

Singapore Government

**PRESS RELEASE**

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • tel: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354/3362207/3362271

02-2/82/07/18

SPEECH BY MR LEE KHOO CHOY, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE) AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION, AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTRE AUDITORIUM ON SUNDAY, 18 JULY 1982 AT 7 PM

Singapore has achieved phenomenal, economic growth and political stability over the past decade. Hard work and pragmatic policies which sometimes seem harsh have been paying dividends. It is the people's responsibility to ensure that the economic growth and stability that we enjoy now will continue to be so for generations to come.

Singapore depends solely on its human resources for its development as we are not endowed with natural resources. With more than 60.8 per cent (1981) of our population below 30, we are indeed a nation of young people and our best investment for the future is in the youth. The government recognises the importance of providing comprehensive services for the youth in education and training, health and social recreation. Every youth in Singapore regardless of his family's social and economic background, has the opportunity to be developed so that he will be able to realise his full potential and to contribute his talents to the important task of developing the nation. Measures are taken to nurture the youth, both physically and mentally into a socially responsible person with an interest in the development of the society and the nation. Our government's investment in nurturing the youth underlines the importance of youth in the future development of our nation.

Modernisation and the rapid pace of industrialisation during the past two decades have brought about profound social transformation in our society. Modernisation and industrialisation, however, have their hazards. They brought with it the urge for material benefits, individualism, self-centredness and the decadent shades of Western culture. Modernisation tends to make people westernised, and for people who have no roots, they begin to behave like Westerners.

In view .....2/-

In view of the rapid social transformation that is taking place as a result of urbanisation and industrialisation, this conference is timely in providing a forum for the youth leaders from various youth and social organisations to discuss and examine the common problems and issues that are confronting them. It serves to assess and evaluate the role and function of the various youth organisations and to see how effective and relevant they are in meeting the emerging and changing needs of the youth of today.

In the past two days, you have actively engaged in deliberating on the topics related to youth and society in the Singapore context. Provocative thoughts and ideas have been thrown up by the various distinguished speakers to stimulate your mind. The key note speech by the Second Deputy Prime Minister, Mr S Rajaratnam, and the papers delivered by the four main speakers have covered a wide range of issues relating to youth and society, in particular the role of youth in a rapidly changing society.

Judging by the recommendations you have adopted, it is obvious that in your workshop sessions, with the help of our young MPs, you have made an extensive and intensive analysis of these issues.

I can assure you that this conference is not just an intellectual exercise. The ideas and thinking expressed in the workshop discussions which form the basis of your recommendations will be studied carefully. Those found feasible and with potential of involving our youth in all aspects of our society, will be seriously implemented.

Before I officially close the conference, I would like to take this opportunity to share some of my thinking with you regarding youth and society.

For any individual, in particular youth, to play an effective role as a citizen, he must develop certain attitudes towards his nation and fellow citizens.

I would like to illustrate these attitudes by quoting some old Chinese sayings which are still, I believe, relevant and valid. The first saying I want to quote is '國家興亡，匹夫有責'. To translate it literally, it means the ups and downs of a nation

is the responsibility of every citizen, '匹夫' in Chinese means ordinary citizens. To put it another way, it means that it is the obligation of every citizen to ensure the prosperity of the nation. This saying clearly indicates that the political and government leaders do not have the monopoly of managing a state. It is wrong and dangerous to leave the affairs to the state solely to the politicians and government leaders. Every citizen is obligated to advise them. This is what 'government by the people' means.

It is to your benefit as young people to ensure that the Singapore you are going to inherit is a better one. Whatever we do today will, to a very large extent, decide what kind of society we are going to have in future. We are the products of our history. No society can run away from this fact.

The second saying, I want to quote is '先天下之憂而憂 后天下之乐而乐'. The saying means a leader should worry over the social, economic and political problems and try to think of ways and means to solve these problems well before others (the ordinary citizens) have even an inkling of them. Leaders have to worry first. In times of prosperity, on the other hand, leaders should let the others enjoy first. After everyone has settled down to a good life, then the leaders can relax and enjoy. In a nation with leaders who care for their fellow citizens to such an extent, there is nothing to prevent the nation from being prosperous.

If we have a situation where the leaders only worry themselves with the solutions to national problems after the ordinary citizens have worried over them or even suffering from these problems, where leaders enjoy themselves when the ordinary citizens are still struggling for a decent life, then the consequences will be obvious. Many nations, unfortunately, are in such a situation. The leaders enjoy and the people suffer. The ultimate end is the collapse of the regime.

As youth leaders, you should acquire this attitude and develop your sensitivity to various social, economic and political problems. You must not think that they are the politicians' and government leaders' business. You are going to be affected by them in one

way or the other. You should worry about them and try to come out with new ideas to counter these problems. In an open society like Singapore, there are channels for you to express yourselves. Politicians and government leaders are no super-human beings. The collective wisdom of the people is required to make a society tick.

The third saying I want to quote is '居安思危'. This saying means that though one is living in prosperity and stability, one must be beware of the possible dangers. That means that we must be on the alert of the possible dangers all the time and prepare for the worst. In Singapore, we often hear people grumble whenever some unpleasant measures are implemented to overcome some impending problems. They do not realise that these precautionary measures are necessary to avoid the dangers. Our present stability, prosperity, and easy life have lulled them into a false sense of security. They believe that life will be rosy all the way. They grumble at the slightest sacrifice they are asked to make in order to ensure a better future.

Conflict, confrontation and violence are prevailing in many parts of the world including South East Asia. Singapore has been praised for many of its achievements, but things can change overnight. If we do not make plans for these possible dangers, one day we may be caught unprepared and that would be the end of us. As youth, you are enjoying the fruits of the struggle of the pioneers in the past 20 years. Young Singaporeans today enjoy better education, better employment opportunity and better social environment. As youth leaders you must not take these for granted, the future of Singapore is in your hands.

With these three sayings which I thought are relevant to the youths of today, I declare the conference close.

---