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SPEECH BY MR A RAHIM ISHAK, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE  
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT THE 4TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
TIONG HWEE PUGILISTIC ART INSTITUTES AT THE CHINESE  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ON 16 DECEMBER 77 AT 7.30 PM

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We in Singapore have an invaluable heritage of rich and old cultures. One of these is the pugilistic art or the art of self defence, whether they be of Chinese, Indian or Malay origins. Our forefathers practised these martial and self defence arts not only as a form of recreation but because they were a vehicle to instil certain positive values. Their practice inculcated a strong sense of social and self-discipline besides coordination and alertness. In the long term this is of vital importance as a means to sustain the work ethos which has clearly been built up among Singaporeans.

The reasons why it is necessary to sustain this strict and forceful social discipline are obvious. Singapore lacks natural resources and there is an absence of an agricultural base. To aggravate this is a dislocated global economy with a sluggish rate of recovery. Let me provide you with just two indicators of this stagnation in the world economy.

First, a look at our volume of exports. The increase of the 1973 figure over that of 1972 was 44.8 percent. In 1974, the figure soared to 58.9 percent. 1975 was a bad year with a minus figure of 9.8 percent. Last year, we could only manage a slight increase of 27.5 percent. The figures for the first six months of 1977, although indicating a small increase, cannot again be compared with the better years of 1973 and 1974. From January to June 1977 our volume of exports only registered an increase of 27.6 percent compared with 41.7 percent and 83.1 percent in the first six months of 1973 and 1974 respectively.

The second indicator is the volume of sea-borne cargo loaded at our port. In both 1974 and 1975, there was a decline in the



volume compared with 1973 with the figures -2.2 percent and -12.4 percent respectively. This has only recently picked up in 1976 with an increase of 14.1 percent.

The figures that I have mentioned are two useful indicators although they are not absolute criteria by themselves. I am sure our economists could provide other figures to show that the world economy is recovering only very slowly from the recent recession. Therefore, there is a need for our economy to be equipped with the necessary capacity and versatility to accommodate any repercussions which might arise as a result of the impending economic challenges ahead of us. The problems are particularly acute with the growing trend of protectionism among the industrialised countries, whether they be Japan, United States or the EEC countries where economic planners are gradually closing their doors to imports. This is an unhealthy trend and can at best only be a short-term remedy to a pervasive global problem. Our economy, both in the manufacturing and services sectors should, therefore, be armed, among other things, with a work discipline which is pugnacious and tenacious to face these challenges.

A high degree of tough-mindedness and strong social discipline are required to meet the political conditions as well. This has arisen especially after the victories of communist insurgency in the Indochinese states resulting indirectly in the revival of communist activities in Singapore. In conjunction with the front organisations of the Communist Party of Malaya and with moral inspiration from the Euro-communists these local subversive elements have gained the morale and courage to intensify their efforts to topple by illegal and violent means the popularly-elected government in our country.

Elsewhere, like in the Middle East, the situation is uncertain. We can only hope that a permanent and peaceful settlement could be reached in that area of age-old rivalries.

The activities of the many pugilistic and self-defence organisations in Singapore are praiseworthy because they have helped to impart the positive values of social and self-discipline. Such qualities are vital to the physical and mental make-up of our work-



force which is known for its propensity to adjust to new conditions and absorb new technology and knowledge. The involvement of our youth in these pugilistic organisations have also helped to keep young minds occupied and prevented them from being led astray by undesirable and anti-social activities. I congratulate the Tiong Hwee Pugilistic Art Institute for its contribution in this field on its fourth anniversary today.

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