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SPEECH BY MR TEH CHEANG WAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT,
AT THE GEYLANG WEST CONSTITUENCY'S NATIONAL DAY DINNER AT
GEYLANG WEST COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SUNDAY, 8 AUGUST 1982 AT 7.30 PM

As we gather here joyously this evening to celebrate our 17th National Day, I would like to invite you to join me for a few moments in serious reflection.

Look around the world today and you will agree with me that Singaporeans have good reason to celebrate. The developed countries of Western Europe and North America are facing seemingly insurmountable economic problems. Beset by high interest rates, inflation and stagnation, their peoples are haunted by the spectre of mass unemployment. In the Soviet bloc countries, the situation is very much worse. Despite having extensive agricultural lands, Comecon countries experience severe food shortages. It was recently reported in the press that the real income of the Polish people has dropped by half. In the Third World, the picture is even more grim. Countless millions face the prospects of malnutrition, starvation and even death.

In these hard times, Singapore is one of the few fortunate countries which has been able to maintain a good economic growth rate resulting in full employment and continuous increase in income. Have we been specially chosen by God to enjoy this good future? No, on the contrary, we do not even have any natural resources. The reason for our success is simply that we have a hardworking population and an efficient, effective government.

Two decades of uninterrupted economic growth has - fortunately or unfortunately - enabled a whole generation of young people to grow up without any first-hand experience of hardship. Many have taken the good life for granted. Some feel that continuous improvement in the quality of life is theirs as a matter of right. In

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reality, what we have built up in Singapore is extremely vulnerable and fragile. Bad political leadership, foolhardy policies and wrong values can make our hard-earned gains disappear completely overnight.

Some people may accuse me of exaggerating. Countries have been torn by war and ravaged by corrupt governments and yet their peoples have survived. Why not Singapore? I am fully aware of the existence of such countries. A good example is China, the land where the majority of immigrants into Singapore were born. China suffered 50 years of war, turmoil and civil chaos between the collapse of the Manchu Dynasty and the emergence of an unified communist government in 1949. Through those hard, lean times which were punctuated by periods of no government, the Chinese people found sustenance in the countryside, the villages and the farms. Singapore, on the other hand, will not survive even 50 days of civil disorder. Eighty per cent of the population live in high-rise apartments. Imagine the chaos that would reign if there were no reliable water or electricity supplies. As a small island state with no agricultural base, we have to import virtually everything we need. If there were no imports of foodstuffs for 50 days, all of us would face serious food shortage or even starvation.

Our young voters must realise the vulnerability of our society. For continuous economic growth and social stability, we must have strong, effective leadership in the government. Singapore simply does not have the resilience to survive the bunglings of an ineffective government. The PAP Government and its policies have stood the test of time. Despite our small size, our political leaders are well-respected by the world community. We need only look to our Prime Minister to see an example of a statesman whose opinion is held in high esteem by the leaders of other nations. In contrast, I have not heard of any country seeking the advice of the Opposition leaders. This is not unexpected. The obsolete policies and ideals which they advocate would be ruinous for any country.

I have no doubt that the majority of Singaporeans want to continue to enjoy political stability, high economic growth and greater improvement in the quality of life. However, we must not

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forget that among us are some who want to see Singapore go down the drain. Members of the Workers' Party travelled to Jakarta sometime last year to solicit the help of the Vietnamese Embassy to create chaos in Singapore. Fortunately, the mischief makers were arrested before their plans could be carried out. Recently, the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Co Thach, has made veiled threats to destabilise Asean. If Vietnam decides to carry out these threats, political elements who want to topple the government are likely to receive external support for their schemes. It is absolutely essential for those of us who love our country to be more vigilant and united in our efforts to frustrate their evil schemes.

Singaporeans can prosper and live in peace and harmony only if everyone realises the importance of having good, strong, effective political leadership. Our future can only be bright if the people and the government pull together to attain the same goals.
