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SPEECH BY SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
MR. A. RAHIM ISHAK, AT 24TH ANNUAL SPEECH DAY OF
OUTRAM SECONDARY SCHOOL AT SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL
ON THURSDAY, 3 NOVEMBER '77 AT 6.00 PM

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I wish to thank you personally for having invited my wife and I to be Guests-of-Honour on this auspicious occasion of the 24th Annual Speech Day of Outram Secondary School. The record of scholastic achievements of Outram has been second to none. This speaks well of you and your staff in pursuing your role as teachers and educators in Singapore.

Today I shall speak of war -- a declaration of total war against the misuse of narcotics in Singapore. The problem needs our urgent attention because it has become so widespread among the young and has penetrated into many economic and social strata of our society. I shall quote you a few figures. In 1974, 3,225 persons were arrested for drug offences. The figure rose to 4,201 in 1975 and in the last six months alone, 5,983 persons were detained in connection with the misuse of heroin.

The problem of drug abuse is serious because of the growing number of people involved and also in the number of drugs being misused. In the 1950s and 1960s, opium and cannabis were popular but today, there is morphine, heroin, methaqualone (MX tablets). The names themselves sound like extracts from a dictionary of chemistry. Polydrug abuse is with us.

We have started the war against the misuse of narcotics but we must intensify our offensive, particularly on three fronts. The first is preventive in nature. Lying at the crossroads of Southeast Asia and in close proximity to the infamous "Golden Triangle", Singapore is unfortunately vulnerable to international "pushers". Yet our role as a regional and global communication centre by air

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and by sea leaves us exposed. Hence our first line of defence must be to build a protective ring around us against the narcotics trade. This requires the vigilance and intense watchfulness of our Customs and Marine Police.

Our second front is in the social and educational spheres because the problem of drug abuse has social origins. First, there are those who seek a state of euphoria, the land of the lotus-eaters as a form of escapism. Second, there are those who are influenced and encouraged by their close friends and associates. Wishing not to be left out in a lifestyle which is continuously drummed in by the mass media, they find themselves drawn into deep addiction. Some come from broken homes and driven away by the absence or lack of parental care and control while others suffer from psychiatric difficulties.

The rapid development of Singapore and the attendant affluence and increase in leisure time have ironic effects too. The youth with more pocket money can afford the coffee houses, large stacks of pop music and so-called sophisticated company like bandboys and social escorts is faced with a decision on how best to spend his time and money. In many cases, boredom sets in and drug abuse becomes a convenient outlet. In this connection, I would like to say that the Outram Secondary School has an excellent record because for the past five years there has not been a single case of drug abuse among the students. This speaks well of the leadership in the school including the principal, the teachers, the Advisory Committees, and, of course, of parents. To be fair, it must also be mentioned that 75 percent of the school population are girls and statistics have shown that the incidence of drug abuse among girls is much less than that among the boys - about 5%. The fact remains that the 25 percent of the male enrolment in Outram Secondary School has been free of the drug abuse. I congratulate you for your good conduct.

The reasons for drug abuse are many and varied and a sociological study is worthwhile undertaking. But today I shall not go into a lengthy discussion of this, rather it is my aim to highlight the fact that the education of our youth must be our prime target because statistics show that over 90% of those addicted to drugs are below 30. Education in this respect should not be confined to the classroom. Parents could play a positive

~~role at home in guiding their children to more productive~~ activities. Parental control and supervision of their activities outside their homes could similarly be tightened. This should be done not with repression but with sympathy and understanding of the outlook and aspirations of present-day youth. Together with the Government, parents can help promote healthy and productive activities to cut down boredom and idleness, recognised as one of the major causes for drug-addiction among the young.

The 170 Community Centres in Singapore could also expand their efforts in organising activities. In addition to existing sports, educational, cultural and recreational activities, new ones such as fishing and boating clubs could be established. We have the sea around us. Apart from sailing, sculling and rowing, amateur fishing could be a new sport from which we can derive definite benefits as fish caught could be consumed. Fishing competitions could be held. For example, the Siglap Community Centre Youth Group is in the process of setting up a fishing club with a view to achieving the above objectives. Some constituencies are fortunate in having coastlines. Those who do not have coastlines could join up with those who have.

We have already opened up the third front. This involves the unpleasant but yet necessary punitive measures, including the death sentence for drug trafficking. However, events have shown that drug addicts and those involved in drug trafficking are not easily deterred by punishment, not even that of the death sentence. This makes it all the more necessary that a positive approach be taken to fight this social menace.

