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SPEECH BY MR YATIMAN YUSOF, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (FOREIGN AFFAIRS), AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF EAST VIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL ON FRIDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 1988 AT 6.00 PM

I do not intend to lecture but I hope you will forgive an ex-teacher who indulges in lecturing once in a while. And I assure you, I will only take a while.

The opening of a new school is, I feel, one of the best testimonies of a Government's commitment to an excellent society.

If a Government wants to stay in power, the wisest course is to keep its people in a backward state but here in Singapore, we believe that for our country to thrive, the quality of our people must be enriched and enhanced - hence this drive for excellence in schools.

A quality people cannot be the aim and effort of Government alone. The Government can build million dollar schools, equip them with the latest teaching aids and invest in teachers' training. This is but a paltry attempt to shape the citizens of tomorrow.

That responsibility lies with you, the parents and teachers.

Education is not just a matter of obtaining good grades in examinations, it is also a matter of deciding the kind of citizen which Singapore needs.

Do we want individuals who put self before society? Or Singaporeans who agree that there is more to life than "I", "Me" and "Myself"?

Modern parents are busy and today's teachers carry the task of shaping the children's character.

But home is where the children are for most of the day and if not parents, then grandparents and elder brothers and sisters have to take the trouble to be with them.

If not by conversation, then by example will children learn those Asian attributes manifested at home - filial piety, courtesy, respect to elders.

With such closeness to the family unit, a closeness to friends, school and country will gradually develop.

It is through human contact that values are transmitted rather than through the cold pages of textbooks.

So parents, when your child goes to school every morning, do not just imagine that he will walk through the door some years later a successful professional.

Hope that he is both successful and is a man who does not pain his parents' hearts and remember his obligation to religion, country, family and friends.

As for the teachers, the child is not just another student who you must help clear the year-end examinations.

He is the citizen who you may meet in 20 years' time. If he is a worthy citizen, and I don't just mean in dollar terms, it will gladden your heart.

So it is not a question of teaching how to read, to write and to do arithmetic but really educating them so that they become not only people of knowledge but also human beings with the right attitudes and values that can enhance the survival of Singapore as a nation.

The school is the perfect place for inculcation of "community-oriented" values. It is a place for the eager-beaver youngs who are receptive to learning.

It is also commonplace for children of the same peer group interacting among themselves, bounded by their own social or group sanctions. They can collectively decide right from wrong.

But most important is the fact that it is in the school that children from different racial, linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds find the opportunity to mingle freely.

Such opportunity must be put to good use in our effort to build a strong and cohesive society. So it is of some concern to me when I hear remarks to the effect that there has been an increase in the tendency of pupils of the same linguistic group to interact only among themselves.

While such group behaviour may be something natural and, to some extent, desirable because it helps to improve their ability and command of their mother-tongues, there is a serious need to understand its possible long-term implications.

Perhaps in our attempt to identify the most effective way of transmitting and inculcating the widely-spoken national ideology, efforts need to be made to study the sociological aspects of group behaviour in schools.

Through greater understanding of the dynamics of social behaviour in school, we will be able to enhance the environment that helps to create a more cohesive society, consisting of worthy citizens.

Such is the satisfaction I have known when I meet some of my ex-students. May you experience this satisfaction many, many times in your life.

And for the young ladies and gentlemen, I have this advice: Study hard, play hard, honour your parents and obey your teachers and may you be good citizens of tomorrow.

It now remains for me to wish the school the best and to declare East View Primary School open.

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