

PRESS RELEASE

31 AUG 1983

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • TEL: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 3362207 / 3362271

Acc No

P3

0060

NARC

37

Release No: 48/AUG

15-4/83/08/18

SPEECH BY MR TEO CHONG TEE, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(ENVIRONMENT & SOCIAL AFFAIRS) AT THE 18TH NATIONAL DAY
DINNER AND OPENING OF THE NEW CHANGI COMMUNITY CENTRE,
UPPER CHANGI ROAD EAST, ON THURSDAY 18 AUG 83 AT 7.30 PM

When the old Changi Community Centre had to make way for development programmes, we in Changi Constituency were faced with the mammoth task of gathering resources for the building and furnishing of a new community centre. We have been extremely fortunate in that so many individuals, firms and organisations have rallied round to augment the unstinting efforts of the Changi Community Centre Building Fund Committee. There were the 32 organisers of the Seventh Month festival who responded gallantly to the appeal and raised \$120,000 in 1977; and the 28 organisers who managed to raise another \$87,000 the following year. To each and every one of you who helped in one way or another in raising money for the Building Fund, I extend my sincere thanks for your generous gesture.

It is indeed auspicious that the opening of the Changi Community Centre should coincide with the 18th National Day dinner. A national day dinner is not just an occasion for merry-making and eating. It helps to remind us that we are one nation. The dinner event brings together all sectors of the community, young and the old, rich and the not so rich, the able and the disabled, the educated and those who have not had the opportunity for education. It is an event which helps us to show that we are one community, one group, one team if you like, and that we are cohesive and united and can work together and play together.

The past 18 years have seen our nation developing from a relatively unknown state to a progressive nation known internationally for the sound and incorruptible management of the nation's leaders and her miraculous economic growth and stability. As with the nation, so too should Changi Community Centre prove itself to be as dynamic and forward-looking as the nation of which it is an integral part.

The new Community Centre definitely surpasses the old one. It has various modern features and facilities such as reading rooms, music room, keep fit facilities, squash, tennis and sepak takraw courts and basketball court with a spectator stand, as well as a multi-purpose hall. The last feature is meant specially for persons or groups to "do their own thing" such as developing their own hobby groups. With these facilities, I am confident that we can respond more meaningfully and effectively not only to the existing but also to the emerging interests and needs of the people here.

But what I am especially proud of is the fact that we have catered for the minority groups in the design of our Centre. We have provided three ramps with railings specially designed for the wheelchair bound disabled, built at a cost of \$26,000 for their easy access to the office, toilets, basketball court and the multi-purpose hall. This will provide the disabled persons in Changi with an opportunity of utilising the facilities and of interacting with the able-bodied. The ramps and easy access will hopefully also encourage greater participation in community centre activities by the aged in our midst.

Whilst we have the physical structure and have made modifications at great expense to meet the needs of certain minority groups who previously were unable to participate in community centre activities because of

physical barriers and difficulties in ambulation and mobility, we must now ensure that the Management Committee and sub-committees will devise ways and means of reaching out to these groups in a way that is meaningful to them. This involves a change in the attitudes of those running the Community Centre, which change should permeate down the line even to the instructors/teachers conducting classes.

We are all aware that one of the key areas in the development of community centre leaders in Singapore is the nurturing of skills and attitudes in community service. One of the ways of exposing these leaders to community service is through working with the groups being catered for. Participation of the aged and disabled in the Centre's committees and sub-committees is to me a desired process. Whilst we are concerned with the development of youth leaders, we must not forget the importance of the contribution the aged and disabled can make.

One of the areas that we can first concern ourselves with is the aged. The recently published National Survey of Senior Citizens, conducted by the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1982, has shown that most of our aged population have ample leisure time, ranging from four to eight hours a day. Most of them are engaged in solitary and passive pursuits such as listening to the radio or watching TV or video. Less than half of those surveyed go for walks and less than one-fifth visit friends or pursue hobbies. Only 18 per cent visit community centres and that too only occasionally. We should start promoting activities here in the Community Centre by including the aged, such as bearing their interests in mind in the planning of programmes and activities to help enlarge the areas of interest of our aged. These could be providing them with more opportunities for interaction-based leisure activities to be held at the Centre.

We should strike out on our own and not just follow what other community centres are organising. The profile and hence the needs of the people of each constituency differ according to their occupations, educational levels, ethnic groups and ages. In order to know their interests, we must ask them. Even if many do not have the time to be actively involved in the committees and sub-committees of the Community Centre, a chance to exchange ideas or suggest items for consideration, can help the Centre grow and enable the Community Centre Management Committee to review their achievements periodically.

Constituents on the other hand should not just sit back and wait for their views to be solicited. Each person must step forward and do his part, fully realising that, whatever contribution he is willing to make, the community and hence the nation is that much enriched.

I now have great pleasure in wishing you all a prosperous National Day and in declaring the Changi Community Centre open.

- - - - -