The harm that narcotics could inflict on our youth cannot and should not be underestimated. Narcotics recognise no barriers. It affects the physical and spiritual health of our youth with indirect effects on successive generations. Research has shown that after the initial state of euphoria in which the drug taker is unable to detect a deterioration in mental and bodily functions, long-term effects set in including cell, chromosome and brain damage. Cancer is another possibility and in the case of the male, sterility could be the ultimate consequence. Singapore can ill afford to see this happen to its youth which is one of our most important assets. Our economic development would be impaired and so would be our standards of living.

There is yet another aspect to the problem of drug abuse and that is in rehabilitation. Five drug rehabilitation centres have been established. The first week in these centres where the drug addicts undergo the 'cold turkey' treatment would be uncomfortable and challenging. While on a visit to these centres, I interviewed some of them and discovered that, after a period of detoxification and recuperation when they are encouraged to take part in sports and healthy activities, those admitted to the centres are on the road to recovery. Yet there is no guarantee that the weaker-minded among them would not return to the habit of drug abuse. Only with effective enforcement after having been discharged as well as proper guidance and counselling, could rehabilitation have its desired results.

One other aspect of the problem needs our immediate attention. Among the drug addicts we have discovered that a large percentage are Malays. In the 5,000-odd cases in the last six months, the breakdown, according to racial groups, were as follows:-

Chinese	48.6%
Malays	44.7%
Indians	5.4%

with the other races taking up the remaining 1.3%. The figure for the Malays is, to say the least, alarming when they only form 15% of the entire population of Singapore.

What then are the causes for this high percentage? The older generation Malays are not known to indulge in heroin or any other drugs consumed by immigrants of other races. Yet Malay youths in recent years have become involved in this abuse. No doubt the fact that there is a supply is basic to the problem but the question arises as to how the demand originated, sustained and augmented. Are Malay parents, in expressing their love for their children, becoming more lenient with them? Perhaps they are and in so doing they have inadvertently created the conditions in which their children could take up the vice without being detected. I feel that parents, if they really love their children, should not hesitate to report to the authorities when they even suspect drug-taking among their children. Malays are known to be law-abiding and God-fearing. The religious education has, I know, positive and beneficial effects in their moral upbringing. There

should be no let-up in this field.

There is another theory to account for this high percentage of drug abuse among Malay youth. It argues on the premise that the Malay race is more artistically inclined and talented. There are many artists, sculptors, painters, musicians and dancers among them. They say that practitioners of the fine arts are more willing to experiment with stimulants as a means to reach new artistic heights and achievements. I do not know whether this is true of drugs and narcotics or whether it is fair to put the blame on racial traits.

I understand that Malay youths who have been arrested for taking drugs, including heroin, were prone to indulge in this abuse in groups of five to ten whereas those from the other races tend to indulge in solitude or in smaller gatherings. Hence the higher figure of drug abuse among Malays has arisen from easier detection leading to arrests and detention. Even if this is true, the figure of involvement among Malay youths would still be disproportionate to the Malay population. As this problem affects Malay youths it must be looked into more deeply and extensively. I wish to propose the setting up of a Task Force with members from the Central Narcotics Bureau, the University, the medical profession, and other competent authorities to investigate the causes of this phenomenon among Malays and to recommend remedies. Malay leaders with the necessary qualifications should be adequately represented in this Task Force as they would be more conversant with the cultural and religious aspects of the community.

I would like to conclude this speech with an interesting phenomenon. Despite the capital punishment which we have imposed on drug trafficking, there has been an increase in the amount of heroin and opium imported. The arrest of some smugglers of opium in the last few days might perhaps point to a trend of the deterrent effects of the death sentence.

Drugs like opium have had a historic connection with politics. In the middle of the 19th century, three wars were fought between the British and the Chinese, among other things, over opium. Today although the actors are international syndicates and "junkies", there is an inconspicuous connection between drug

trafficking and political pursuits. Southeast Asia is the home of the Golden Triangle. Its poppy fields produce 1,000 tons of raw opium annually. This is more than 70% of the world's opium supply. Traditionally, Marseille and Hongkong were the two prominent heroin laboratories in the world. But today Southeast Asia houses many establishments involved in the manufacturing and processing of this drug. Taking this into account and the fact that the increase in the exports of heroin and opium from the Golden Triangle coincided with the end of the war in that area, the question must surely be posed as to whether this is merely coincidental or whether political motives, apart from the pursuit of economic gains, are involved. If there is any substance to this hypothesis, then of course there are even wider implications to this problem than the war which I said was declared internally against the misuse of drugs.

Finally I wish to congratulate you on your 24th anniversary.

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