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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH, DR. TOH CHIN CHYE,  
AT SHRI GEETA JAYANTI AND 56TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION  
OF THE NORTH INDIAN HINDU ASSOCIATION AT THE VICTORIA  
THEATRE ON SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1978 AT 7.30 P.M.

In the last 20 years there have been striking changes in the structure of Singapore's population. The number of young dependants below 15 years old increased by 17 per cent between 1957 and 1976 while the number of old dependants aged 60 years and above increased by 177 per cent. We can look at the picture in another way by measuring the ratio of these two age groups. In 1957 there were 8.9 old aged dependants for every 100 young dependants. In 1966 the figure was 11 per cent. These low ratios were due to the large numbers of births between 1952 and 1966. As the impact of family planning began to be felt it jumped to 21.2 per cent in 1976. If we succeed in maintaining the fertility rate at two then at the end of the next 20 years this ratio will increase to about 35.7.

These figures indicate that our population is growing older as the number of old dependants increase faster than the number of young dependants. This leads to the question "Who will support them?" It will be the employed among the economically active population aged 15-59 years. In 1957 the number of young dependants was 619,100 persons while the economically active was 771,500 persons. In other words it took 100 economically active persons to support 80.2 young dependants. This of course meant a heavy burden on breadwinners at that time especially when the unemployed was in the region of 10 per cent. Thanks to family planning, the young age dependency ratio in 1976 fell to 51.7 and it is predicted to fall further to 38 by 1997. This means that young people born in the last 10 years enjoyed a better standard of care than those born earlier. With low young dependency ratios parents can lavish more time and resources on their children. Parents today worry about their children's ...2/-

their children's education even when they are at the early age of 4-6 years by sending them to kindergartens whereas 20 years ago kindergartens were virtually unheard of. Those born in the 1960's are now teenagers. They have their own lifestyle which is quite different from what their parents were used to at their age. Most of them know little about deprivation and their aspiration towards the better things of life are higher. How much sense of responsibility they will acquire with increasing material well-being and what impact they will make on our society in the future only time can tell.

In contrast the increasing number of aged dependants will become a growing concern. In 1957 for every 100 economically active persons there were 7.2 aged dependants. In 1976 this ratio increased to 10.9 and in 1997 it will be 13.6. In the western countries old aged security has become national problems. They compound economic problems of inflation, recession and unemployment. As the number of working people decreases with economic recession their social security taxes are increased to maintain the aged in sickness and in health. This has led to proposals such as in the United States that the age of retirement should not be made mandatory. On the other hand, growing resentment among young people who remain unemployed has led to the counter-proposal that older people should give up their jobs and make way for new entrants into the labour market. Social security systems from cradle to grave are proving to be millstones around the necks of taxpayers and governments.

The experience of the western countries should make us more conscious of the dangers of abandoning traditional family ties and community responsibilities. We need to innovate our own forms of looking after our aged dependants. This is one area where community participation in welfare work can be strengthened. We have begun institutionalising care for the aged chronic sick not in expensive geriatric hospitals but at home through the Home Nursing Foundation. Civic conscious groups or organisations can assist in looking after the lonely and indigent aged. They are not infectious diseased patients and do not deserve to be isolated in large depersonalised institutions. They ...3/-

institutions. They have their own place in the community. In celebrating your 56th anniversary may I urge your association to give thought as to how it can contribute positively towards solving the problem of old aged dependancy. Such community concern will make Singapore not only a happier place to live in but also instil confidence in the population that there is a future for all of us.

FEBRUARY 4, 1978.

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