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SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
AT THE POTONG PASIR NATIONAL DAY DINNER AT THE SENNETT
COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SATURDAY, 6 AUGUST 1983 AT 7.30 PM

This year Singapore celebrates the 18th anniversary of its independence on 9 August and I am joining you for the fifth time to celebrate our National Day Dinner. I would like to use this opportunity to give you a brief account of what had been going on in the last one year.

Last year on this occasion I indicated to you that the world economic situation was such that our economic growth would be adversely affected and we must be prepared to face difficulties in the next few years. The world economic recession has severely affected many countries in the last 12 months. Singapore has been more fortunate. We weathered the storm much better than many others. We not only got off without much harm but we even seem to have done well. Our economy has grown at an annual rate of more than five per cent, there is little or no unemployment, and inflation rate is down.

We can say that our present state of prosperity is due to hard work and good leadership. There is also a strong element of luck. We cannot however always depend on luck. The next 12 months will remain difficult. World events can still result in an economic catastrophe which can overwhelm us. For the time being our strong financial reserves have prevented mass unemployment and economic recession. Without strong reserves we could not have embarked on the vast construction projects and the expansion in our housing construction, nor the building of the MRT. But we are not yet out of the woods.

Let me explain. We know that some of the biggest banks in the U.S. have lent so much money to countries like Brazil, Mexico, Yugoslavia, Poland, and others, that the debts incurred cannot be repaid. Some debtor countries are even unable to pay the annual interest charges. Up till now the banks have resorted to rescheduling, that is, to lend these countries more money to make up interest payments so that they will not have defaulted. This is not likely to fool anybody. How long this charade can go on must now depend on luck. Unless rich countries like the United States can come forward to assist or international organizations like the World Bank and IMF can intervene, to work out some compromise to stave off a financial catastrophe, the world will be in for trouble. Singapore cannot be shielded against the repercussions of the collapse of the world financial system. We will also be pulled in. Without really strong reserves, we may not even survive.

The stronger our reserves are, the better we can meet the possible dangers ahead. The person who tells you that the Singapore reserves serve no purpose but should be spent in providing more social welfare amenities, like free medical service, subsidised PUB rates, lower bus fares, lower rents and prices for public housing, generous unemployment benefits, and many other welfare payments in order to promote a caring society does not know what he is talking about.

Coming back to the problems within the Potong Pasir Constituency, here they are well under control. All the developments are being carried out according to plan.

(a) The new housing estate at Potong Pasir is being completed according to schedule. Phase One with 104 flats will be balloted on 16 August 83. The next few phases of the HDB development will be gradually completed. By the end of 1985 the whole estate will be lived in. There will then be some 3,800 flats and executive apartments with as many new tenants in the new housing estate as there are people in the present Potong Pasir Constituency.

(b) The new Community Centre will be ready to serve both the old and the new tenants alike so that they can strengthen the spirit of community. Already preparations have been made by a group of community leaders to extend to the new residents a warm welcome, and every assistance they may need to enable them to settle down quickly in their new homes.

(c) In the Kolam Ayer area the Jurong Town Corporation has completed its development of flatted factories. They have all been occupied giving employment to thousands of people, bringing prosperity, and removing old eyesores in the area.

(d) PWD has not been idle either. Their two major highway projects that run through our Constituency have been completed. One takes you directly to the new Changi Airport and the other will enable motorists to drive right up to the centre of the city.

(e) Generally the Police have worked hard to establish their Neighbourhood Police Posts in the Toa Payoh area. One Neighbourhood Police Post will be set up in the new Potong Pasir Estate. Our Constituency should cooperate with the Police to make Potong Pasir a crime-free and safer area for everybody.

(f) Lorong 8 Toa Payoh has a totally reconstructed market. It is now reputed to be one of the best markets and cooked food centres in Housing Board estates. Many residents are attracted by the good business of the cooked food stallholders in this market to seek the MP's help to obtain a stall. But unfortunately no new stalls are being built in Lorong 8. Besides the Government is reviewing its hawker policy to rent out cooked food stalls not so much to the poor and unemployed but more to people with special cooking skills. Many Lorong 8 residents have applied for new flats because their children have grown up and will be getting married. They have been waiting for a long time. We all know

that HDB flats are allocated on a first-come-first-served basis. The good news is that all who are now waiting will be able to get their allocations before the end of 1985 if they are not too choosy.

(g) The residents in Sennett Estate still have many complaints, including inadequate parking lots, closure of back lanes, narrow streets, poor street lights, unauthorized extensions, and illegal use of residential accommodation for business offices, etc. These problems cannot be solved overnight, but the relevant Government departments have been, dealing with them as the complaints arise.

Presently we have underway the annual Courtesy Campaign. There will continue to be many other campaigns, including how to increase productivity, how to work as a team, how to improve your skills, how to defend Singapore, how to be good neighbours, how to build a happy and healthy community, how to promote Mandarin, how to plant more trees to turn Singapore into a garden city, and so on. Through these campaigns the Government hopes that in addition to ensuring economic stability, social and political advancement, it can also improve the environment and build a more socially conscious, civilized, and courteous community. Our citizens should give these campaigns conducted at different times of the year their whole-hearted support. The people of Potong Pasir Constituency should not be lagging behind in their efforts to promote better living conditions and healthier and happier surroundings within the community.

On this auspicious occasion when we celebrate our 18th National Day, may the people of Singapore continue to enjoy health, happiness, progress, and prosperity.

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