

**TEXT OF SPEECH OF THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN
YEW, AT THE OPENING OF THE ASIAN SEMINAR ON URBAN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AT THE VICTORIA THEATRE AT 11
A.M. ON MONDAY, 10 DECEMBER, 1962.**

Distinguished Delegates, Distinguished Visitors, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like first to extend to all the distinguished delegates a warm welcome to Singapore. We are happy that you have chosen Singapore as the venue for this Asian Seminar on Urban Community Development. I hope you will all enjoy your brief stay here.

Speaking to so many experts on both rural and urban community development, it would be presumptuous of me to more than touch upon the subject of your seminar.

More than 80 per cent of the population of Asia live in villages in the country where the forms and pattern of a traditional peasant society have persisted for centuries, oblivious to the great changes to the city civilisation of the modern world. However, two factors -- the industrialisation programmes of

the new governments in Asia, and the landlessness of the younger sons, are bringing about the inevitable drift from the country to the towns. As they leave the country behind, so they leave behind the traditional village and family ties, ties of mutual insurance that goes with a tightly knit peasant community, the oldest forms of social insurance against hunger and poverty. In the higgledy-piggledy tenements of the city now problems arise not only of re-housing them but of re-forming them in new group patterns to create a community which ensures a satisfying social life and effective forms of social organisation to help co-ordinate with and supplement welfare programmes of government departments.

In Malaya because of the highly developed plantation and mining economy of the last 50 years with its extensive road and rail transport, about half the population live in towns.

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Broadly speaking, the Chinese and Indian communities, either first generation immigrants or the descendants of immigrants, live in the towns and cities, and the Malays who are the peasants live in villages or kampongs in the country-side. Singapore is the first large town to develop in Malaya and fairly presents the problems of urbanisation throughout Malaya, albeit in an advanced stage.

Over 80% of the population of Singapore are Chinese and Indians, immigrants or descendants of immigrants. About 12% are Malays. Only recently, with widespread primary Malay education in the countryside, is there a drift of the Malays from the country to the towns of the Federation of Malaya. From the towns of Malaya there is a drift to Singapore, the largest town of all.

The Chinese and Indians are those who were adventurous and adaptable enough to leave their homelands to seek a better life in Malaya. From the villages of Southern China and Southern India they have grown new roots here. They carried over from China into Malaya their clan and village associations. These were their closest knit non-governmental organisations. Through the clan associations and the Chambers of Commerce formed of trade guilds and the clan associations, they maintained a substitute pattern of the old social ties of their village of their homeland. Their tontines and mutual aid and insurance relationships of the early clan associations took the place of the traditional village social patterns.

After a hundred years the pattern gradually changed. As the immigrants and descendants of immigrants became the settled community, new forms of social associations developed. Gradually, sporting clubs and benevolent societies began to mean more to the active social life of the descendants of the

immigrants, than the old clan associations which helped their fathers to settle here.

Now in a new phase, with self-government and independence, the clan associations, guilds and the Chambers of Commerce have changed their roles and are gradually ceasing to be the only points of contact between the immigrant communities and the Government. With direct representation in the legislative chamber the people have learned quickly to adjust themselves to a new situation. The old forms of contact and co-operation between the immigrant population and the colonial power have given way to new forms between a settled community and its elected leaders. Political parties, community clubs and recreational groups, welfare bodies are all in the process of becoming the new medium of co-ordination and co-operation between Government activity and the people.

What is interesting to note in the urban community in Singapore is the difference between the high mobility and adaptability of the Chinese and Indian immigrants as against the indigenous Malays. The Chinese and Indians, being immigrants, ex-hypothesis were people who had psychologically prepared themselves for change, and they took to the urban life in Singapore easily and without tears.

The Malays, on the other hand, being a settled rural community in Singapore are reluctant and resistant to sudden change in their living habits. They still prefer to live in “kampongs” or villages in the country. They prefer wooden houses on stilts with a piece of land around it for poultry, fruit and vegetable gardening, to a concrete flat in the city. As the city expanded, rather than be absorbed into the city, they have gone or been pushed to the outer rural areas. They have preferred this although it has meant less amenities. An example can be seen in the Southern Islands where about 4,000 to 5,000 Malays eke out a precarious existence on what must have been the traditional fishing village economy over 100 years ago when Raffles landed here. Living in houses built on stilts over the sea with the tides acting as a natural sewerage, they have preferred it and abjured the amenities of pipe-water, electricity, schools, medical services available in Singapore city itself. For with the Malays, it is not just an economic adjustment between a cheap attap hut and a dearer city flat. The greater problem is the psychological one of making them willing and happy to give up their traditional forms of kampong society, the social insurance ties of the family and in a closely-knitted kampong community to the impersonal life of the city.

You might find this another interesting instance: At the beginning of this year the Government announced plans to re-develop a traditional Malay Settlement area on the city's outskirts at Geyland Serai, about five miles from here. There was an outcry that come 300 to 400 flats in modern blocks with schools, a community centre, a creche, and a market was going to take the place of a congested conglomeration of broken-down attap shacks and huts. It took no little persuasion to get the Malays to accept the fact that they will find life as congenial in a concrete flat with modern sanitation and running water as in the old attap shack.

Fortunately here and there in the city proper there were pockets of Malays who, because of their employment either in the Police, Army or Government departments are in institutional quarters, most of which are modern flats. They are examples of Malay adjustability to urban life once the psychological

resistance to change has been overcome. Their resistance to change is not just because they are changing from wooden house on stilts with an attap roof to a cell in a concrete beehive but more important because it has meant the breaking of old social ties in community patterns which provided a satisfying life in a complete society they understood it. These family ties provided for unemployment and sickness insurance. Here is a wide and fascinating field for the social scientist.

I read recently of the generous tribute paid to our housing programme by Mr. Minocher-Homji, the Director of the Seminar, when he arrived a few days ago. We are fortunate in having a relatively high standard of living, relative that is, in Asian terms. We have embarked on a not-over-ambitious programme, within five years to build some 52,000 housing units to break the back of the housing shortage. This year alone we have built 12,000 units. By the middle of next year the arrears should have been wiped out, and we shall be building to keep apace with the expanding younger population. We have tried to learn from the experience of others in Asia, and in other parts of the world. We have tried to adapt their lessons to our needs. We have tried to build these 52,000 units grouped in community housing estates complete with schools, playgrounds, shops, market, clinics, creches and community centres, all the things which make city life more like the closely-knit relationships of a small town or a village, and prevent the feeling of living in a pigeon-hole inside a beehive.

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Our urban community development raises a multitude of problems, of people of different racial, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the more mobile and adaptable immigrants and their descendant as against the more settled and conservative Malay kampong dwellers. I am sure the Singapore delegates will learn from the wealth of expertise that so many of the distinguished delegates

bring to this conference. We can profit from their knowledge of not dissimilar problems in other parts of the world.

Mr. Director and distinguished delegates, I have great pleasure in declaring open this Seminar.

December 10, 1962.

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