

means that Indian talent which is already scarce, is either being directed into fields where Indians are already over-represented or that Indian talent is on the average not good enough to gain admission into the hard sciences or business subjects.

In my casual discussion of this subject with Indians, I find a surprising number who think that this state of affairs is due to some discrimination against Indians. Unless Indians face up to the true causes of this problem, instead of hiding behind the bogey of discrimination, Indian Singaporeans will make no progress.

Tonight I want to deal with three issues that are facing the Indian community:-

- a. education;
- b. emigration;
- c. immigration.

Education

The educational problems of Indian children from primary level to tertiary level have been well documented. Two points stand out:-

- a. First: Indian children are well below the average. At every level from PSLE, "O" Level, "A" Level and University, Indian Singaporeans do not perform as well as Chinese Singaporeans. In Mathematics and Science, which are subjects that are important to a modern technological society, the performance of Indian students is below average.
- b. Second: In the last decade, Indians have not improved their condition, relative to the other communities. As I have stated, in certain areas, they may even have fallen behind.

All is not however bleak. In absolute terms, Indian children, like other children in Singapore, have improved their educational performance, thanks to the increase in the quantity and quality of resources the Government has allocated to education. That effort, together with the accompanying improved performance, is now percolating to the base of the pyramid.

Despite the improvement in the educational performance of Indian children, it will take two, three, or even four generations before the Indian community can catch up with the present educational attainments of the rest of Singapore.

That is only a small consolation. A special effort has to be made or the Indian community will permanently lag behind the rest of Singapore. We cannot drift along. Today Indian Singaporeans are competing with the whole of Singapore. During the British Colonial period, Indians in fact competed with less than half the Chinese in Singapore. The majority of educated Chinese and Malays were educated in the Chinese or Malay language and thus ruled themselves out of the professions and the civil service which were English-based. Educated Indians, on the other hand, were mostly English educated and the real competition was with only about half the population. The situation today is completely different. The bilingual policy with English as first language means that the whole population is now in the race.

Our educational problems are, at root, social problems. There is just no evidence of the will to move forward and excel among the lower strata of the Indian community as there is outside the community. That statement might come as a surprise to some members of the Indian community who have "made it". They, the ones who are doing well, are in the main-stream of Singapore life. They want their children to do well, educationally, and to reach a higher socio-economic level than they themselves have attained. For a large section of the Indian community, however, that drive for improvement in their socio-economic status does not exist. Thanks to rising incomes, even

4

the less successful Indians have been able to accumulate more of the good things in life. They tend to compare their lot with that of their friends and relatives in India, or with the plight of Indian work-permit holders in Singapore, and somehow imagine that they have attained Nirvana. Life has been easy and good. Why, they think, should they bother to strive too hard? Worse, why bother to encourage their children to excel?

Emigration

The second problem facing the Indian community is that of emigration. Rough figures that are available suggest that the Indian community is leaving Singapore at a rate that is two to three times higher than the average rate. The numbers in itself should not be worrisome. It so happens that the proportion of Indians in Singapore has fallen from close to 10 per cent to 6.5 per cent in about three decades. What is worrisome is that so many of the highly-educated members of the Indian community are leaving. If the trend continues, where are the future Indian leaders to come from? Where are we going to find the role models if the community is diluted in quality?

Some Indians complain of discrimination. Yes, it exists but where does it not exist? The relevant question is: Are Indians likely to be better off anywhere else in this world? Will they have the same opportunities to move up as they do here? There is so much in our favour here. The government and government-related companies and operations, multi-nationals and the financial organisations are the largest employers. These institutions practise meritocracy more than any other organisations. If we do not want to be "strangers everywhere, at home nowhere", we should sink our roots here firmly, and decide to build a thriving, progressive and cultivated community, a community which does not forget its traditions but, at the same time, contributes to the task of national integration and development.

As a minority, we must expect to have to try harder, not less hard. We must be outstanding and not just average. Having been a Foreign Minister for many years, I can tell you that a small country like Singapore has to work harder and be more brilliant to be recognised and given a role. So with us as a minority community. If we do not excel, we must not expect sympathy and special consideration because we are a minority community. Let us forget, once and for all, the idea that because we are a minority, we are entitled to special concessions and privileges to help ourselves. It has not been our way, and it should not. Instead, we should rely on our own resources to improve the well-being of the entire community. We have the resources, in manpower, brains, and even money. We must learn how to harness those resources.

This type of speech may not have been possible two decades ago, or even a decade ago, or perhaps, even five years ago. It may have been misconstrued as stirring up trouble. It is now possible to make this speech because of the more mature state of our society. We should take advantage of the opportunity to ventilate our problems among ourselves, and tackle them in a community-wide manner. It is time to bridge the many differences in the community of language, class and religion. The community is too small to afford such fissures.

