

SPEECH BY MR LIM CHEE ONN, MP FOR BUKIT MERAH AND
POLITICAL SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
AT THE OPENING OF THE BUKIT MERAH COMMUNITY CENTRE
EXTENSION ON SATURDAY, 3 MARCH 1979, AT 8.00 PM

The opening of any new building or premises is always an exciting occasion as it marks the culmination of the hard work put in by many people over a considerable period. Tonight's official opening of the Bukit Merah Community Centre's extension is no exception.

However, the building and the infrastructure do not of themselves ensure that a Community Centre will serve the needs of the community. There are other equally important contributions to be made if the Centre is to fulfil its role effectively. Before I go into this in greater detail, I would like to talk briefly about the various steps involved in bringing a project such as this to its successful completion.

First, the idea has to be conceived. The needs of the community having been recognised, it takes someone with vision and energy to get the machinery going, starting from the very first letter, telephone call or discussion when the idea is first mooted.

In the case of the Bukit Merah Community Centre's Extension, it was my predecessor, the late Mr Lim Guan Hoo who first perceived the need for a larger Community Centre to serve the residents of Bukit Merah. He laboured mightily to get the project off the ground. We are all indebted to him for his unstinting efforts in this endeavour.

The next step is the translation of the idea into its physical form. For this, a host of activities is needed to nurture the idea into fruition. It is during this phase that generous contributions from constituents and well-wishers are required to ensure that plans do not flounder. Without the support which has been given, today's

official opening would either have been delayed or not held at all.

Many of those who are here tonight have given generously towards the Extension Fund. To you we all owe our gratitude. There are others who have given unselfishly of their time and effort to ensure that construction progressed according to schedule. Here I must mention that members of the Bukit Merah Community Centre's Management Committee, our Citizens' Consultative Committee and the People's Association's staff all have a share in the credit due.

I now come back to the point I made at the beginning. How to prevent the Centre from becoming a white elephant, utilised by only a small percentage of the community it is intended to serve.

Successful operations require ingenuity and dedication to be exercised by those involved with the running of the Centre. While modern conveniences and auxiliary facilities are useful, they cannot replace bright ideas and devotion from the Centre staff and members of the Management Committee in meeting the needs of the majority. One such example is the provision of facilities for games or sports.

Owing to the limited land area occupied by this Centre, it is not possible for it to provide facilities for enthusiasts of every sport. Priority must be given to those sports which have a wider appeal. While it may be fashionable to have squash courts, the following for this sport in Bukit Merah is somewhat smaller than that for basketball, sepak-takraw or table-tennis. It would indeed be irresponsible for those in charge to ignore priorities of this sort.

Times however do change. What is the object of enthusiasm for only a few today can become the focus of interest for the majority in the future. For this reason,

I hope that community centres will pay more attention to identifying the specific needs and interests of the community they are supposed to serve. It is no use dishing up the same courses and programmes year-in and year-out. Equally, what has been successful in another centre will not always be relevant or appealing to the local community.

Activities in any community centre ought to reflect the requirements and interests of the constituents. More important, they should take into account national objectives and priorities. It takes effort to do this effectively. But it is an effort which must be made. Those who are unwilling or unable to do so must make way for those who can and are willing. Otherwise our community centre will become merely a silent monument to the efforts of those who laboured for its completion and will fail to achieve the objectives for which it was intended.
