

PRESS RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information & The Arts, 29th Storey, PSA Building, 460 Alexandra Road, Singapore 0511. Tel: 2795754/5.

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**TEXT OF SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG,
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, AT THE CHINESE PRESS CLUB
AT NEW PARK HOTEL ON 16 SEPTEMBER 1991 AT 6.00 PM**

MY VIEWS ON THE GENERAL ELECTION 1991

The opening chapter of The Great Learning in the Four Books says: "What the Great Learning teaches is to illustrate illustrious virtue, to renovate the people and to rest in the highest excellence." It is not easy to "illustrate illustrious virtue" and to "rest in the highest excellence", but from my political experience, I feel that "to renovate the people" is the most difficult task, especially in a multi-racial society and under the one-man-one-vote system.

In the last 26 years, under the democratic system, it was a difficult job for the PAP Government to successfully transform Singapore from a colony to a prosperous and independent country. But it is even more difficult to transform the people within the same generation, especially in a rapidly developing, multi-racial, multi-religious society, when the young and old have totally different social and education background.

Singapore's economy has developed rapidly. Our people have no problem in meeting the basic needs like food and accommodation. There is no unemployment problem. In fact about 90 per cent of our flats are owner occupied. Our workers enjoy wage increases every year. Inflation in Singapore is among the lowest in the world. The general consensus is that Singapore has an honest and able Government. We have political stability, and good conditions for industrial development. Foreign investors have confidence in Singapore.

How come there were so many protest votes in the recent General Election? We need to analyse and reflect on this issue.

The People's Action Party was entrusted by the people to continue to form a Government in the recent election. We won 77 of the 81 Parliamentary seats. We have more than 60 per cent of the electorate voting for the PAP. If the result of this election is compared with other democratic countries, PAP has indeed done well.

But viewing from a different angle, our Parliamentary seats have dropped from 80 in 1988 to 77, and the percentage of votes for PAP has slipped from 63.2 per cent to 61 per cent. This is a small setback. PM Goh had repeatedly requested voters to give him a strong indication, and a clear endorsement for, his consultative style of Government and his development plans for the future. Unfortunately, he did not receive the response he had expected. His initial disappointment with the election result was understandable.

But what has given rise to the slight setback for PAP in this election? The newspapers and critics have analysed the outcome and have given their comments. I think we can categorise those who voted against the PAP into the following four broad categories:-

- (1) Those who think that a democratic country must have opposition parties in the Parliament.
- (2) Those Chinese educated who feel that they have been neglected by the Government.
- (3) Those who could not improve their standard of living.
- (4) Those who blame the Government regardless of the issues.

**THOSE WHO THINK THAT A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY
MUST HAVE OPPOSITION PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT**

There are some among the middle-income group, especially the young English-educated professionals, who think that a

democratic country must have an opposition party in the Parliament. They have disregarded the achievements and contributions of the PAP Government in the last 20-30 years. To them, a single party Parliament smacks of a dictatorial system, even though they acknowledge that such a single-party Parliament was the will of the people in past elections. It is common knowledge that the PAP Government is an honest and capable one. They would like PAP to continue to govern the country. But they are afraid that if there is no opposition in the Parliament, the Government would become dictatorial. They welcome PM Goh's open and consultative style of Government. This group of English educated voters are a vocal lot. They believe that the open consultative style of Government would allow them to participate and influence Government policies. This way, their interests would be better looked after.

**THE GROUP OF CHINESE EDUCATED WHO FEEL THAT
THEY HAVE BEEN NEGLECTED BY THE GOVERNMENT**

Looking at the results of the General Elections, there are people who come to a hasty conclusion that the Chinese educated Singaporeans no longer support the PAP. This is not a necessarily correct conclusion. But we cannot deny the fact that a lot of dissatisfied sentiments have been expressed among the Chinese educated Singaporeans. Indeed among them, there are some who must have voted against the PAP in this election.

A popular view is that the Chinese educated Singaporeans feel that the Government is too eager to please the vocal English educated Singaporeans and is afraid that they might migrate or they might not support the PAP. On the other hand, the Government has neglected the aspirations and interests of the large majority of Chinese educated Singaporeans. The PAP Government has taken the support of the Chinese educated Singaporeans for granted. Some of the Chinese educated are unhappy that the Government only remembers them during an election.

Many of the Chinese educated feel that the Government pays greater emphasis on the views expressed by the English

educated. They feel that the Government is greatly influenced by a small group of English educated who dare to criticise and dare to speak up, but has not taken the views of the Chinese educated seriously.

The relaxation on censorship, in their view, is the result of the pressure from a small group of the English educated who want greater freedom. The Chinese educated are fearful that moral standard of the society will deteriorate. On the other hand, they feel that their concern and worries over the Chinese culture and language have not attracted due attention of the Government. They feel that although the Government keeps mentioning the importance of learning the mother tongue, it has not given serious attention and care to the use of the Chinese language and development of the Chinese culture.

They also feel that because of the dominating role of the English language in the society, and because the English educated Singaporeans are holding all the key appointments, the Chinese educated Singaporeans do not have the opportunity to rise in society. And because of the difference in values and perceptions, they feel that they are unable to communicate with the elites in society.

Cabinet members and senior civil servants are predominantly English educated technocrats. They could not understand the thinking and the views expressed by the Chinese educated Singaporeans. They also could not understand the problems of the lower middle income group and the ordinary folks.

