equipment and explosives can break them down and get away with your goods. Depending on the value of the goods in the store you may even insist on greater security. In addition to the strong walls, gates, and vaults, you may provide regular guards, guard dogs, constant inspection and supervision. Is this not the same with Singapore? Against an aggressor who is a big power with nuclear capability, Singapore cannot be defended. But surely that does not mean we should not build up our defence forces to the

maximum to /2.

maximum to discourage lesser aggressors. Should we allow ourselves to be easy pickings? Or do those critics against our defence spending think Singapore is not worth defending? Without defence and security there can be no political and economic stability. Without stability there can be no progress and prosperity. Our very livelihood and existence is dependent on our being able to defend Singapore.

We cannot rely on others to defend us, therefore, our defence forces are built up on the basis of National Service. Every physically fit male citizen of National Service age must serve for 2 to 2½ years in the SAF. N.S. has been with us for more than 10 years now. It is generally well accepted. It should be so strengthened in the hearts and minds of the people that any able-bodied young man who did not do his N.S. should be looked upon as an outcast or a pariah in the community. This may not go down well with a few rich and doting parents who keep trying their best to create some excuse or other to enable their son to avoid N.S. or to have it postponed indefinitely. They do not say that they are against N.S. but they use various strategies to delay the inevitable. My advice to such parents is that they should honestly examine themselves and their own generation. They will then realise that as Singaporeans they must make a commitment. They can no longer keep on running from place to place. If Singapore is their home and the home of their children, then the young Singapore citizens must be trained to defend their home and country.

The Ministry of Defence has dealt with the whole range of excuses. We have listened to all of them and can provide suitable answers to everyone of them. But whatever the excuse the able-bodied young man cannot avoid doing N.S. It will be better for the doting parents to prepare their sons for N.S. in readiness for enlistment so that when he joins the SAF he will be able to take everything in his stride.

The saying is that peace can only be preserved when every state conducts its own defence effectively. Singapore can only have peace when it is known that its people can defend its sovereignty and integrity effectively. We can do so if every citizen is well trained. It will not be fair if some are trained

and others are not. Every one has the same obligation to do National Service.

My second topic is Opposition in Parliament. The subject comes up now and again particularly among the English educated and also during election time. The electioneering stunts and postures of opposition candidates during election campaigns need not bother us. Opposition candidates lose nothing but have everything to gain when they make all sorts of allegations and promises. Even in the unlikely event of their being elected, they will still be unable to carry out their promises. But by then no one can require them to render any account.

We should, however, analyse the reasons why lack of opposition members in Parliament continues to bug the English educated. The non-English educated do not even notice that such a situation exists and cannot care less about it.

The explanation is not far to seek. It is a matter of relative values. The English educated have been taught one set of values which apply as the norm in Europe and America. They consider that whatever Singapore has done has not been as good as what was done in the US or in Europe. This being the case everything Singapore does that is not a copy of the West is not up to the standard. What exists in the West and is absent in Singapore then becomes our shortcoming. Irrespective of whether the western ideas are relevant to our society, the accusation of inadequacy can be levelled at the Government when we do not slavishly copy western modes and practices. The suggestion that there is no opposition MP in the legislative chamber is a case in point. The non-English educated on the other hand is satisfied with the conditions here. They accept that Singapore had gone a long way since 1959. They are happy to see their status and livelihood improve, their children having a place in school, that medical and health services are easily available, and that the HDB can provide every family with decent accommodation. Compared with what they used to have and with what they know their friends and relatives in other Asian countries have, they are well satisfied.

Let us examine this ~~case~~ in some detail. Is it true that there is no opposition? We all know that there are all kinds of opposition, from Communists, Communist United Front, fellow travellers down to labour parties of workers and non-workers and riff-raff of every kind. Why is it that with so much opposition there are no opposition MP's in Parliament? Whatever may be said of the PAP, no one can deny that as a political party it has observed scrupulously the rules of parliamentary democracy. Hence when the electorate decides to have all MP's of one particular party, it becomes the wish of the people that the PAP should continue to govern without opposition in Parliament. It is not obligatory of the PAP to either concede or reserve some seats for the opposition. As a simple illustration, if the SERA football team is so much stronger than the opposition, you do not ask the team to stand aside to let the other side score goals just because the other side cannot score a goal in fair competition.

We should, however, go back to fundamentals. It is scarcely honest to say that there has been no opposition in Parliament. There was opposition. The only credible opposition is the Communists and their Communist United Front organizations. The Barisan Socialist is only one of them. They can probably put up a better show than all the riff-raff that periodically performs at each election or by-election. But the Communists have decided to fight the PAP by unconstitutional means. They chose to take their struggle against the PAP into the streets. They have been doing this for many years. You all sleep soundly each night because our police and security forces are working all the time to keep the Communists and the subversives in hiding.

The communist opposition is better organized and their underground subversive groups are even at this point of time plotting our downfall. Their main objective is the destruction of the existing system of government to replace it with one of their own. Hence the lesson for all of you is that the alternative to the PAP is not a government of the riff-raff as we saw in 1954/1959, but a genuine communist government a la PRG or SRV.

To say that there is no opposition is not being intelligent. To request that PAP should concede one or two seats to candidates

who cannot /5.

who cannot get elected according to the rules is childish. The PAP welcomes opposition in the open debate. Our arguments centre on what contributions can be made to the improvement of Singapore. Our competence in running a clean, efficient, and effective government has been appreciated by the vast majority of the electorate. Time and again they have decided that the PAP is their best choice. The opposition candidate is not prevented from making a try. Bleating about no opposition in Parliament is not something that deserves consideration. We should direct our efforts to keep Singapore economically buoyant and politically stable. This will enable the people to live in peace, harmony, and prosperity. We do not need opposition for opposition's sake.

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