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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE FENGSHAN COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SATURDAY, 2 JULY 1988

The People's Association (PA) was established on 1 July 1960, 28 years ago. To a whole new generation of Singaporeans, our problems of the 50s and 60s are merely history. They have heard of, but never known unemployment, housing shortage, illiteracy and industrial unrest, Communist agitation and subversion, strikes and riots, communal friction, conflicts and riots.

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It was a hard life for the parents. But hard work, perseverance and cooperation turned Singapore around from crises into the stable Singapore of the 1980s. Full employment, prosperity, and rapid urbanization have changed our lives and brought new life styles. They have affected the values of our young. However, we must never forget that there has been no change in our smallness, and in our location.

The PA has two key objectives:

(1) to promote racial harmony and social cohesion;

(2) to act as the bridge between the leaders and people at the grassroots.

The early community centres were simple structures, with limited facilities such as basketball courts and 'ping pong' tables. Nevertheless, they became focal points for community activities, because community leaders were able to reach to and mobilise the masses. Our modern community centres are bigger and better equipped. They must meet the different needs and aspirations of Singaporeans.

Singapore has become highly urbanised. Eighty-six per cent of Singaporeans are living in high-rise HDB and HUDC flats. In another five years, there will be no kampungs or villages left. People in high-rise buildings have more need for facilities like community centres, where they can interact socially with friends and neighbours, to pursue hobbies and to stay physically fit through sports and other forms of regular exercise.

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The People's Association must also re-orientate its programs and facilities to meet changing needs. Community leaders must be imaginative to attract more participation. There must be constant improvement, more variety and better quality.

There are about 1.5 million Singaporeans aged 30 and below. The young prefer modern music, aerobics, computers, sea sports, tennis, squash and so forth.

Sea sports and adventure activities must be exciting and physically challenging, but without too much danger. Social development activities attract and allow the singles to interact.

The Fengshan Community Centre is the latest of 67 modern centres. It is part of the physical and social transformation of Singapore. Our economic progress has enabled us to build modern facilities such as the MRT, the indoor stadium and better homes. However, it is more difficult to improve on our intangibles, like being one nation, to gel as one society our diverse races, with their different religions and cultures.

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Never delude ourselves that the outward trappings of our modern society have already made us into a nation, or we shall put to unnecessary risk our political, economic and social fabric.

Older Singaporeans have traditional cultural values as their core beliefs. Because they have experienced harsh and difficult times, they have tended to overprotect their children from the hardships which the older generation experienced. But overprotection is not good for the children. Hardship and discipline when young are good for the character.

Young Singaporeans need to be especially aware of our own past. In Singapore, the individual is subordinate to society unlike in the West where the individual places himself above society. If we forget this key difference, our society will be in peril. For we are different and cannot suffer racial, linguistic and religious excesses without disintegration of our society.

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We are more vulnerable than any other country in the region. Therefore, we must stay in control of our destiny. Most local factors are within our control. However, we have lived together in relative harmony for the last 20 years. So if we do not radically depart from our past practices, we can expect to continue to do so.