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KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MP FOR POTONG PASIR AT THE COMMUNITY LEADERS SEMINAR ORGANISED BY THE POTONG PASIR CITIZENS' CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE ON SUNDAY, 26 OCTOBER 1980 AT THE SENNETT COMMUNITY CENTRE AT 10.00 AM

New Challenges For The Potong Pasir Community Leaders

The organizers of this one-day Seminar must be congratulated for their foresight in choosing "Triumphantly into the 80s" as their theme for discussion. We must prepare our community for the many changes and challenges in the years ahead. All our community leaders should understand these problems and be prepared to work hard to guide and advise the people to unite in their efforts for the common good. Personal interests should never be placed before the interests of the community or the country.

The decade of the 80s will be a water-shed period for the world. Well accepted theories, ideas, and ideologies held sacred for many years in many countries will give way to radically different ones. Practices and patterns of behaviour previously accepted as tried and tested will be called to question. Changes in social and economic plans and programmes will occur in line with changing political social, and economic conditions in different parts of the world. Singapore is probably better prepared to meet these changes. Nevertheless community leaders must work hard to unite the people to wholeheartedly support Government policies so that together they can confront and surmount all the problems that we will encounter.

The Potong Pasir Constituency is undergoing vast changes. The three different and distinct areas within this constituency have temporarily been reduced to two with the resettlement of the people from the Meyappa Chettiar Road/Lorong Ahadiat/Jalan Potong Pasir area and from Kampong Woodleigh. With two distinct communities, Lorong 8, Toa Payoh in the north and Sennett Estate in the south plus the small pockets of population scattered in between, the nature of the Potong Pasir community has changed quite dramatically. Our community leaders will have to try to bridge the gap between Sennett Estate residents and those elsewhere. Their past efforts to interest Sennett Estate residents in the problems of Potong Pasir have met with indifferent success. From now onwards, the sense of community must be strengthened.

All the residents in the constituency irrespective of the areas from which they come must be integrated to form one big residential community. We must think in terms of mutual help, concern for neighbours, and care and assistance to everyone in need. We must coordinate the individual efforts of the residents from every walk of life to improve the environment within the constituency so that the Potong Pasir Constituency will be a more pleasant place to live in and to bring up our children. In two or three years' time we can welcome new constituents when they move into the new Housing Estate now under development by HDB in the old Kampong Potong Pasir.

Ideally a community leader must have long association with the constituency and understand the problems of the community. He must himself be successful in the field in which he provides leadership. His own personal life must be exemplary and his honesty and integrity must be above reproach. He must feel genuinely concerned for the poorer and less-fortunate. Generally he must want to assist members of the community to improve their livelihood, their education, and their skills so as to raise their standard of living and provide better prospects for their children. The community leader must be correctly motivated. He must not be interested only in his own advancement but rather he must place the interests of the community before self. He must work hard to improve the society which has given him not only the opportunity for a respectable and comfortable life but also the honour and privilege to serve it in return. Community leaders who work hard to improve living conditions of the people will be rewarded not in monetary terms, but in the satisfaction of doing something worthwhile for their fellowmen. Many such community leaders have been given recognition by the State, and accorded a place of honour and esteem in the community.

Everyone will wish that we have as many ideal community leaders as we can get. But we have to be realistic. With so many interest groupings, not every group can be led by an ideal and correctly motivated community leader. What we hope for is that every community leader puts the public interests, or the interests of the community before his own personal interests. He should be sincerely concerned about the welfare and well-being of members of his community. We need community leaders who can provide leadership at various levels i.e. grassroot, sports and recreation, music and drama, culture and education as well as social, economic and political work.

Within the constituency, there are various social and economic elements more noted for their diversity than unity. Leading such a community is by no means easy. In the past some community activities were more successful than others. The diversity consists of racial, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences among the residents. There are people belonging to different trade associations, professional bodies, sports clubs, clan associations, churches and temples. Building a sense of community into these polyglot groups is not easy. Solidarity and concern for each other can exist among small groups. But to try to integrate the interests of these diverse groups together into one big community will be a difficult problem. All good community leaders have learned to accept that things that are worth doing are never easy. To encourage greater neighbourliness, to improve the environment and living conditions, to raise the living standard and general well-being of the residents, are all things that are worth doing, but they need hard work.

