

Singapore Government

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ADDRESS BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER OF DEFENCE
AND MP FOR POTONG PASIR AT THE SENNETT ESTATE RESIDENTS
ASSOCIATION ANNUAL DINNER TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE
POTONG PASIR COMMUNITY CENTRE AT THE CRYSTAL BALLROOM,
HYATT HOTEL ON FRIDAY, 21 NOV 80 AT 8.00 PM

Last year when SERA discussed with me its plans to hold its Annual Dinner, I proposed that the occasion be used to raise funds to benefit the community or some worthwhile charity. SERA was however somewhat hesitant. At that juncture SERA had been reorganized and revitalized with the infusion of new Committee Members, and its support from the residents of Sennett Estate had just begun to gather momentum. To turn the Annual Dinner into a fund raising function could deter some members and discourage residents of Sennett Estate from giving SERA further support. Past experience had shown that when an organization existed solely for raising funds, support for it soon dwindled. SERA was then not sure of the ground reaction. Wisely it decided to hold a function that would bring its members together. The Annual Dinner was held at the Sennett Community Centre on 15th September 1979. Many members and residents from Sennett Estate as well as friends and well-wishers from elsewhere joined in to make the celebrations a resounding success.

The excellent turnout on that occasion convinced SERA that the people of Sennett Estate far from being apathetic, were keen to do their part in public and community work. Many of them have come to realize that to live together in harmony, to improve their environment, and to have safety and security in their housing estate, they must be interested in what is going on around them and in the welfare of other people in the estate. They may well be able to look after themselves but they need not be apathetic or indifferent to other people in their housing estate. They must involve themselves

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in community work. This obligation to the community can best be discharged through SERA. By joining SERA and taking part in its activities they benefit not only the community but themselves as well. The more support SERA gets the greater its capability to translate members' participation into social and public service. The more active SERA becomes the greater it will succeed to benefit the needy and under-privileged not just in Sennett Estate but also in the Potong Pasir Constituency as well. The greater SERA's successes, the more will it be able to attract enthusiastic social workers and community leaders. Your last Annual Dinner was therefore notable for the change in attitude of the people of Sennett Estate towards social and community work and towards the activities of SERA - no longer are the residents of Sennett Estate inward looking and minding their own business, but rather they have come out to take part in fostering a keen community spirit. This change holds forth much promise of a new spirit of community and a new sense of commitment to improve living conditions, to be concerned with the welfare of neighbours, and to help those in need.

This year when SERA discussed with me its Annual Dinner, I felt that the people of Sennett Estate would be more receptive to let the occasion be used for fund raising for a worthy cause. The plans for the new Potong Pasir Community Centre had just been finalized at about that time. The Annual Dinner could be a good opportunity to raise funds for the new Community Centre. This suggestion was enthusiastically welcomed by SERA. The Potong Pasir Constituency is happy that this Annual Dinner is the first public function in aid of its Community Centre Building Fund.

Initially SERA was in some doubt whether there would be enough support to make the fund raising effort a success. It need not have worried. We must remember that in doing work for the community we are not alone. Community work involves reciprocity. You help me this time and I will do the same when your turn comes. One good turn deserves another. We keep on making friends. We have many friends in the industrial, financial, and commercial organizations who have responded to our call and come forward to help us. I take this opportunity to acknowledge their support and to thank them for their generous donations.

Many of you may wonder why a community centre is required when the Sennett Community Centre is to all intents and purposes adequately serving the Constituency. There are reasons. A new community centre is needed to replace the one inside Kampong Potong Pasir which was demolished to make way for HDB development. With some 3,000 new flats plus a commercial neighbourhood centre being built and 12,000 to 15,000 new residents moving into the area in the next three to four years, a well located community centre can bring together both the present residents and the new ones to live in greater harmony and neighbourliness. The new community centre in the centre of the HDB development will be more convenient for all the people in the Potong Pasir Constituency.

