# SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE OPENING OF THE SEMINAR ON "ROLE OF RESIDENTS' COMMITTEES IN PROMOTING COURTESY" AT THE TANJONG PAGAR COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SATURDAY, 28 JUN 80

Part of human behaviour is learned. Part is instinctive. Courtesy is learned, not instinctive. We learn things most easily by watching other people repeatedly talking and acting in certain forms, and imitating them, especially those parts that we like of what we see and hear. This continuous interaction between people in a village, or a town, evolves into the custom and social forms in that society.

Every society changes with the passage of time. For example, we are a more rooted, settled and confident people than we were 10 years ago. In another 10 years, nearly 82% of our population will be in HDB new towns; there will be no more squatter huts. Today, more than 60% of HDB estates are owner occupied. By 1990, 76% will be owner occupied. So your neighbours are likely to be life-long neighbours. Everybody has a physical stake in Singapore's growth and development. Therefore, everyone has a stake in making their

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contact with their life-long neighbours free of friction, and interaction with them courteous and considerate. Courtesy improves the quality of our social life.

I have seen societies turned sour. When I went to Britain as a student in 1946, I found a people courteous and gracious, despite six years of war, destruction and deprivation. London was then the centre of a great civilisation, justly proud of its heroic role in the last war, and conscious that it was a centre of great decisions and events which affected the world. Over the last three decades, returning for periodic visits, I watched with sadness a gradual roughening in inter-personal relationships. The British economy was overtaken by that of the other EEC countries, especially Germany and France. The British people lost heart, watching successive governments unable to reverse the trend of events. British management became demoralised by endless squabbles with intransigent trade union leaders re-fighting old battles. Their self-esteem was shaken, so they lost that glow of graciousness which only a self-confident people can exude. British drivers, once the most considerate and courteous, have become as aggressive as those in Europe, though not as bad as ours. Courtesies have become perfunctory; personal standards of honesty have gone down; vandalism in trains, football stadiums and other public places, unheard of 30 years ago, have become part of contemporary Britain.

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No society is static. The world moves on; every society moves up or down. Through sustained effort, with a campaign each year, we can improve the social behaviour of adult Singaporeans; we can thus influence that of our children for the better. By 1990, we can file down the rough ragged corners of our social behaviour which can grate on each other. Politeness can reflect genuine consideration for each other's dignity and well-being; it is part of a well ordered society determined to improve the social as well as the material aspects of life.

I thank you for coming forward as the Residents' Committees of various housing blocks to take the lead in raising social standards. It is interaction between people, each of us watching and responding to each other's behaviour, that will influence our children as they grow up during their most impressionable years. It is an effort worth the making. Money cannot buy courtesy. Courtesy is one manifestation of civilised living, the result of attention to the finer points of human relationships over many years, of a people who have been able to live freed from dire poverty and that constant sense of insecurity which haunts so many societies. By persistent effort, our children can grow up naturally polite; they should not need courtesy campaigns.

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