The Chinese educated have often wondered if they are there only to be pushed around. Why can't they have the right to take part in policy decision-making? But they keep their grievances to themselves, and have become the neglected "silent majority". Indeed their unhappiness is not the result of recent developments. They have probably felt this way for a long time. The PAP will take a serious look at this particular issue in greater depth. The feeling of dislocation of the society among the Chinese educated Singaporeans must be corrected at the

earliest opportunity.

THE ORDINARY PEOPLE WHO COULD NOT IMPROVE THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING

To the ordinary people, their main concern is their daily issues. The increase in maintenance fees, conservancy fees, carpark charges, school fees, medical costs, bus fares, telephone bills, etc would affect their livelihood, especially people in the lower income group. Although the middle-income groups can cope with the rise in the cost of living, they still feel that they still find it difficult to raise their standard of living despite wage increases every year. What about those who are unemployed and those who have no income? Indeed their standard of living deteriorates every time there is an increase in fees. The pressure of yearly inflation suffocates them; they feel desperate indeed.

But this group of older people generally are still the great supporters of the PAP. The PAP therefore has the duty to look into their predicament, to see how their welfare can be enhanced, how their burden can be lightened, and to help them to resolve some of the basic issues of living.

Shopowners, hawkers, small businessmen are badly affected by the increase in rental because of the free market economy. The rise in the price of COE also increases the burden of the small shopowner. Such dissatisfaction exists. PM Goh has already promised that the Government policies of 'open market and free competition' and 'maximising economic returns' policies may need to be adjusted and be made more flexible in its implementation. Such policies should be modified so that people feel that they are able to enjoy the fruits of economic progress.

THOSE WHO BLAME THE GOVERNMENT ON EVERYTHING

In any country, regardless of political and economic systems, there are always people who blame the Government on everything. Mr Yang Mun Tat of the Chinese press revealed in his article on 8 September 1991 that he received a call from a female

reader who concluded that one of the reasons for the setback experienced by the PAP was because it allowed NUS students to distribute condoms at the students' ball. Although the distribution of condoms was eventually cancelled due to the criticism from the public, the lady caller put the fault on the Government because she considers NUS as part of the Government. In her view, such condom issue would not have happened if the students are properly controlled by the University. She thinks that the Government is responsible for this unfortunate incident. So she voted against the Government.

I have received two letters regarding betting on the date of the General Election. The letters were received by me on 20 August and 23 August 1991. The complainants said that several thousand individuals were being cheated of several million dollars by an underground group. People all over Singapore were talking about the issue. The complainants hoped that the Government would annul the betting results so that those who lost in the bet need not have to pay up. I am sure the two complainants must have voted against the PAP because the Government failed to do as they suggested.

There are people who want more freedom to do things in their own way. They only want to win, and if they lose, they will blame the Government.

In real life, there are many faults that are totally unrelated to the Government and yet there is always a group of voters who always blame the Government for the faults. What should the Government do in order not to offend this group of voters?

Singapore is a multi-racial and multi-religious country. Even among the Chinese, there are many clans and groupings, with different education and social economic background. They face different problems, they have different requests and aspirations.

This election has given the PAP important signals. These signals come mainly from the Chinese educated and the majority

who speak dialects. They have been the key supporters of the PAP. The loss of Bukit Gombak, Hougang and Nee Soon Central by PAP is certainly the result of the decision made by some of the Chinese educated and the dialect speaking Chinese. These people, who voted against the PAP, seldom write to the press to complain. They seldom express their opinion on controversial issues. These are the people who have the Confucian ethic and value system. They do not agree with the R-rated movies, they are fearful that such movies will harm the morals of the young. But they do not participate in dialogue sessions because these sessions are generally conducted in English. They have different aspirations, different objectives in life. Through the use of votes in this election, they reminded the Government of their existence, their problems, their feelings and their concerns.

Therefore regardless of who forms the Government, it has to balance the interests of the main racial, language and religious groups, to make sure that every group has the equal attention of the Government. If the Government only wishes to fulfil the need and aspiration of the English educated and only develop one aspect of the society and is biased against the others, then it may lose the support of the others.

The majority who had been the great supporters of PAP have adapted to the change of time. Although most of their children are learning English now, they continue to speak Mandarin and dialects, and continue to preserve the Confucian ethic and value system. They indeed help to strengthen and stabilise the foundation of our society.

The election has shown that those candidates who speak Mandarin and dialects have an edge over those who do not. Knowing how to speak Mandarin and dialects is definitely an advantage. This is a fact in Singapore.

The English educated must be more understanding and tolerant from now on. The Government cannot fulfil all their needs, without regard to the needs of the others. The Government has to look after the whole population and give everyone adequate

attention. Everyone must cooperate together, like a big family, looking after each other and together we progress.

This election has resulted in a 300 per cent increase in the number of opposition MPs in Parliament. The single party Parliament is already a thing of the past. Now we have a bipartisan Parliament like other countries in the Commonwealth. The people have the power to elect those candidates they feel are more capable, more sincere to serve them. But voters must also bear the consequences of their decision. The bipartisan Parliament has already divided our voters into two camps. For example, the voters in some constituencies are mainly supporters of the governing party. The governing party therefore has the responsibility to look after their supporters. Similarly, the opposition parties have the responsibility to look after the voters in their wards. Who can look after the wards better, very much depends on the performance of the MPs in the next few years. It is up to the people to see who are more efficient in solving the problems of the people, in fulfilling their needs. The voters can make another decision in the next election. This is called democracy. This is bipartisan politics. This is also the starting point of the evolution of the political system in Singapore.

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