

**Volume 79  
No. 2**



**Monday  
17th January, 2005**

# **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES SINGAPORE OFFICIAL REPORT CONTENTS**

**Permission to Members to be Absent (Col. 84)**

**Nominated Members of Parliament (Col. 85)**

**(Announcement by Mr Speaker)**

**Administration of Oaths (Cols. 85-86)**

**President's Address (Cols. 86-189)**

**Debate on the Address (First Allotted Day)**

**Adjournment of Debate (Cols. 189-190)**

**Motion agreed to**

**Adjournment (Col. 190)**

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES SINGAPORE

## OFFICIAL REPORT

### TENTH PARLIAMENT

---

#### PART I OF SECOND SESSION

#### VOLUME 79

---

*Monday, 17th January, 2005*

*The House met at 1.30 pm*

PRESENT:

- Mr SPEAKER (Mr Abdullah Tarmugi (East Coast)).
- Mr Ahmad Khalis Bin Abdul Ghani (Hong Kah).
- Dr Ahmad Mohd Magad (Pasir Ris-Punggol).
- Mr Ang Mong Seng (Hong Kah).
- Mr Alexander Chan Meng Wah (Nominated Member).
- Mr Chan Soo Sen (Joo Chiat), Minister of State, Ministry of Education.
- Mr Chay Wai Chuen (Tanjong Pagar).
- Dr John Chen Seow Phun (Hong Kah).
- Mr Chew Heng Ching (East Coast), Deputy Speaker.
- Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong (Non-Constituency Member).
- Mr Chiam See Tong (Potong Pasir).
- Assoc. Prof. Chin Tet Yung (Sembawang).
- Mr Charles Chong (Pasir Ris-Punggol).
- Dr Chong Weng Chiew (Tanjong Pagar).
- Mr Davinder Singh (Bishan-Toa Payoh).
- Mr Cedric Foo Chee Keng (West Coast), Minister of State, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of National Development.
- Mr Gan Kim Yong (Holland-Bukit Panjang).
- Mr Andy Gan Lai Chiang (Marine Parade).
- Dr Geh Min (Nominated Member).
- Mr Goh Chok Tong (Marine Parade), Senior Minister, Prime Minister's Office.
- Mdm Halimah Yacob (Jurong).
- Mr Hawazi Daipi (Sembawang), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Minister for Manpower.
- Mr Heng Chee How (Jalan Besar), Minister of State, Ministry of Trade and Industry.
- Assoc. Prof. Ho Peng Kee (Nee Soon East), Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Mr Inderjit Singh (Ang Mo Kio), Deputy Government Whip.
- Ms Indranee Rajah (Tanjong Pagar).
- Prof. S Jayakumar (East Coast), Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Law.
- Mr Khaw Boon Wan (Tanjong Pagar), Minister for Health.
- Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan (Hong Kah).

*Debate on President's Address*

Khiang said that the Government has not given any help to the people. The problem is that some people do not want to accept the openings that are available to them.

The President's Address has outlined the seven priorities of the Government. They may not appear to be glamorous but they are really very pragmatic. I am confident that if we were to implement all these, we will do well.

There are three lessons which we can learn from the Indian Ocean tsunami: firstly, knowledge is strength. Over the years, the NTUC has trained many workers so that they can acquire new skills and are therefore able to face the economic restructuring. This is something which we have achieved. Secondly, we must have the will to live to survive. We know that in the last few years, NTUC has redesigned and re-engineered many kinds of work. Much has been said about the hospitality industry. We have actually restructured the work flow in the hospitality industry and provided various types of training for our workers to adapt to these new methods that would help them to earn better-paying jobs. This re-engineering of the work process has also provided opportunities for the workers who were retrenched so that they could take up new jobs. As long as we can put in a concerted effort, even if we cannot anticipate what is coming, we should at least recognise and seize the opportunities that come along. I am confident that we would be able to bring greater vitality to Singapore, as the President has mentioned in his Address.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I propose to take the break now. I suspend the Sitting and will take the Chair again at 4.00 pm.

*Sitting accordingly suspended at 3.38 pm until 4.00 pm.*

*Sitting resumed at 4.00 pm*

**[Mr Speaker in the Chair]**

**PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

**(Debate on the Address)**

Debate resumed.

**Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang (Nominated Member) (In Mandarin):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I support the motion standing in the name of Mr Gan Kim Yong.

This year, Singapore will be celebrating its 40th anniversary of independence. With unremitting effort, we have built up a democratic society and achieved security and progress. I think this is something that we should take pride in. Yet, we must not forget that there are still many challenges ahead of us.

Our national pledge begins with, "We, the citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves as one united people, regardless of race, language or religion". Let me be bold in saying that we have made much progress towards this goal. However, we must continue to work on it to make further progress.

The Singapore Tourism Board is promoting the concept of "Uniquely Singapore". What is unique about Singapore? I think the most important thing is our diversity.

I believe that what is most obviously unique about Singapore is our diversity. However, this also poses a great challenge.

Biologists teach us that diversity is strength. With regard to the economy, our economic diversity has contributed substantially to our prosperity. During the 2003 SARS crisis, retail shops and tourism were badly hit. But manufacturing, logistics and financial services

*Debate on President's Address*

[Prof. IVAN PNG PAAK LIANG]

were relatively less affected. So, overall, we did not suffer too badly.

I believe that diversity is the key to our strength as a regional and international hub. We have people from different backgrounds who are fluent in many languages. They create value in management and the service industries.

Our diversity has also contributed much to our national security. The whole world faces the threat of terrorism from extremists. Fortunately, we have built up a multi-racial and multi-cultural society. That is why we are better able to deal with extremist threats, both internal and external.

However, for our social diversity to be a stronger source of national strength, we need to work harder on social integration.

Let me give two examples based on my own experiences. Some years ago, a university colleague had to read the names of students at a graduation ceremony. The names of the Malay students were printed as "Abdullah b. Ahmad", "Fatimah b. Khamis" and so on. My colleague read them as "Abdullah bin Ahmad" and "Fatimah bin Khamis". Today, how many of our younger Chinese citizens know the difference between "bin" and "binte" in terms of gender?

Let me give the second example. Recently, a publisher sought my advice on the cover design of a textbook. It was a book on management targeted at the Asian market. But what was the key design motif? A bright pink piggy. Apparently, the designer did not appreciate the negative implications of selling such a book to the Malaysian, Indonesian, the Middle East and other Islamic markets.

Singapore will celebrate its 40th anniversary soon. I personally feel that

we have to work harder on social integration and to turn social diversity into strength. We should work within our secondary and primary school system to proactively increase the mixing amongst students of different races.

For Singapore to be even more prosperous, we must draw upon every resource of every citizen. We should let everyone make their contribution – whatever the role, however sensitive the role, whether in the economy, society or national defence. So long as he is a Singaporean, if he is capable, we should allow him to make a contribution to our nation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have spoken of diversity as being what is unique to Singapore and its importance to our future progress. Now, let me address a related issue, that is, what creates the sense of belonging to Singapore.

As other Members have mentioned, as we internationalise, more and more of our people will live overseas. Some will go overseas to study and stay behind. There may be others who will be recruited to work in foreign countries. Singaporeans are well-educated and well-rounded. They are well sought after by employers all over the world. To bring our people back, whether in person or in spirit, we must strengthen their sense of belonging in Singapore.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe, you would agree with me that the sense of belonging is based on four key elements – each begins with the letter "P". They are Parents, People, Place and Pride. To be filial to our parents and the importance of people is obvious. Let me focus on the third aspect – Place or the environment. This is the mix of sights, sounds and smells. A good environment or good place is also a foundation of neighbourhood and community.

*Debate on President's Address*

Research by my NUS colleagues in Tiong Bahru has shown that familiarity with place is an important part of self-identity and social memory.

We have made progress on Place. My friends in Hong Kong compliment Singapore for preserving our Chinatown much better than Hong Kong. The recent decision by schools to open their facilities to our neighbourhood activities is also a very good example.

However, as the pressure of school and work seems to be getting stronger and stronger, I think we have lost something in our neighbourhood and community. People have little time to know their neighbours, even less time to participate in neighbourhood activities. I think we must do more to build up the community and neighbourhood spirit.

Can something be done to improve on the design of the HDB flats? One of my friends remarked that the HDB void decks only provide concrete benches and these attract only old people. We need "cool" amenities to attract parents and their young children.

In our housing policy, when allocating housing units, could we not give priority to people living in the same community, so as to maintain their sense of belonging to the area?

