

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS AT  
THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT ON 3 FEB 81

Honorable Members

Three major tasks confront Singapore in the 1980s. First, we need to build a modern industrial society founded on sophisticated economic activities and a new relationship between management and labour. Second, we must get every citizen to recognise and support the pivotal role that defence and national service plays in underpinning our continued independence and prosperity. Third, we must complete the most crucial phase in the process of self-renewal, getting my younger ministers to take the big decisions which my older ministers have hitherto shouldered.

Seldom have events and circumstances been more unfavorable for our economic development. Economists no longer argue whether there will be a recession in 1981. Their attention is focused on guessing how deep the recession is going to be.

We must be prepared for slower growth and even some unemployment in the coming years. Poor economic growth will subject management-labour relationships to severe strains. Under these more difficult circumstances, management and labour will have to evolve a new relationship, one whether both management and labour pull, and are seen to be pulling, together. They must never work against each other. Old habits of confrontation between management and labour must cease. Instead, there must be identity of interest among employers, management and labour so that workers as well as employers are left in no doubt that industrial disruption brings only losses for all. We must strive to cut out waste and inefficiency. Our workers must be trained, and retrained, to higher levels of skills and professionalism to prepare them for the jobs that will see us through the 1980s. To survive, we have to upgrade our economic activities.

Since 1965, we have devoted a large part of our national resources towards building up our armed forces. And for good reason. They are our guarantee that Singapore will be left in peace to pursue her own ends for the good of her people. Unfortunately, we have yet to get across the message that the defence of Singapore is the responsibility of every citizen. Many people still think that, in war, the fighting will be done by the regulars and full-time national servicemen in the SAF.

We cannot afford a large standing army. The strength of our armed forces is, therefore, in our reserves. We must totally restructure our scheme of rewards and incentives. When service in the armed forces is accorded the respect and prestige that it deserves, then the SAF will attract and retain talent in the regular service, and training and rank in the reserve service will be taken seriously. Everyone will soon realize that a citizen's rank and status as an SAF reservist will affect his civilian career. We shall create a direct nexus between the advancement of a citizen as a soldier and his advancement as a civilian, and vice versa. Our citizens must not regard the defence of Singapore as a two- or three-year affair, after which the national serviceman can put aside his uniform and leave it to others to carry on. No one will defend Singapore except Singaporeans. No one will fight for us except ourselves. This is the stark truth.

This year marks a turning point in our process of self-renewal. The younger ministers are taking a leading role in the political leadership and in government. Their participation in government decisions will become more dominant. They will evolve their own political style to keep in step with a rapidly changing electorate and the social and economic transformation that has taken place in Singapore over the last 21 years. The conduct of government business has become more complex because our economy and our society have

developed in range and in sophistication. My young ministers bring fresh minds, bursting with enthusiasm and energy, to bear upon the problems of government. They have been trained in the new disciplines, and come up with more ambitious approaches to problem solving. My older ministers provide that safety net of long experience and proven judgement over which the young ministers can test out their new ideas and enthusiasms. Eventually, and not before too long, they also must acquire that touch and judgement.

We will continue to identify and induct talent into the political leadership. There is no better way to secure our future than by making sure that Singapore is served at the highest levels by her best and her brightest. We shall systematically seek out young men and women of integrity and ability who are perceptive and sensitive to the needs of the people and have the dedication and drive to work for the community. They must be men of tenacity and resolve. These are the indispensable qualities of leadership which have mobilised Singaporeans into overcoming seemingly insurmountable problems in the past.

Singaporeans have once more shown their confidence in my government by returning the PAP in all 75 constituencies. This makes it all the more necessary to ensure that the government does not abuse the trust built up over the last 21 years. Members of this Parliament, especially those who are not

constrained by Ministerial office, have a duty to voice the view of their constituents, in committees, in questions and in debates. All bills, all legislation should be subject to the strictest scrutiny. Nothing should be passed without thorough, critical, and open debate. Parliament must mirror the views, the hopes, the doubts and the fears of Singaporeans. The more thoroughly government policies are understood, the better the chances of successful implementation. Acceptance by and cooperation with a knowledgeable people of the policies of government, is the way to success. This is the objective of my government. Members will best help in achieving this objective by speaking out their views, and criticizing government policies to make them more responsive to the needs of the people.

Singaporeans are maturing as a nation with our own lifestyles and our own aspirations. We can learn from the West and Japan. We want their technology and knowledge, but our basic values, the essentials of our philosophy of life, must be preserved. We cannot imitate the lifestyles or the ephemeral fancies of other peoples without doing damage to ourselves. However, we can benefit by importing from America, Europe and Japan the latest advances in medical science, computer software, the manufacturing processes for high technology products to upgrade our economy. We can learn from Japan how to organize our society so that we become a more cohesive and a more united nation, with each

Singaporean keenly aware of his responsibility to his family, to his fellow-workers, to his employer and to his country.

Singapore has grown from a fishing village into a modern metropolis because Singaporeans believe in hard work, thrift, honesty and self-reliance. So long as we continue to practise these virtues, the future holds no fear for us.

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