

# SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE

PUBLICITY DIVISION · MINISTRY OF CULTURE · CITY HALL SINGAPORE 6

77-008-12  
MC/AUG/27/77 (Labour)

National Archives and  
Records Centre, Singapore.

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR LABOUR, MR ONG PANG BOON, AT THE 12TH NATIONAL DAY DINNER OF THE TELOK AYER CONSTITUENCY HELD AT THE HONG LIM GREEN COMMUNITY CENTRE ON FRIDAY, 12 AUG 77 AT 7.30 PM

20 AUG 1977

Acc. No. NARC

77 0068 49

To-night, the people of Telok Ayer gather here to celebrate the 12th anniversary of our independence. One generation has completed the whole scheme of education, from primary to "A" level. Henceforth, with each successive year, another generation will have gone through this educational process. So, increasingly more and more Singaporeans will grow up, for whom an independent Singapore is an ordinary fact of life.

Yet in Singapore's history, 12 years amount to a brief span. Previous to them were nearly 150 years of colonial rule. Ahead lie the great challenge to make our independence endure: herein lie the task of the emerging generation and political leadership, their commitment to the future, and our collective responsibility to consolidate our identity with Singapore.

Our past 12 years have been relatively prosperous ones, despite the global economic recession in more recent times. Facts and figures tell this success story. We have more than survived, making false the gloomy predictions of those who have wished us ill. We have overcome several crises - the uncertain years immediately after separation, the threat of massive unemployment and to our security following British decision to withdraw from East of Suez, and, in more recent times, the economic hardships flowing from the global recession. We have weathered these crises because we have responded collectively as Singaporeans. We have not allowed ourselves to be overwhelmed by uncertainties and difficulties. We have accepted the challenge, and galvanized ourselves into action.

We have committed ourselves to economic success because it has been the main challenge in the post-independent years. But we have not omitted to lay the long-term foundation of nationhood.

Nation building is a conscious effort and endeavour. Through national service, education, mass media and games, and every conceivable way, we have been fostering a sense of commitment and identity. Yet, in the process, we have not lost our balance of judgement or the perspective of realities. We wish to be friends and trade with all countries irrespective of ideology and system of government or race and culture. We welcome foreign investors, traders, sportsmen and tourists to our shores. But in politics, we have made it clear, and rightly so, that this one area of our nation's well-being is exclusively reserved for Singaporeans. We will not tolerate outside interference. Otherwise, Singapore will not be run in the collective interest of Singaporeans.

As a nation we are only 12 years old. The process of commitment to Singapore and identifying is a continuing one. It is made more difficult by the fact that we have divergent ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Our education policies and housing programs have done much towards breaking down the traditional barriers of race and culture, and of clans and castes, while national service has strengthened our sense of commitment.

For a people, a commitment to economic success is part and parcel of nation-building. But for each individual, the same cannot be said to be so. An individual commitment to economic success is not the same as an identification with Singapore. An identification of opportunities is not the same as a commitment to our Republic. Our individual commitment is to a territory and our identification is with the multi-racial society we are evolving. Realities change. Perceptions and solutions of problems must also change. But our commitment and our identification with our country, must always remain constant. It is a state of mind - an intellectual and emotional tie to a territory and its society, its political, economic and other values that, together, separate Singapore as a distinctive nation from others. If we are clear about our commitment and identity, we can share the fruits of prosperity and the burden of adversity with the same equanimity and dignity, and as Singaporeans.

So, on this 12th anniversary of independence, we should rededicate ourselves to the continuous task of nation-building.

-----