When naming places, I think we should also put in more effort. In the 1970s, the Raffles Institution building, with a history of more than 150 years, was demolished. The school was moved to Grange Road. Then in the 1990s, it moved again, and this time to Bishan. River Valley High School and Crescent Girls' School are now situated far from the roads after which they are named.

Environment, names, anecdotes, all add up to history, and they certainly

contribute to our sense of belonging and nostalgia.

I mentioned 4Ps: the last one is Pride. We should be proud of our economic achievements. We should take pride in our social achievements, as well as our political achievements. As Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Mr Gan Kim Yong and Mr Iswaran have said, we have contributed significantly and generously to the victims of the recent Indian Ocean tsunami. We should take pride in our contribution.

Having said that, I must say not all are proud of being Singaporeans. We now recruit foreign talent aggressively in all fields. Because of this, some locals feel that employers blindly pursue foreigners and that locals have become second-class citizens. They feel left out. We must address this issue and strive to maintain a balance when we recruit foreign talent.

We should continually encourage our people to take pride. Flying the flag and wearing medals on National Day is good. We should let all those *bintangs* and *pingkats* appear more frequently.

I have a small suggestion. There has been much discussion about dual citizenship, but there has not been a consensus on this. Why do we not consider the concept of "secondary citizenship", with reduced rights and responsibilities? Some Singaporeans stay overseas for a long time and they apply for foreign citizenship. If we allow them to maintain a secondary citizenship with Singapore, they need not cut off all the ties with us. So, we could allow them to continue to take pride with us.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said at the beginning, we should be proud as we celebrate our 40th year of independence. Parents, People, Place and Pride are the

*Debate on President's Address*

[Prof. IVAN PNG PAAK LIANG]

four pillars of belonging. They are the foundation of our future happiness, prosperity and progress. And for Singapore, to be happy, prosperous and progressive are exactly what we seek, as stated in our national pledge.

**Miss Penny Low (Pasir Ris-Punggol)** (*In Mandarin*): 40 years of glorious achievements.

Sir, 40 years of independence has transformed Singapore from a country without rich natural resources into a country of prosperity and progress. In the early years of nation building, our fragile land suffered from a spectrum of challenges from civil chaos to communist insurgency. Then, our GDP per capita was only US\$512. Fortunately, our Government and leaders promptly resolved all the internal and external challenges, maintained political stability and has since successfully completed two peaceful successions of leadership. Now, 40 years later, our per capita GDP is more than US\$21,825 (in 2003) and we have achieved the developed country status. Singapore also boasts of a string of international achievements, for example, we are ranked among the most competitive, globalised and investment profitability country in the world. Singapore is regarded as the best business environment in Asia, has the best quality of life, best medicare system, best workforce, best physical infrastructure, and many other glorious achievements.

Today, Singapore enjoys social stability and economic prosperity. Regardless of race, language and religion, we live in relative harmony, share common space and objectives in furthering the interests of Singapore. In the area of security, our unity as a people successfully defeated the plots of the

terrorists since 2001. In 2003, we also managed to contain the SARS epidemic and was highly commended by the World Health Organisation in our efficient and effective handling of the SARS crisis. All these achievements are the result of the concerted efforts between the Government and the people.

*People-centric policy*

The President, in his address, once again emphasised on a "people-centric policy". He attributed our success to the concerted efforts of our people and their confidence in our nation. Some people lamented that this is an old issue revisited, that the address offers nothing new. Bearing in mind that the fact remains that Singapore is small and has little natural resource, we must indeed continue to focus on developing our human resources – our most valuable asset. We must ensure that we develop every Singaporean so they may have both the strength and confidence to contribute to Singapore. Simultaneously, we must ensure everyone can benefit from the fruits of our labour, and ensure a consistent and sustainable development. Hence, the President's call for a people-centric policy as a cornerstone, together with benevolence and transparency in the administration and policy matters, presents a new vision for our future direction. We continue to emphasise on our human capital.

*Benevolence in people*

The recent Indian Ocean tsunami took the lives of more than 150,000 people. The survivors, however, faces the challenges of food and water shortage, and the impending risk of diseases and epidemy. Seeing the sufferings of our neighbours, Singaporeans empathised with the situation and swiftly put their compassion and benevolence into effective action, participating in all sorts