

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • tel: 328191 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 362207 / 362271.

National Archives and
Records Centre, Singapore.

05-1/80/07/24.

- 2 AUG 1980

Acc. No. NARC

80	0050	18
----	------	----

SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR POTONG PASIR, AT THE OPENING
OF THE POTONG PASIR COMMUNITY CENTRE AT LORONG 8, TOA PAYOH
AND THE LAUNCHING OF THE CONSTITUENCY COURTESY CAMPAIGN
ON THURSDAY, 24 JULY 1980 AT 7.30 PM

Tonight it is my pleasure to declare the Potong Pasir Community Centre officially open and also to launch this year's Constituency Courtesy Campaign.

I shall first deal with the Community Centre. This is a new structure put up by the Housing and Development Board to be rented to the People's Association for use to serve the needs of the residents in Lorong 8 and the neighbouring areas. This Community Centre replaces the one that had been in existence in the Potong Pasir Village. The Village Community Centre had to be pulled down to make way for redevelopment of the Potong Pasir area.

We are grateful to both the Housing and Development Board and the People's Association for their efforts to provide us with this Community Centre. We are particularly appreciative of the efforts of the Housing and Development Board in responding to the request of the residents of Lorong 8 for a playground to be developed on an empty piece of land adjoining this new Community Centre. This playground has now been properly developed and landscaped, and I am glad to see that many of the residents and their children living in Lorong 8 are making use of it. The Ministry of Defence has also contributed its share to this recreational facility by providing it with some equipment to encourage the people, particularly those who have been in national service, to keep themselves physically fit. It is my hope that more people will make use of the equipment to do physical exercise and induce our

younger generation /2.

younger generation to pay greater attention to physical training.

The new Community Centre is, however, only a temporary facility. Plans have already been drawn up for the development of a key centre in the new Potong Pasir housing redevelopment. The Housing and Development Board has designed the new centre. Our Potong Pasir community leaders will have to work hard to raise the necessary funds for the building of this key community centre which can be ready within the next two to three years. We hope to meet with generous response from our friends and well-wishers when we begin our fund raising campaign later this year. I appreciate the assistance that I am already getting from many people and I hope that more will come forward to help.

Let me now turn to this year's Constituency Courtesy Campaign. By nature, culture, religion, and upbringing the peoples of Asia are courteous and obliging. Yet in Singapore with our cosmopolitan population who mainly originate from Asia, we have found it necessary year after year to promote courtesy campaigns. Why is this so? Are we less naturally endowed or poorer in our culture, religion, or upbringing that we seem lacking in normal courtesy and politeness, or have we for some reason or other degenerated into rude and uncivilised barbarians? I do not think that the Singaporean is in any way less courteous and polite than other Asians. There must, therefore, be reasons for the lack of courtesy among our population.

The main reason for discourtesy among many of our people is their living in a highly urbanized society. The pace of daily life, particularly in our work, is probably much faster than what our mental and physical processes are geared to accept. With more and more people moving into high-rise apartments in densely populated housing estates, with our roads being more and more congested, with constant increase in noise and other irritations, we cannot avoid friction, frustration, and tension. As a result many of us are often irritable and quick-tempered, ready to give vent to our

frustration and anger at the slightest provocation. We cannot totally do away with this kind of environment. We should rather make every effort to reduce the irritations and to learn to live with them. Our regular courtesy campaigns aim at reminding our people to be more tolerant, patient and polite to one another.

Another reason for the existence of discourtesy in Singapore is that we still have many inequalities and inequities in our society. At one end of the scale we have the well-to-do who may or may not be well educated but who take great pleasure in flaunting their wealth. Often some of these people behave with pride, inscience, and arrogance. While at the other end there are the less fortunate who have not met with success in their endeavours and who must struggle to eke out a living. They are frustrated, disappointed, and angry both with themselves and with society. Neither of these two extreme groups, the rich and the poor, can be expected to be very courteous in their daily behaviour.

Added to these already very serious causes for discourtesy is our inheritance of the migrant mentality from our forefathers. Many of us have only recently planted our roots in this country. Many others have not yet divested themselves of the migrant mentality. They continue to nurse a sense of insecurity. The cleverer and more privileged ones are worried about their future. They are constantly looking out for better alternatives for survival and will not make definite commitments to be true Singaporeans. They do not accept that security can only come with definite commitment and the acceptance of obligations and duties as citizens, including the responsibility to defend one's country and the necessity to participate in and contribute to solving the problems of the community. These insecure and transient people cannot feel for others or tolerate their shortcomings. Being only interested in themselves they will probably take advantage of others. Their behaviour cannot be too courteous. In their dealings with others they are likely to cause irritation and friction.

When we mix the various explosive ingredients together in a community that still suffers from some social and economic ills associated with inequalities and injustices, it is not surprising that tensions and conflicts manifest themselves in rudeness and discourtesy. If left unchecked these tensions and conflicts will lead to disaffection and strife. Eventually they can result in revolution and destruction of our society. We must, therefore, do our best to educate our people to be polite and tolerant and to be more concerned for the welfare of others.

Our courtesy campaigns are directed towards encouraging our people to be more patient in their dealings with others. We all know that courtesy begets courtesy and rudeness can only result in rudeness. We must try our best to be courteous to each other all the times and to pay greater attention to the sensitivity and feelings of others. With goodwill and good sense we can succeed. Every citizen can be more tolerant, polite, and concerned for the welfare of others. Hopefully with our conscious and deliberate efforts we can make Singapore a more courteous society.

#####