

# PRESS RELEASE

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(PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE) AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF PEOPLE'S  
ASSOCIATION AT THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE AWARDS  
PRESENTATION CEREMONY AT THE ISTANA ON 1 AUG 80 AT 6.10 PM

This is the fifth National Youth Service Awards Presentation Ceremony. It is an occasion where we have singled out a few individuals and groups for commendation and awards. Since the beginning of this exercise in 1975, six teams and six individuals have received awards. This year we are adding another three individuals and three groups to the list.

The awards are conferred on these recipients, not so much for their brains or brawns. The type of recipients we are looking for and are conferring awards are not necessarily the high flyers in academic or sporting achievements for the latter categories of youths have been adequately looked after by way of recognition and incentive. Our targets are those who care to devote their hard-earned leisure and energies to help create a happier life and surrounding for the less fortunate people in our society. Our criteria is the spirit of sacrifice and devotion for others, which I am afraid is still very lacking in our society where most people adopt a more materialistic and utilitarian approach to life.

When time and energy is measured in terms of money, who would bother to spend long hours and much energy on 100 old folks in Bukit Merah? Why not leave them alone to linger on with their loneliness and misery in their winter of life? But their lives were brightened up as a result of the initiative of some 30 young volunteers who surveyed their needs and set up the Bukit Merah Old Folks Club for them. Again, who would have cared to spend time and energy on retarded children? From the utilitarian point of view, they are of no use to society just as the old folks have outlived their usefulness.

They could have been left alone to brood over their clumsy monotonous lives. But a group of youths have helped to cheer up their lives by forming a Youth Section of the Singapore Association for Retarded Children. Similarly, through the initiative and effective leadership of Abdul Halim bin Abdul Kader, the drug cases in the Kampong Kembangan Constituency dropped from 102 in 1977 to zero in 1979.

What has motivated the many youths who are present here this evening to do the things which have made life happier for the many under-privileged people among our midst. Is it not their social conscience, the human instinct for common survival and the eagerness to see that others too lead a happier life? This human instinct for common survival, the sense of awareness of others' needs and the sensitivity to human sufferings, sad to say, is dying out. Instead of the strong helping the weak, the rich assisting the poor, we find in our present-day world the tendency of the strong bullying the weak and the rich exploiting the poor. This survival of the fittest doctrine is applied in narrower human relationship as well as international relations. We see evidences of the stronger nations bullying weaker nations and the bigger giant commercial enterprises swallowing the smaller ones.

In the game of power struggle, millions of human beings are either massacred, tortured or thrown into the sea in the name of ideology or religion or even race. Never in the history of mankind have human feelings become so numbed and insensitive to human sufferings. This is an era of decadence in social conscience.

Against this background this simple ceremony and the purpose behind it is significant. The few examples of human care and devotion for fellow human beings, however insignificant they may be in the world context, should be enough to remind us that we are fortunate to be in a more civilised society where there are people who are still sensitive to human sufferings and like those gathered here this evening volunteering to help minimize such sufferings. If this exercise of ours can help rekindle the social conscience of more people and the good examples of the recipients of awards can inspire more youths to follow their footsteps, it will have achieved some purpose.