In the past the efforts of the community leaders aimed at solving basic economic problems of the poorer people. They succeeded very well and most of these problems have now been solved. With improved education and better employment the hardships of the residents were relieved and many families became better off. Many younger members accepted HDB housing and moved out but many who were used to the traditional way of kampong life remained. The Government had intentions of resettling the people of Potong Pasir into the new HDB estate in Toa Payoh, this did not meet with general acceptance and Kampong Potong Pasir continued for some 10 to 15 years further. Toa Payoh Estate became a great success with other people, only then did the people of Potong Pasir realize that there was advantage in modern high-rise housing. In 1979 when a concerted effort was mounted, they finally decided to move from the squalor of the old kampong to the spick and span cleanliness and modern conveniences of the new flats in Ang Mo Kio and elsewhere.

The present generation of community leaders who had been assisting the people of Potong Pasir did not make much impact on the residents of Sennett Estate. The Sennett Estate Community Centre for instance attracts little enthusiasm and support from the residents of Sennett Estate. Historically this community centre was to serve a

wider area. Electoral boundaries changed and as a result our large community centre found itself being located at a rather inconvenient corner of the constituency. We shall be mounting serious efforts to raise funds to put up a new community centre in the central location within Kampong Potong Pasir.

We must make both this new community centre as well as the old one better able to serve the needs of the community. The services and facilities provided must be more within easy reach of the residents. In the early 60s and 70s the work of the community leaders was well appreciated by the residents in Kampong Potong Pasir and Kampong Woodleigh. They helped the poor people with their problems. They sought donations and financial assistance from the residents. The community activities did not cater much for the people of Sennett Estate. Though they had formed the Sennett Estate Residents' Association, the activities organized only attracted limited participation. The Sennett Estate residents did not have strong feelings regarding the community. They preferred to keep their problems to themselves. Perhaps one of the most important new challenges is how to attract their participation and how to channel their undoubted abilities and resources into community building.

With the younger generation becoming better educated, higher skilled, and well able to find better paid employment, it became inevitable that a generation of well established community leaders could not provide the type of activities that would interest them. It is to their credit that the older community leaders did not abandon their responsibility. They persisted to do their best even though it meant getting their own friends and business colleagues to support them in their activities. This resulted in the building up of different factions among the community leaders to support one position or another. Prestige and face rather than community interests became important. The different factions often had divergent interests. Community activities became stereo-type and of interest only to small groups of people. The people soon became disenchanted. The community leaders became isolated from the people they serve. The new challenge is how to attract new activities that meet the needs of the younger members of the community. Unless this can be done we will not be able to foster the spirit of service, mutual assistance or encourage

solidarity and a sense of community among the residents of the Potong Pasir Constituency.

In all human endeavour when pressing problems are solved invariably new and more difficult problems will arise. No sooner have the problems of the older generation been resolved, than we find ourselves confronted with the problems of rising expectations of the younger generation. To meet the hopes and aspirations, ideals and ideas of the younger Singaporeans in the years ahead we need a new type of community leader who can communicate with and understand their needs and requirements. The normal activities of the community centre like holding regular dinners, supporting the Government in tree-planting, courtesy, speak Mandarin, and other campaigns no longer hold much attraction for the younger generation. They know what the Government is trying to do. They do not need the community leaders to explain policies and campaigns to them. Many of them are probably better educated and better informed than the community leaders. Unless the community leaders can understand the consequences of the changed circumstances and know how to respond to the problems of rising expectations of the younger members of the community, the new challenges of the 80s will not be met.

For the next decade the problem is not just to look after the basic human needs of the lower income earning families. The main thrust is rather to cater for the demands of the more affluent young people. Well organized sports and recreational activities, intellectual and cultural study groups that can advance their professional and knowledge horizons will be in better demand. The new challenge is for our community leaders to plan and organize such activities. The new community leader must be able to organize the young men and women to contribute their ideas and to channel their energies into community work. They must be receptive to suggestions and new ideas from the younger people in the community. They must understand that with rapid change, what was good 10 or 15 years ago for the lower income residents can no longer be of interest to the better educated and more affluent residents of both Lorong 8 Toa Payoh or the Sennett Estate or for that matter the other residents in the constituency.

What activities are likely to attract the interests of the younger generation? We cannot define these in detail. Generally human needs and aspirations change as their economic conditions improve. Luxuries become necessities. As creature comforts are satisfied, new and higher expectations are raised. Community leaders have to keep on improving on the facilities, amenities, and activities to meet the demands of a rapidly developing young community. Relative affluence brings to the young person a greater concern for physical health. When people had to work hard to earn the bare necessities of life they paid little attention to jogging or other sporting activities to maintain good physical health. Those with sizeable incomes enjoy a higher standard of living and pay greater attention to physical health, cultural and intellectual activities. Poorly educated and low-income families require little in the form of cultural and intellectual entertainment. Those with secondary and tertiary education holding good jobs and responsible positions demand better recreational, cultural, and intellectual amenities. Community leaders must bear these in mind if they are to attract the participation of the younger generation of members.