Immigration

The third issue that I wish to discuss is that of immigration. I am not referring to work-permit holders. We have too many of them from the Indian sub-continent. It is best that we reduce their numbers so that Indian Singaporeans at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder can set their sights on higher things rather than make smug comparisons between their lot and the lot of the work permit-holders.

No, what we want is to attract Indians in the professional, executive and academic strata, who are able to

blend smoothly into our society. Those incoming Indians will, first, partly compensate for the unfortunate outflow of Singapore Indians to foreign countries, and second, help to improve the general status of the Indian community.

The Government has introduced, in the first instance, a quota of one thousand permanent resident passes for such high-calibre Indians. The take-up rate is encouraging.

Action Committee on Indian Educational Problems
and Singapore Indian Development Association

Because of the continuing problems besetting the Indian community, the six Indian MPs have set up an action committee to improve, in the first place, the educational performance of Indian children. The Task Force will be action oriented. It will suggest specific action programmes to improve the educational performance of Indian children. We are prepared to give the committee a wider responsibility. It may examine any facet of the Indian situation in Singapore. The Task Force will be chaired by Mr J Y M Pillay (the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of National Development and Chairman of Singapore Airlines). Mr Chandra Das, the MP for Cheng San GRC will be Adviser to the Action Committee. The other members of the Committee are stated in the attachment to the text of the speech which I have released to the Press.

The six Indian MPs have also encouraged the formation of a body to look into the special problems of those families in the community who, for various reasons, have been trapped in a maze of social, personal and economic problems. This body has been registered as the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA). The President of SINDA is Mr E Sukumar, Director, University Liaison Office, National University of Singapore. The Adviser to SINDA will be Dr S Vasoo, MP for Tiong Bahru GRC. A short note on SINDA and the full list of office bearers is also attached to the Press Release of this speech.

We hope the entire Indian community will rally around and give its full support in time, brain power, and where necessary, money, to facilitate the important task that we have set for the Action Committee on Indian Educational Problems and the Singapore Indian Development Association.

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ACTION COMMITTEE ON INDIAN EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

- Adviser : Mr S Chandra Das
MP for Cheng San GRC
- Chairman : Mr J Y M Pillay
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of National Development
- Dy Chairman : Dr N Varaprasad
Principal
Temasek Polytechnic
- Secretary : Mr Srinavasan
Lawyer
- Members : Mr D Natarajan
Principal
Swiss Cottage Secondary School
- Mr George Abraham
Executive Director
Indian Chamber of Commerce
- BG Kirpa Ram Vij
Executive Chairman
Neptune Agencies Pte Ltd
- Mr V Krishna
Executive Engineer
Public Works Department
- Mr A Nathan
Principal
Serangoon Technical School
- Mr Sinna Karuppan
Executive, Texas Instrument
- Dr Philip Pillay
Lawyer
- Mrs Ganapathay
Principal
Loyang Secondary School
- Mr Bhajan Singh
Principal
Si Ling Secondary School
- Mr Tharman Shanmugaretnam
Deputy Director
Monetary Authority of Singapore.

SINGAPORE INDIAN DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (SINDA)

1. There are and will always be some families which for various reasons cannot meet life's challenges. These families often face social, personal and economic difficulties which can lead them into destitution.
2. In recognition of this need, the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) has been recently established to provide a comprehensive and closer follow-up social and welfare services to assist these families to help themselves and contribute as useful members of our society.
3. The SINDA hopes to mobilise voluntary and community efforts to assist these families. Some of the main objectives of the Association are:
 - (a) To promote and co-ordinate projects for the advancement of Singapore Indians and to undertake public education and awareness programmes for them;
 - (b) To initiate, organise and manage self-help and relief schemes to enhance the quality of the lives of Singapore Indians;
 - (c) To work in conjunction with any organisation whose objects are similar to those of the Association.
4. The SINDA has enlisted the support of various concerned Indian Singaporeans onto its Board of Management to draw up relevant social and welfare programmes to assist families facing difficulties. The members of the Association's Board of Management are:

Adviser : Dr S Vasoo
MP for Tiong Bahru GRC

President : Mr E Sukumar
Director
University Liaison Office,
National University of Singapore

Vice President : Mr Abdul Rashid
Lawyer
Khattar Wong & Partners.

Secretary : Mr R Shankar
Senior Assistant Bursar,
National University of Singapore

Asst Secretary : Mr R Ramachandran
Assistant Director,
National Library

Treasurer : Mr M Giri
Senior Executive,
Development Bank of Singapore

Asst Treasurer : Mr A Thiagarajah
Finance Manager,
Esso Pte Ltd

Committee Members : Mrs P Deby Sarojiny
Senior Medical Social Worker
Tan Tock Seng Hospital

Mr S Tiwari
Senior State Counsel

Mr Ajith Prasad
Dy Secretary, Ministry of Finance

Mr Dileep Nair
Dy Secretary, Ministry of Defence

Dr Bilveer Singh
Lecturer
Political Science Department,
National University of Singapore

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