

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY MR YATIMAN YUSOF, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(FOREIGN AFFAIRS), AT THE BRIEFING ON THE NATIONAL AGENDA
AT THE KAMPONG EUNOS COMMUNITY CENTRE
ON SUNDAY, 8 MARCH 1987 AT 10.00 AM**

Singapore is a young nation. We have just passed through our 21st year of nation-building. We have behind us a clear manifestation of achievements in the economic, industrial and technological fields.

We are now moving into a new phase of development to achieve greater social cohesion and a higher level of integration of its multiracial community. With the strength achieved through a higher standard of living, each community is now in a better position to seek for this new objective.

Multiracialism is not only the cornerstone of our harmonious society, it is also protected as the pillar of our national philosophy. We have accepted the reality of racial differences which makes us culturally richer and socially more tolerant towards differences of the others. The National Agenda is a means to achieve a greater social cohesion. It is launched at a time when there is a new mood to solve our multiracial problem through open dialogues, discussions and exchange of ideas.

This new environment makes every Singaporean - regardless of his ethnic group, language and religion - more aware of the necessity to understand each other's problems and to work together towards a deeper sense of mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's hopes and expectations. This is made possible because we have become a more mature society. Singaporeans are more willing to voice their concern and hope openly.

The visit of President Herzog of Israel is a case in point. Sensitive issues which were previously swept under the carpet are now being discussed openly. Singaporeans are beginning to face issues affecting their life more rationally than before. This is a healthy sign with promise of increasing momentum towards national integration.

In 1965, when Singapore was forced to leave Malaysia, most of us had decided to place our future in this country. We believed that the future was in our hands and we had worked ferociously to face massive challenges posed by the deplorable living conditions, massive unemployment and the uncertainty of our future.

Twenty one years later, we have in our hands the Republic of Singapore that we had built together with our sweat and tears. The Malays, being the biggest minority group had to some extent, contributed towards this end. We hold dearly, the spirit of self-reliance, mutual help and mutual care, to build a Malay community which is distinctive in this region.

This achievement was made possible without help or "interference" from any other outside forces. However, recent developments had shown that parties outside Singapore have a tendency to interfere with our local affairs. If newspaper reports are of any indications, then we view with grave concern, remarks made by some politicians from a neighbouring country.

Comments on BG Lee's statement were made not only by up-and-coming Malay/Muslim politicians but also by a minister from that neighbouring country.

Whatever problems that Singaporeans face, it is for the Singaporeans to solve. In this respect, national integration or the creation of national identity is a long and difficult process. Whatever the difficulties that may arise, it will and must be resolved within the "Singapore family".

Apart from the national duties, Malay MPs as a group, will play their role as expected of their community within the framework of "politics of accommodation" - a two-way process requiring mutual understanding, mutual adjustments, mutual trust and mutual contributions from all parties involved. For this problem to be solved, all community must work hard at it.

To successfully overcome this challenge, there is a real need for Singaporeans from the majority group to review their traditional viewpoints and perceptions on Malays and Muslims in Singapore.

We have to make fresh approach to this problem. We have to take the right perspective and free ourselves from the constraints of the past in creating our Singapore identity.

In this respect, remarks by foreign political leaders are not only regrettable but also undermine our genuine effort to carve a future of our own.

They have no stake in their future here. We have. Our future is in our hands. Let us decide what our future is to be. Let us work towards our own objectives without foreign interference.

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