

Self-help ethnic groups have worked well: PM

They have helped in understanding specific challenges and dealing with them candidly

By LI XUEYING

SELF-HELP ethnic groups have enabled each community to tackle their specific challenges without raising racial and religious sensitivities, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday.

He noted that when Singapore first embarked on an ethnic-based self-help approach, some people were worried the policy would "sharpen our racial and religious divides".

"These are valid concerns," he said. "But as things turned out, far from undermining our cohesion as a society, self-help groups have enabled us to understand the specific challenges and issues confronting each community, and deal with them candidly, honestly, directly, without raising racial and religious sensitivities."

Mr Lee was speaking at the Chinese Development Assistance Council's (CDAC) 15th anniversary dinner.

There, he presented a plaque to Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, who served as CDAC patron since its formation in 1992 when he was prime minister. Mr Lee became patron last year. Pioneering board members such as Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng and banker Wee Cho Yaw were also honoured. The 160 guests then sang a birthday song for the CDAC, which has helped 50,000 students and low-income workers annually since 1992.

Said Mr Lee: "The CDAC can be proud of its many achievements over the last 15 years."

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the birth of groups such as Mendaki, Sinda and CDAC to help look after the welfare of the needy in the Malay, Indian and Chinese communities respectively.



PHOTO: EDWIN KOO

HAPPY BIRTHDAY CDAC: PM Lee and (from left) key Chinese Development Assistance Council members Tan Chin Siong, Lim Swee Say, Goh Chok Tong and Wee Cho Yaw blow out candles on a cake to celebrate the self-help group's 15th anniversary.

Their success showed the self-help approach has worked, he said.

But he stressed that the groups' leaders "must avoid turning their organisations into exclusive ethnic enclaves catering to only parochial interests".

He is thus glad the groups have formed a joint council to run programmes open to Singaporeans of all races and religions.

Called the Self-Help Groups Coordinating Council, it was set up three years ago. Said its chairman Gerry De Silva, president of the Eurasian Association: "We run projects such as joint tuition classes, so we can piggyback on each other's resources for the common good."

But more can be done.

Mr Lee said the groups should look at building even stronger links, and provide more opportunities for interaction between the different communities. This, he said, will widen the common ground and strengthen racial and religious harmony.

Mr Lee added that going forward, self-help groups can do more to serve the community, especially with challenges such as a widening income gap and an ageing population.

Reiterating the "many helping hands" approach, he said that while the Government has launched many initiatives like Workfare, it "cannot be the solution for all problems".

Individuals, families and community organisations all have a role. Self-help groups, being closer to the ground and communities, "can come up with more innovative and responsive solutions, and reach out more effectively to the elderly and the less fortunate among us".

To do so, they must leverage on the network of community partners from grassroots organisations to schools.

For its part, the Government will "continue to support your initiatives and programmes, and work with you to ensure no one in need will be left behind without community care and support", pledged Mr Lee.

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Symptoms of dengue fever:


- Dengue usually starts suddenly with a high fever. **Anyone who has fever and feels unwell should seek medical attention immediately.**
- Other symptoms may include rash, severe headache, pain behind the eyes, and muscle and joint pain. Nausea, vomiting, and loss of appetite are common.
- Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever (DHF) is a severe, often fatal, complication of dengue fever. This is when the blood vessels start to leak and cause bleeding from the nose, mouth, and gums. Bruising can be a sign of bleeding inside the body.
- Dengue can only be diagnosed by a blood test.

Health advice in the event of infection:

- There is no specific treatment for dengue. Ensure that you have adequate rest if you are suspected or diagnosed to have dengue fever. Drink enough water to prevent dehydration.
- Those infected with dengue should be kept away from mosquitoes for the protection of others.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you experience severe abdominal pain and sweating, with cold, clammy hands and feet.
- Follow up with your doctor regularly until he/she informs you that you no longer require close monitoring.


Prevent transmission, protect your family:

- If you, or a loved one, are a confirmed or suspected dengue patient, mosquito repellents and coils can help prevent the transmission of the virus to family members and neighbours via the *Aedes* mosquitoes.
- If someone in your neighbourhood has contracted dengue, use of repellent can minimize your chances of being bitten by an infective mosquito.
- Get your family members to wipe out potential mosquito breeding habitats in your home and around the common areas to prevent a new cycle of transmission.



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