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SPEECH BY DR SEET AI MEE, MINISTER OF STATE
(COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT) AND (EDUCATION),
AT THE ON-THE-SPOT ART COMPETITION
AT LIANHUA PRIMARY SCHOOL
ON SATURDAY, 29 APRIL 1989 AT 8.00 AM

I commend the Principal and teachers of the School for organising this art competition in conjunction with the Bukit Gombak Constituency Family Day Celebration. Your participation in this constituency event clearly shows the importance you attach to making your School play an active role in the community.

I am pleased that the topic "My Family in Bukit Gombak" has been selected as the theme for the art competition. This is because it makes us consciously think about the idea of "family" and what it means to us.

Usually, we think of what a family is in terms of the members i.e. there is a father, a mother, one or two or more children, and sometimes grandparents are included. A simple way to describe the family is to use the hand as an analogy. If you take the thumb and fingers of the hand to represent the family members, you will see that each digit is different from the other even though they belong to the same hand. So too with family members. Members are individuals with their own personalities and characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, even though they come from the same stock. For maximum efficiency, the fingers and thumb must work together. A loss of any digit will affect the overall performance of the hand. Similarly, family members need to work together and give each other support so that they can face problems or meet challenges.

Without such closeness and support, a family unit is weak and is unable to overcome difficulties.

We now have the one hand which represents one family - the father, mother and children. It seems complete in itself, isn't it? Most of the work we do like writing, drawing in Spot Art Competitions, can all be done with one hand. But, can we manage all through life working with one hand? - the answer is "Yes" but to a limited extent. To be 100 per cent effective and efficient, it is necessary to use two hands.

What does the second hand represent? Let me suggest that -

The thumb is the government and the four fingers -

- (1) the extended family - grandparent, aunts, uncles, cousins;
- (2) friends and colleagues or school-mates;
- (3) those who look after you - your bosses, teachers, principals, etc
- (4) those who need looking after eg the poor, the sick, the old, the widows and orphans.

If you add them all - you have society. The single independent family, when it works in and with society, becomes stronger and more efficient. A society built on cohesive, healthy families will be strong.

The family today is buffeted by winds of change. Divorces, separations, single-parent families hit at the very building block of society. In homes where both parents work, fathers have to take a greater responsibility in child caring and upbringing than traditional forms dictated. In single parent families, one adult is performing the multiple responsibilities and roles normally shared by two. Children from such backgrounds have different family experiences, of

what parents do and of their own roles. What was the norm a decade ago is not necessarily the NORM today. Parents, children and society in total need to adjust, adapt and understand.

How can families remain strong in the light of these changes? May I suggest the following:-

Family members need to

- (i) communicate and spend time together so that they develop closeness and rapport;
- (ii) show mutual respect for and appreciation of each other ie say "thank you" when things are done for you and "sorry" when you are wrong;
- (iii) co-operate and support each other;
- (iv) teach the younger members of the family and pass on core values to them by word, habit and example.

Each of us has a part in developing the kind of society we want for ourselves and for our children. The promoting and enhancing of family life is important in achieving one of our societal goals which is to establish the family as the basic unit of society.

I now extend to the parents and participants of the art competition my best wishes and look forward to seeing the young artists do their best.

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