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SPEECH BY MR YATIMAN YUSOF, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (FOREIGN AFFAIRS), AT THE CHILDREN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS 1986 AT KALLANG THEATRE ON WEDNESDAY, 1 OCTOBER 1986 AT 9.00 AM

I wish to thank the Geylang District Primary Schools' Sports Council for inviting me to celebrate Children's Day this morning.

Children's Day is a very special day set aside to highlight the distinctive role of children in society. It is also meant to create an awareness amongst us on how children in different parts of the world live, especially in places where they are less fortunate.

In Singapore, children are one of the most fortunate groups of people. While parents are worried by recession, with some even having lost their jobs, children seem to be the lesser affected. They have food to eat. They remain in better houses. They enjoy good medical facilities from polyclinics and nearby dispensaries where medical help can be obtained when the need arises. They still go to school with pocket money, and are able to set their minds on studying rather than worrying about money.

Such conducive physical, social and economic environments would not have been possible if the government of Singapore had not been successful in creating a better life for its people. We must uphold this and continue to improve so that the children of tomorrow will have better lives.

If you had watched "Newswatch", or read the newspapers, or heard adults talking, you would know that the government is encouraging parents to have more children. Singapore needs more young people to sustain its prosperity and bring Singapore into a new orbit of progress.

While the young population forms a larger part of our society now, more old and retired people will be found in Singapore in the next 20 to 30 years.

There will not be enough people to take up jobs, which are necessary for Singapore's well-being. The young people, who would become much fewer in number, will have to support greater number of older people. The response from parents - after the long continuous success of our two-children family planning approach - has been lukewarm. It is difficult to change the minds of parents overnight because they are still used to the idea of having only one or two children.

Apart from being used to small families, parents tend to compare the value of children with other things in life. They evaluate the amount of money they have when spending on food and clothing, education and toys, entertainment and pocket money. They also weigh the amount of time that can be used to earn more money to improve their income and to better their career prospects, against time spent caring for their children.

They also compare the time that they stand to lose for leisure and social functions because of duties for the nurture of their children.

This has prompted many parents, especially the better-educated ones, not to have many children.

It is sad that some parents look upon children in terms of material gains. But against all the so-called costs, there are also incomparable benefits which parents and newly-married couples should seriously consider.

Children are a source of pride, inspiration and encouragement to working parents. Their presence often help parents to iron out stress that may have resulted from work pressure and threatening to strain marital relations.

Children are a source of entertainment and hope for tomorrow. Newly-married couples who have decided not to have children should ask themselves this question: "What good is the strife, hard work, sacrifice to earn more money if not for the future?" And the future includes children who will benefit and contribute to the standard of living.

It is pertinent that we review the question of children and society. If the prosperity of Singapore depends on the demographic aspect of specially maintaining a balanced young population, it is something that we have to pursue. In the hands of our children lie a better future for Singapore. And for that reason, we should place the nation's well-being over and above our personal ones.

While we celebrate Children's Day today, let us not forget that in other parts of the world, there are children who live in poverty, famine and hopeless despair. You are quite fortunate to have all the basic requirements in life but all these will not remain ours forever if you do not work hard for yourselves.

In some other countries, children may be able to feed themselves by cultivating food but in Singapore, we do not have enough land to cultivate the food that we need.

The only guarantee to our survival is through improving ourselves in education and skill so that our presence would be an asset to Singapore.

It now leaves me to wish all of you a happy Children's Day. Do enjoy the concert that is specially prepared for you.

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