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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE ACTING MINISTER FOR EDUCATION,
DR. LEE CHIAN MENG, AT THE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS'
GRADUATION CEREMONY (INTERMEDIATE COURSE) AT THE
TEACHERS' TRAINING COLLEGE, ON SAT., OCT.31, AT 3 P.M.

Nineteen sixty-four marked the beginning of an unprecedented growth in pre-school education in Singapore when the People's Association established eight rural kindergarten centres. Until then, pre-school education was enjoyed only by children from the upper and middle income families. The growth in kindergarten activities has been steadily on the increase ever since.

With rapid industrialisation and rising standard of living, Singapore parents have become more aware of the need of the pre-school period for their children, not the least motivated by our highly competitive and selective education system, where a child who enters primary school without any pre-school experience is at a disadvantage.

In February this year, a study of pre-school education in Singapore was conducted by the Research Unit of my Ministry. The survey shows that there are some 19,000 children receiving kindergarten education of which 14,000 are enrolled with the People's Association and 5,000 with the private establishments. As the survey has been necessarily confined to the registered kindergartens, it does not include the student population of this age group in kindergartens not registered with the Ministry. A rough estimate of the enrolment for those unregistered kindergartens is around the region of 18,000, making a total of 37,000 children receiving pre-school education in 1969.

The percentage of pre-school children between five and six years receiving education is, therefore, about 70 per cent, only half of which are attending registered kindergartens.

The survey also reveals that only 20 per cent of the principals of the registered kindergartens have received any proper professional training in kindergarten teaching, and that there is a much lower percentage among the teachers. Professionally trained teachers in the unregistered establishments is unheard of. In most of these kindergartens, the facilities for the proper conduct of kindergarten education is far from satisfactory. The programme is too formal and rigid while the children are given instruction without being able to engage in a more meaningful activity of learning through play, experience and discovery. This is partly due to the fact that most parents tend to rate low those kindergartens whose curriculum allocates too much time to such activities. In some establishments, the

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programme is almost a duplication of primary I curriculum which will definitely stifle the child's interest in learning in the pursuing years.

I am afraid this is a most unhealthy state of affairs. A child between five and six is at his most receptive age. All those shortteennings in our present kindergartens will have a far-reaching adverse effect on our children in the years to come.

With continuous urbanization and even higher standard of living, it is expected that by late seventies, the percentage of children of this age group attending pre-school education will be very close to 100 per cent. If this unhealthy situation is not rectified, it would create a very serious social problem. While the Government is not in a position at the moment to get directly involved in kindergarten activities, other than offering facilities through the People's Association, it is the Ministry's view that the quality of pre-school education must be raised. To do so, the quality of the kindergarten teachers must be improved upon.

The first training scheme was launched as early as 1964 when the People's Association began their kindergarten activities. Last year, the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the Adult Education Board, organised, for the first time, a part-time in-service course for teachers in the registered kindergartens. This course lasted over a period of four school terms. This year, the Ministry has decided that a long-term training programme for kindergarten teachers be launched in conjunction with the Adult Education Board. These courses, mainly in-service, will include lectures on education, psychology, teaching methods and other subjects essential for kindergarten work. The courses are divided into three stages: Basic, Intermediate and Advanced. At present, there are approximately 500 teachers from both registered and unregistered kindergartens, attending the in-service course on Basic Kindergarten Teachers' Training and it is estimated that by the middle of next year, about 1,000 kindergarten teachers will be trained to this level. Facilities for upgrading training at the Intermediate and Advanced levels will be provided.

Considering that sufficient trained teachers will be available by then, the Government has decided that as from January 1, 1972, all kindergartens must be registered and may only employ teachers who have at least successfully completed the basic course or its equivalent.

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With regular courses conducted for upgrading the quality of the teachers, by late 1970's when almost 100 per cent of the children between the ages of five and six will be receiving pre-school education, we will be able to have sufficient qualified teachers who can offer a better kindergarten programme to our children. Then kindergarten teaching will form an integral part of our school system. It would then be possible for the curriculum in school to be adjusted, taking into account the programme at the kindergarten level.

The 46 successful graduates of the Intermediate Kindergarten Teachers' Training Course present here this afternoon are the pioneers of the Government's effort in producing quality teaching in the kindergartens. I would like to congratulate them on their success and urge them to consider their graduation day not as the end, but the beginning of the bigger involvement with the study of all aspects of human growth and development, particularly of the pre-school children, with whom they will be so intimately involved.

Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Committee for Kindergarten Teacher-Training Courses and the lecturers concerned for their effort in making this training scheme a success.

OCTOBER 31, 1970.

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