Community leaders should attract the younger people to join the community centres and establish a dialogue with them. Without this it will not be possible to bridge the generation gap. By holding closer discussions with their counterparts in the more affluent and younger constituencies our community leaders can get ideas as to what activities and facilities are in demand by the younger generation. Constituencies such as Cairnhill, Marine Parade, Katong, or Siglap will probably have more experience of this nature. We can get some advice from them and study the types of activities these community centres mount for their constituents. Some of them can then be adopted for use in the Potong Pasir Constituency.

Most of these activities will probably be new to older community leaders. They are however necessary. Younger community leaders can communicate with their own group to organize such activities. All these do not mean that we have no longer any use for the established community leaders. They have wisdom gained through practical experience. Their practical knowledge can prevent over-enthusiasm. They can exert

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a good restraining influence to prevent excesses of youthful exuberance. The young leaders have the same limitations but with an eye to the future, and experiences things, the attitudes of reservists towards their role

in the military, as well as the employers' views on the part they could usefully play in the Reserves Upgrading Scheme. With continual serve? It is realistic to accept that for everything we get there is feedback, MINDEF will be able to identify weaknesses and take the a price to be paid. Rapid economic and social development may have necessary steps to improve our Reserves Training System. solved our education, housing, employment, social, and economic problems. For the Reserves Upgrading Scheme to succeed, reservists must respond positively to this challenge to improve themselves in per capita income. But to achieve these many families have to depend on more than one wage earner. They should avail themselves of this opportunity to update themselves on the new developments in the S/E which would The price paid for the increased income is the reduction of parental care and the for and stand as they advance to higher command appointments. The children do not get as much of the family upbringing, the parental care, and the constant supervision that a non-working mother can provide. The rising expenses of their education system has made matters worse. The dilution of educational standards particularly in legal instruction has resulted in a generation of young people who are academically educated but whose sense of duty to the SAF and maintain the high standard of performance and quality about self than anything else that our Reserves Upgrading Scheme has set out to achieve. We will

succeed with your unstinting support and total dedication to serve the younger generation that our community leaders will have to deal with the SAF. are therefore better educated and trained than their parents. They are more worldly wise, they care more about their own personal interests and less for others. - They are more articulate and vocal. They do not accept the need for others to lead them. They are often critical of established procedures. We see many such cases at our Meet-the-People sessions, often to the amazement, astonishment, and dismay of the older generation of community leaders. Things that we normally take for granted like filial piety, care for the aged and the sick, the welfare of neighbours, the interests of the community, etc. are often brushed aside by the poorer examples of our educated youngsters. They are only interested to achieve what they want and will not be concerned with the effects on others in the process. Our new community leaders must persuade the younger generation to a more reasonable way of thinking. Such problems will be the new challenge for our community leaders in the years ahead. Leadership is a quality that can be cultivated. The good leader must be able to influence those he leads and to mould them to conform to a proper pattern.

Community leaders of the 80s will have as one of the most important tasks the influencing of our younger members to accept that public and community interests are of importance and should be placed before individual and self interests.

The improvement in the standard of living and the rising expectations of the younger generation must not lead us to forget that there are still many poor and aged people in the constituency who need help and attention. The older and in many case the less well-endowed and less-fortunate, include people whose children have grown up. Some of these children have got married and moved out to form families of their own. When nothing is done for the elderly and the poorer people, there will be loneliness, economic hardship, and problems with mental and physical health. Community leaders must continue to cater for these categories of people. Many older people have little income, yet they would not like to depend on their married children. They need to find some means of earning their livelihood. They still have useful skills to offer but because of their age they cannot get employment. Community leaders can organize activities that can utilize the skills of these senior citizens. The less educated older people often look for market stalls to sell foodstuffs or other merchandise. This may be a solution should they run the stall profitably and are still in sound physical health to work hard. Often when the old people cannot do such work, an unsatisfactory situation will arise. The market stalls will be sub-letted to others who employ young people to operate them. Young people should not be hawkers but rather should be trained in skills that can contribute more to the economy of the country. The community leader must look at both sides and balance what is good for the person he is helping against what is good for the country.