

30 SEP 1980

SPEECH BY MR SIA KAH HUI, MINISTER OF STATE FOR LABOUR
AND MP FOR UPPER SERANGOON, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF
EXTENSION TO ST GABRIEL'S PRIMARY SCHOOL
ON 27 SEPT 80 AT 5.00 P.M.

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It is indeed a pleasure for me to be here at the official opening of the new extension of the school. The extension consisting of a hall, a new canteen and special rooms will improve to a large extent the physical facilities of the school. Apart from the Government grant of \$165,600, a sum of \$200,200 was contributed by parents of pupils and well-wishers of the School. I want to congratulate all those responsible for successfully completing the new extension project.

Schools, colleges, institutes and universities are powerful tools for preparing our young for their role in society. Besides teaching them skills and imparting information, our education institutions also develop the attitudes and beliefs of our young. For example, since independence, we have sought through our schools to inculcate loyalty to the nation. The flag raising, lowering and pledging ceremony in schools has undoubtedly contributed to patriotism among our young.

Of late, there has also been considerable debate over the diminishing work ethics of our workers. Employers have complained of the poor attitudes among some of our workers like job hopping, reluctance to do overtime or shift work, individualistic outlook, lack of initiative and lack of

a sense of responsibility. These bad work attitudes were listed in the EDB and Ministry of Labour reports published in the papers. The VITB's letter on what should be done to improve work attitudes has also been published.

Work attitudes are the result of influence in the home, school, the work place and the society at large. Solutions to the problem of poor work attitudes will lie in action taken in these areas. The family has a role to play. Children learn from their parents, brothers and sisters and relatives. If for instance they are taught to be responsible for tidying up after play, this will contribute to their developing a good attitude towards care of work tools and tidying of work places. Parents can influence their children against job hopping. They can impress upon the youngsters the long term benefits of skill development compared to the short term gain of a few dollars. However, the major responsibility for influencing work attitudes at the work place lies with management. The unions too have an important supportive role. If managements place correct emphasis on management of personnel, train managers and supervisors in handling people and motivate their workers, then you are less likely to have bad work attitudes. On the part of the Government, it is looking into the causes of and solutions to bad work attitudes. It has for instance agreed to introduce a CPF job record scheme under which employers can obtain from the CPF Board the job history of a job applicant for the last 3 years and is looking into the NWC's recommendation of the forfeiture of the employers' CPF contributions of job hoppers.

The development of correct attitudes towards work is part of moral education in schools. An important responsibility of schools is to prepare the young for work. It is not enough to give him the necessary skills and knowledge. It is imperative that he has also the correct work attitudes. In fact a prominent trade unionist has recommended that trade unions and employers sit on the boards of governors and advisory committees of schools so that bad work habits may be nipped in the bud in the formative years in school. Schools do indeed have a role. The managements of schools as well as teachers should look into ways and means to developing some of the correct attitudes towards work among our young.

There is another matter I would like to touch upon. When I was a boy I was able to 'enjoy' my days in school. I cycled to school; went swimming at Marine Parade (the old Marine Parade at the end of Joo Chiat Road); and participated in Boys' Brigade activities - drill, signalling, first aid; etc - in the afternoons. Only after dinner did I do my homework. By 9.30 pm or 10.00 pm I was ready for bed. The main expectation of children then was for them to be 'good' ie well-mannered and well-behaved kids. But today, children are expected to be smart, to work hard, to compete to top the class and whether they need it or not, forced to sit beside a private tutor for several hours a week. The emphasis is different. There is over pressure to excel

all the time. Little or not enough consideration is given to their innate abilities and inclinations. The kids sense it and they are so to speak on top gear all the time. They are kept busy from morning till night. The abnormal pressure is forcing them into the adult world prematurely and this is likely to do more harm than good in the long term. The great majority who cannot measure up to the expectations of their parents or teachers will lose their self-confidence and self-worth. You know what will be the result if an adult loses his self-confidence and feelings of selfworth.

Few days ago the Straits Times Forum page was devoted mainly to letters re problems of teachers who suffer from stress and that mental health of teachers deserves special attention. One letter was from an ex-neurotic teacher and one by 'anxious'. Teachers have also voiced their grievances of being overpressurised by the Education Ministry. I understand there is now a team set up in the Ministry to look into the matter. How about our children? It would be worthwhile to look into the issue of overpressure on our school boys and girls.

Having said all that it was refreshing for a change to read in the press last week the results of a survey of the Young Singaporean conducted by an advertising firm. According to the survey, the Singapore youths are not materialistic, unfilial and irresponsible moral

degenerates - at least a very great majority of them are not. The man who was mainly responsible for the survey stood firmly by the findings of the survey and maintained that Singapore youths have not lost all sense of traditional morality and that they are not selfish and interested only in personal gain. In fact he said that from his personal observations our young people are very polite and considerate.

Now this is quite something, coming as it was from an outsider. It does not matter whether the answers given to the questionnaire reflected more the young people's pious hopes and aspirations rather than their actual belief and behaviour, whichever it is, obviously the young in Singapore still have their hearts in the right place and believe in the same virtues and values as their parents. The ground is therefore fertile and it is up to the teachers, the elders, community leaders and church leaders to reinforce the good work done so far. Let us hope and pray that the next generation of young people will be able to find their rightful place in our society.