

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Communications & Information, 36th Storey, PSA Building, 460 Alexandra Road, Singapore 0511. Tel: 2799794/5.

Release No. 13/AUG
03-1/87/98/04

87-YNH-15

**SPEECH BY DR YEO NING HONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS
AND INFORMATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE,
AT THE YANG CLAN'S 37TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER AT YEO'S
BUILDING ON TUESDAY, 4 AUGUST 1987 AT 8.00 PM**

I am happy to be here tonight to join in the celebration for the 37th Anniversary of the Yang Clan Association.

In the modern history of Singapore, clans have made important contributions to the progress and development of Singapore. In the early days, under the British Colonial system, the livelihood of immigrants in Singapore was difficult and uncertain. In their ignorance, the early settlers were often exploited. The clans provided support for these people, particularly those of the same surnames, those from the same villages and the same provinces. They give assistance in times of need and provided protection in times of trouble. During the Second World War, many clans helped to defend Singapore. With practically no training and no arms, many of their members died in their valiant attempts at defending Singapore. Even more died during the Japanese occupation, and in the turmoil and lawlessness that followed immediately after the Japanese surrender. In our fight for independence in the 1950's and early 1960's clan associations rallied people together, to fight for self-Government and then for merger to give a better life for all Singaporeans. After separation, we all dug our heels in and fought for survival. That was the time when, in the words of our national song, people thought we won't make it and when trouble seemed too much for us to take. But we did. We put aside dialect and language differences. We exercised self-discipline. We worked hard to achieve a nation, to give peace and prosperity to our people.

With the rapid development of Singapore the roles of the clan associations too will have to change. The challenge is to find new areas of contribution, new ways and means, for clan associations to continue their relevance in modern Singapore. It is important for them to move on, to ask what the future roles of clan associations can be, to ask questions, such as: How can clan associations help achieve greater national cohesiveness amongst Singaporeans? How can they help safeguard our traditional values from being eroded by Western influence? How can they help inculcate in our younger Singaporeans the sense of self sacrifice and discipline that underpin the success of Singapore?

How well clan associations can contribute to these and other problems that confront us as a people, as a nation, depends on how the clan associations are able to muster their human resources for our national objectives. A good first step would be for the clan associations to reach out to the younger members of their clans, to have a steady inflow of younger, active members. There is no shortage of young talent in Singapore. For example, there are Yeo's in practically every sector of Singapore, private, public, and professionals. They include senior officers in Government, senior officers in the SAF, senior medical specialists, prominent bankers, businessmen, and so on. This is of course also true of other surnames. We need to reach out to them to encourage them to serve in the clan associations. The more the clan associations are able to reach out to a wide cross-section of these members, both old and young, the better able they are to respond to these new needs of Singapore. By the presence and participation of younger members, the clan associations would be better able to serve Singapore.

Finally, clan associations have always been nationalistic. It has been one of their great sources of strength. In Confucianist traditions, they have always directed the individual's loyalty to his family, his clan, and his homeland. Singapore is our homeland. In five days' time, we shall all celebrate our 22nd National Day. Singapore has been independent for 22 years. A new generation born in independent Singapore has come of age. They have undergone their national service and are now ready to defend Singapore. Older Singaporeans have also adopted Singapore as their homeland. This sense of shared destiny, to triumph over all adversities and to prosper against all odds must bind us together. We cannot allow others to manipulate us, by one foul measure or another, to divide us in order to rule us. For that we have to be eternally vigilant. The last 12 months have shown the many different ways in which our prosperity and progress can be threatened. Older members of clan associations can add this to their long experience and share that hard-earned experience with their kinsmen, their children and grandchildren. That way, through our families and our clans, we can preserve our traditional values of diligence, perseverance, and vigilance, and ensure Singapore's progress and prosperity.
