

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR SEET AI MEE, MINISTER OF STATE  
(COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT) AND (EDUCATION),  
AT THE OPENING OF THE DIAMONDS OF DISTINCTION 1990  
EXHIBITION AND CHARITY DINNER AT CRYSTAL BALLROOM,  
HYATT REGENCY HOTEL ON FRIDAY, 5 MAY 1989 AT 7.30 PM

A very Good Evening to all of you.

I am pleased to be here this evening to officiate at the opening of the Diamonds of Distinction 1990 Exhibition cum Charity Dinner.

Presented in today's collection are 165 specially crafted and unique sparkling pieces. But, the sparkle tonight is not from diamonds alone but also from your hearts as today you have remembered the less endowed in our society in making this an occasion to raise funds for the Community Chest.

When one hears the words hearts and diamonds, one is normally led to think of couples in love, and of engagements and marriage. One of my more pleasant tasks as Minister of State for Community Development is to monitor the progress of marriages among youths through the Social Development Section of the People's Association.

This Social Development Section was set up in the People's Association in November 1985 to promote marriages among 'O' level single youths, complementing the work of the Social Development Unit under the Ministry of Finance.

Since its formation, the Section has organised more than 600 activities for about 50,000 youths with the aim of promoting social interaction, thereby providing many opportunities for social contact, an important step for the start of relationships leading to marriage. The activities organised range from dinners, dances and personal grooming to campings and short overseas trips.

Within the last three years, membership of the Section rose rapidly to almost 40,000, with a healthy mix of 48 per cent males and 52 per cent females. What is significant is that almost 4,000 marriages have been registered between members of the Section or between members and non-members of which about 200 or five per cent of these marriages came about through the Computer Matching Service provided by the Section which was started only last year.

These are encouraging results and the Section plans to organise more varied and interesting activities, both by itself and in conjunction with other organisations like the SAF Reservists' Association, the National Trade Union Congress, hotels and private sector organisations. The Section hopes to achieve 10,000 marriages within the next five years.

In the last quarter of this year, the Social Development Section will be organising a seminar on "Promotion of Social Development Activities in the Private Sector" for private sector representatives with the aim of encouraging private sector employers to organise social functions for their single employees. Our experience has been that private sector organisations have been rather lukewarm towards organising such activities.

While many government departments, statutory boards and ministries have set up "Social Development Clubs" within their organisation, few in the private sector have done so. Why is this so? Could it be that private companies do not deem such employee welfare programmes necessary, or, is it because such activities are considered counter-productive to the overriding goal for corporate results? I don't know.

Whatever the reason, I am sure that employers cannot continue to ignore the desires of their employees for a home they can return to, for someone to love, the need to be loved in return and for children to share the joy and happiness which results from such love.

A happy and contented worker will be a good and productive one. I would, therefore, like to encourage private sector organisations to set up social development clubs and/or organise social activities for their single employees.

A recent survey conducted by my Ministry on how people of opposite sexes meet and get married and the prevalence of match-making mechanisms revealed a number of interesting findings.

Majority (81 per cent) of the singles interviewed felt that they were likely to get married within the next five years. Among the rest (19 per cent) who did not think so, half of the female respondents said that this was because they were still young, while for males, the main reason was because of career. Forty-eight per cent of these singles were concerned about their unmarried status - the older ones were naturally more concerned about it than

the younger ones. Those with higher educational qualifications were less concerned about their single status, presumably because they felt that they would have no problem finding a life partner when they are ready for marriage.

What is a little disturbing is that majority of the singles, 78 per cent placed career as their top priority in life and only 10 per cent felt that getting married was the most important. Also, a significant 34 per cent felt that they had no, or insufficient, opportunities to meet people of the opposite sex. The respondents' perception of the ideal ages for marriage for male (29.8 years old) and female (24.3 years old) were about 1-2 years younger than the actual average ages of marriage of male (29 years old) and female (25.9 years old) in the population respectively.

Contrary to popular perceptions, many of the singles (over 60 per cent) were quite amenable to match-making arrangements with the lower educated and the older respondents being more likely to agree to such arrangements. Preferred match-making agents were friends (96 per cent), relatives (60 per cent), government agencies (43 per cent) and private agencies (24 per cent).

Among those already married, social contact - through social gatherings and activities - and network contact - through introduction by a third party like friends, relatives, etc. - were the primary means through which couples met each other. Network contact was more common among the lower-educated while social contact was more prevalent among the higher-educated.

These findings show, among other things, that people generally do desire to get married but career priority and

insufficient opportunities for contact caused many to delay marriage. While establishing a career is important in providing a strong foundation for setting up a family, this should not lead to people delaying their marriage until it is too late.

We can help our singles realise their desire for a happy and fulfilled family life by providing them with ample opportunities to meet each other. The Government's Social Development Unit and the People's Association's Social Development Section will continue to organise a host of social activities and match-making services and I would like to see private sector employers do likewise. Happy workers will be good workers, happy families will ensure a stable society.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to the organisers of tonight's dinner for their support and commitment in raising funds for the charities of Community Chest. I would like to see more business corporations emulating your fine example to help make Singapore a more caring and sharing society.

It is my pleasure now to declare open the Diamonds of Distinction Exhibition 1990 cum Charity Dinner.

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