SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT BYC/INFS.NV.74/59

TEXT OF AN ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, TO ASSEMBLYMEN AND CIVIL SERVANTS ON THE CONCLUSION OF THE SECOND COURSE FOR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLYMEN AT THE STAFF TRAINING SCHOOL ON NOVEMBER 16, 1959.

There is little I could add to what I had said before. All of you have had occasion to hear the Government's view on the necessity of the political leadership understanding the difficulties and shortcomings of the administrative machine. The fact is that the social, the economic and the political problems are there. It would have been there whichever party had won the elections - unemployment, the high birth rate, lack of industrial expansion and so on. All these were things created by a diversity of forces and we have inherited them. It is our business to make the machine work at its best.

National Archives of Singapore

It is about 5 1/2 months since the 3rd June. The settling down has been a little bit faster than we anticipated. Ministers, Assemblymen and others have got a grasp of the realities of the administration and the administration too, particularly those who have been attending the Political Study Centre, have

begun to understand the language of the political leaders although they might not always agree with the remedies we propose. It is a step forward. It has been brought home to them that, unless the administrative machine responds to political needs, then the whole situation is bound to become more tense and more difficult as the years go by.

I hope in the course of the next few weeks when you will be going round the Ministries, you will take the opportunity (both the officials and the Assemblymen) to exchange views and ideas.

All of you who are representatives of the people have to face the constant pressure of grievances seeking redress. If you ignore these requests, then you do so at your peril. If you just press the administrative machine and demand that these requests be fulfilled without regard for priorities, then nothing worthwhile would be accomplished in the end or the things which are accomplished might not be worthwhile. Therefore, between the demands of the people and resources that are at our disposal, there must be the intervention of the political leadership. That really is the art of government - utilising to the maximum the limited resources at our disposal. We have got the best administrative machine in South East Asia. That is something to be grateful for.

National Archives of Singapore

Let us never forget that the total resources of the country, if you count revenues of the Central Government, the local authorities and the public corporations, are no less than between $400-$500 million per annum all at the dispensation of the Government. That is a fair sum of money for a population of 1 1/2 million on an island of 220 square miles. Therefore when we start talking let us always remember this: we have to decide where the money finally goes to and what can be made of our resources - whether we put up the money in houses for those who have no jobs to pay rent, or in industries, or schools, or in stand pipes whilst there is no water because reservoir expansion has not taken place. Every Ministry demands more money. You as the political leaders should help the Government assess respective priorities - whether a lot of money should be sunk on housing as against schools, schools as against roads, roads as against power station which may be inadequate in about three years' time. You as the administrators have to make every cent count. There have been inadequate supervision and corrupt practices in the past. I want to say that not all these charges of corruption were unfounded. Recognising all that, let us make the effort to make every dollar count. At the same time, let me tell the political leadership that we must get away from this atmosphere of smear, or we will end up with an atmosphere of fear of character assassination as that created by MacCarthy on Communists and Communism in America.

National Archives of Singapore

As political leaders, your duty is to see that the corrupt are isolated and removed but it must be done in a way that the innocents are not terrified. The morale and self-respect of the innocent must be maintained. I must emphasise the urgency of the necessity to get the political leadership to understand the administrative machine and the administrative machine to respond to its fullest capacity.

Let me say a word of thanks to all those who have participated in this course.

NOVEMBER 16,1959. (Time issued 1630 hours).

National Archives of Singapore