While the Sennett Community Centre has adequate facilities, its location is not too ideal. It is convenient for the people of Sennett Estate but quite out of the way for those living in Toa Payoh, Braddel Road, Upper Serangoon Road, and other parts of the Potong Pasir Constituency. Efforts to attract these people to utilize the facilities of the Sennett Community Centre have met with little success. The People's Association is itself convinced that a new key community centre more strategically located than the Sennett Community Centre is needed to serve all the people in the Potong Pasir Constituency. Our new community centre has already been designed by HDB architects. Once sufficient funds are raised, the HDB will call tenders and construction work can begin in the middle of 1981. The residents of Sennett Estate will therefore receive a bonus. They keep their community centre and get the added advantage of joining in the activities of a new community centre across Upper Serangoon Road. This should attract more community leaders and young activists to come forward to join in our community work.

The new Community Centre will have the usual range of facilities including a central multi-purpose hall and stage for large gatherings. This can be used for music and drama performances, cultural shows and public functions. There will be squash courts, basket-ball, and badminton courts, music rooms, library, games rooms, study rooms, kindergarden, office and conference rooms. All these facilities and amenities are planned to attract more participation

from the younger generation of Singaporeans now growing up in the Potong Pasir Constituency plus the new residents who will be moving into the HDB housing units and neighbourhood centre, and those working in new industries in the JTC development at Kolam Ayer. Our Potong Pasir Constituency is on the threshold of a new era of greater activity. We need more bright young community leaders who can understand the ideals and aspirations of the new generation and who can assist the new Community Centre in providing the type of amenities and facilities that will be in demand. Unless the new Community Centre can meet all these demands, it will not be serving the purpose for which it is developed.

The new Community Centre will cost \$2,695,500. The total government subsidy will be \$1,843,500, leaving \$852,000 to be raised by the Constituency. This is a large sum of money. Tonight's effort will be a good start. Many well-wishers and friends have come forward to support our fund raising efforts. A Fund Raising Committee has already been at work to organize various functions and activities and there is no reason why, if we work hard, we cannot realize the target in the time provided.

Many MPs and CCC and MC leaders have asked why the constituency should be given the task of raising such big sums of money to build community centres. In many instances the constituency already has its own community centre. The new ones to be built have to be much more elaborate and better equipped to meet the rising expectations of a more affluent community. But the funds required will also be much larger and more difficult to raise. Further since it is the HDB that is responsible for moving new tenants into the constituency and thus directly creating the demand for added community facilities, logically the HDB or the People's Association should construct the new community centre. The HDB can easily provide the community centre in its overall planning for the new development.

One explanation that can be given is that in working for at least a portion of the sum needed, the leaders and organizers involved will be able to strengthen the community spirit. Human nature being what it is, many of us do not appreciate the things that are freely

given to us. We cherish more the things which we have obtained through our own hard work and effort. The new community centre will be much better appreciated, patronized, and utilized, when the community itself has put in the effort to raise funds for its construction. Through such efforts and through fostering the spirit of community we are in fact involving the people and laying firm foundations for nation building. The people of the Potong Pasir Constituency cannot therefore object to doing their part to raise funds for the new Community Centre. It will serve constantly to remind us that whatever we have today had to be struggled for and was obtained through hard work and that our future progress and prosperity will continue to depend on our ceaseless toil and effort.

The construction of the Community Centre is probably the least difficult of the many problems we face. The new centre and its amenities will mean very little unless we have the leadership and organization to plan and implement appropriate activities that will meet with the enthusiastic support of the people in the Constituency. We should like to see the new Community Centre being able to attract leaders and organizers of ability and dedication who will work with resolve and commitment to plan, organize, and implement many interesting programmes that will benefit the whole community. It is through this spirit and commitment to the community that our people can realize their aims of improving the quality of life and attaining a healthy, green, and clean environment where people will be more courteous, helpful, and concerned for the welfare of their neighbours.

SERA has been in existence for a number of years. Sennett Estate residents have realized the need to contribute their share to this spirit of community. Your energetic President and Committee Members have worked hard to bring the residents together and to encourage them to participate in many community activities. New leaders in SERA will continue to do this excellent work. They can cooperate with other community leaders in the CCC and MCs to strengthen the spirit of community and hopefully to encourage more of the younger generation to participate in community activities. We can eventually look forward to the Sennett Estate residents being members of the more politically advanced and socially conscious communities in Singapore.

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