

14 SEP 1992

92-07c-13

Release No.: 54/AUGUST
16-0/92/08/28

**SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER &
MP FOR KIM KEAT, AT THE 1992 TOA PAYOH GRC (KIM KEAT)
NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION DINNER, ON 28 AUG 92, 8.00 P.M.,
AT THE TOA PAYOH LUCKY RESTAURANT**

[Speech in Chinese]

On August the 9th, twenty-seven years ago, we became one of a handful of countries in the world which had independence forced upon us. There were no celebrations. There was no rejoicing, no dancing in the streets.

It was a shocking day for Singapore. We were thrust into the world, to fend for ourselves, and to survive as a nation.

Conditions then were harsh and difficult. Life was a constant struggle. People did not know where their next meal would come from, or whether it would come at all. Fortunately our survival spirit was strong. We knew that we had no choice but to unite and to work hard. And so we did. We toiled and sweated, working long hours. From slums and poverty, we built Singapore into what it is today.

I remember the first time we celebrated National Day together in Kim Keat, in 1973. I entered politics only the year before, when you returned me as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Kim Keat during the General Elections of September 1972. Kim Keat constituency was also created in 1972. This is therefore the 20th year that we celebrate National Day together. Therefore tonight's celebration is special to me and to many of you who have been with me since 1972.

I am grateful to all of you for your faith and confidence in me during this last twenty years. I also wish to thank the many community leaders and grassroots activists who have supported me all this time, particularly those who helped and guided me when I first entered politics.

I am therefore pleased to be giving out certificates of appreciation and long-service awards to our grassroots activists and community leaders this evening. I think they deserve recognition for a chore that some may consider unglamorous, unrewarding and unappreciated. Far from being

redundant, community leaders and grassroots activists are the crucial links between the Government and the people. They are the ones who help to initiate plans of improvement and see through programmes to improve our estate and our living environment at the constituency level. They are the ones whom you turn to first when you have problems.

Of those who will be receiving awards tonight, Mr Ng Kee and Mr Wong Shou Jui deserve special mention. For twenty years, they have dedicated themselves to serving our community actively. Let us show our appreciation to all our community leaders for their commitment and untiring efforts at making this constituency a nicer place to live in.

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[Speech in English]

First of all, I wish to pay tribute to the people of Singapore including all of you present here this evening for making our National Day a day worth celebrating. Together, we have built Singapore into a bustling nation it is today. This outcome is in no small way due to the active role played by our grassroots activists and community leaders. In the coming years, the grassroot leaders will play an even more important role as a bridge between the people and the Government.

Many people get the impression that Government policies today tend to be more complicated than in the past. They are not easy to follow and understand. I agree. The reason is simple. It is because we are dealing with more complicated problems for which there are no simple solutions, unlike 20 years ago when our problems were more straightforward and simple.

All Government policies do affect various sections of the people in one way or another. Although people are generally better educated today, that does not necessarily mean that everyone has the time or will make the effort to try to understand policies, or the rationale behind Government decisions.

Most people prefer to listen than to read. People generally have little patience for complicated things, especially long explanations. So, to depend on newspapers and news bulletins to explain policies is not good enough. Instead, the most effective and reliable way is through personal contact. Greater effort has got to be made to meet the people on the ground, to listen to their views, and to explain the underlying reasons and objective of the various policies.

Grassroots activists and community leaders can therefore help to close the perception gap between the people and the Government by interacting more closely with the people - to explain Government policies and at the same time listen to their views and problems. In fact you are in the best position to do so because you are on the ground all the time. Your contacts are more personal, more frequent.

I would also like to urge Singaporeans to be more understanding. In a democracy, the minority must learn to respect the decision of the majority. PAP was elected into office by majority of the voters. If PAP wants to stay on in power, it must continue to enjoy the support of the majority. If that is the case, ask yourself why should the PAP often introduce hard-headed and unpopular policies when it is so easy to be popular, when the PAP is in the position to give goodies away in order to win votes!? Ask yourself why?

Many Singaporeans told me that they are not against the government policies per se, but the way these policies are carried out. They need more explanation and, should be given more time to understand and prepare for the impact of the new policies.

If that is the case, the solution is simple. Just give more time for explanation and preparation before implementation of new policies. But at the same time, our fellow citizens must be more patient, pay attention to explanation, and try to understand. This is the way it should be as we become a more matured society.

On that note, may I wish all of you success in all that you do. And may we always continue to celebrate each National Day together in peace and prosperity.

From: INFORMATION5 (8812:GVT224)
Subject: [Kim Keat National Day Celebration Dinner]
Posted: Thu 10-September-92 14:16 SING
Delivered: Thu 10-September-92 14:16 SING (60 lines)
Msg ID: IPM-8812-920910-128508200

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