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**SPEECH BY MR YATIMAN YUSOF, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(FOREIGN AFFAIRS), AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF
BEDOK TOWN SECONDARY SCHOOL
ON THURSDAY, 21 AUGUST 1986 AT 5.00 PM**

My wife and I would like to thank you for inviting us to this very auspicious occasion - the official opening ceremony of Bedok Town Secondary School. To say auspicious may be both inaccurate and an understatement for you have chosen a date which is doubly auspicious. Firstly, it is a special day for everyone here - students, teachers and parents. I am sure a lot of effort have been made to make today's occasion a memorable one. I wish to congratulate the principal, staff and pupils for putting this grand show. Secondly, as we gather here today, we are still being enveloped in an atmosphere of festival, a mood of celebration for the 21st anniversary of our National Day.

I think it is useful for all of us to use this occasion to reflect on some aspects of the development of education in Singapore. One cannot forget that in 1959, a few years before our independence, the People's Action Party came to power. The new government then introduced a nation-wide massive programme for educational change in Singapore. Schools were opened all over the island. Every child, boy or girl, was encouraged to go to school. Education has been an integral part of our nation building. And it will remain to be one of the major instruments in moulding the character, and shaping up the mental orientation and philosophy of our future citizens.

The 25 years of new education system accompanied by rapid changes and adjustments to match the changing needs has now produced citizens in their 30s.

They become parents who are actively transmitting their beliefs, values and expectations to their children. Some of them are holding key positions in the administrative, economic, industrial and political life of Singapore. Through the school system, we have produced Singaporeans who are able to contribute and make Singapore tick. They will be playing an even greater role for Singapore's future.

With this historical background in mind, let us ask this question: "Have we become a mature society?" Physically and economically, yes we have. And I must add that to some extent our achievement is unmatched by many countries in the world. We have achieved a high standard of living, second only to Japan. We live in a healthy urban setting with a clean and green environment. Eight out of every ten among us live in a modern flat with modern amenities. We have one of the most efficient road systems and a technically advanced communications network. Our people are better fed, better dressed, better housed and are better educated and skilled. But achievements in these fields have not been matched with another equally important element - the character of our society and citizens. In our effort to build a modern and successful Singapore, we have created individuals who are hard-working, achievement-oriented, creative, productive and innovative. All these qualities are of paramount importance for a society struggling to survive. But what is lacking in these "steely" people is the spirit of care and love for other human beings, their fellow citizens.

If we run through the various successful campaigns of the past, be they anti-spitting campaign, anti-littering campaign, campaign to improve road safety among users, to say a few, we are bound to find that we have to educate our people through the "stick and carrot" method. Let me give an example. It is not unusual for us to realise that the highway patrol car is not far ahead of us when we see cars slowing down and are driven within the speed limit. But the

moment the highway patrol disappears into side junction, drivers will step on their accelerators exceeding the speed limit. It is the fear of being caught and be given demerit points and being fined that forced them to follow the rule. Similarly, it is not an unusual sight to see litter strewn around at the National Stadium or in other places after big gatherings are over. We litter freely when we realise that enforcement of law on everyone is impossible under these circumstances. So it is the "stick and carrot" again.

The latest of the series of "stick and carrot" approach which the government is forced to take, is on killer-littering. Why is it necessary for the government to introduce penalty against the culprits including repossessing the flat - a measure seen by some as too severe? The moment killer-littering was seen as deteriorating close to becoming a social problem by the print media, the HDB sent teams to respond to complaints on killer-littering. Residents' Committees were activated to play an advisory role to discourage killer-littering. Some Members of Parliament had even gone to the extent of speaking to the families whose littering and irresponsible habits are known to the neighbours. It is sad to say that such subtle and personal persuasion had failed.

This brings us to the first question when we ask ourselves whether we have become a mature society - a true citizen of our nation. Singaporeans have yet to develop a mature patriotic attitude, manifested by our willingness to do something for the sake of our country and caring for fellow citizens' well-being, welfare and aspirations.

Before a person decides to throw something, rarely has he thought that by doing so he would kill or injure his neighbours. Before he decides to throw a cigarette butt or any heavy object through the window or over the corridor, seldom does he think of the implications of his irresponsible doings to fellow flat dwellers below. We have

not reached a point where all of us will stop spitting, cease littering, refrain from speeding, avoid taking drugs and cease vandalising because of our love for the nation and for fear of bringing disrepute to Singapore. We have not reached a point where we impose self-constraints and self-discipline simply to uphold the good name of Singapore and feel proud of what we do.

Another equally important area indicating our lack of maturity is our rather superficial understanding of the workings of a multi-racial society. After moving out from our old compartmentalised society and living close to one another for decades, we have yet to evolve a truly multi-racial society with each member understanding to the fullest extent, each other's religion, culture and practices and sensitivities related to it.

What we should seek to do is to open the two way door of multi-racialism and close the door of chauvinism. The best measure is through enlightening ourselves on each other's inner thoughts and needs. Only by doing this can we increase the momentum towards creating a genuine multi-racial society free from sectional impositions. This philosophy must be clearly manifested in physical and cultural tangibles that in turn will act as a reminder and catalyst towards creating a more like-minded citizens of Singapore.

I am fully aware that similar to love between men and women, patriotism needs time to bloom. And, I am very optimistic that given time, Singaporeans will grow and mature as a society.

There are already indications that when the time comes, Singaporeans will rise to the occasion. Firstly the overwhelming response shown by Singaporeans from all walks of life to rescue victims of the Hotel New World collapse is a case in point. Many had risked their life to save those trapped under the rubble. Secondly, when we face severe

economic recession, our workers, realising that it is disastrous for them to insist on continuous high salary increases, agreed to salary freeze. Thirdly, reactions from parents and youths affected by National Service have been more and more favourable. The strongest indications that Singapore has slowly come to age was the spirit shown by participants and spectators during last fortnight's National Day celebration at National Stadium. These are manifestations of patriotism during crises or during emotive circumstances. It is a good sign and it proves that patriotism and love for the nation has grown beyond its embryonic stage. However, the real challenge for us is to build patriotism and sense of caring for fellow citizen's well-being during peaceful times. It is a question of bringing the kampong spirit into an urban and modern setting. Only after this is achieved can we claim that we are maturing as a society.

With that note, I officially declare Bedok Town Secondary School open.

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