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SPEECH BY MR. LIM GUAN HOO, POLITICAL SECRETARY TO THE
MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR & DEFENCE AT A DINNER HELD IN
CELEBRATION OF NATIONAL DAY AND THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDING OF SINGAPORE AT THE BUKIT MERAH COMMUNITY
CENTRE ON THURSDAY, 21ST AUGUST, 1969 AT 7.30 P.M.

We in Singapore are celebrating National Day as well as the 150th Anniversary of the Founding of Singapore. The celebrations reflect our firm conviction that we have a future in this part of the world and a just pride in what all of us in Singapore have achieved on all fronts up to this point of our history. As we look back on the last 150 years we should not forget the hard lessons of the difficult and challenging past from which our forefathers have come. We need to analyse intelligently the trends of the present and project a future that we can work at with all our might. This is a time for new thinking and for looking ahead. This evening's gathering is symbolic in the sense that we are gathered together to express our common feelings towards the Nation and in so doing to renew and augment our love and respect for our country. It also shows our continuing commitment to greater future effort. However, there is and can be no looking back for any complacent self-congratulation, though it will be with the springboard of the past that we will make our great leap forward into the future.

This evening we also have with us a number of our youths from the Constituency who have been selected to do full-time service in the armed forces. They will be given a training that will equip them with the necessary military skills and an education that ensures that we will have dedicated, loyal and highly civic-conscious young citizens who are always willing and able to play an effective role in nation-building. Those who have served national service have already been found jobs. And we also can notice great changes in the youths

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that have gone through national service. Shy, quiet youths who have never had the opportunity of staying away from their homes for any length of time have suddenly found confidence in themselves during the period of basic training. They become more mature and better behaved, and parents are often pleasantly surprised. Our youths also develop a greater sense of responsibility. All this goes to show that we have been right in introducing national service. Recent events in South-east Asia also drive home the point that our citizens must be prepared for the worst if we were all to live in security. There is no alternative to the building up of our armed forces. All of us must learn to care for our collective security and well-being, and we must be self-reliant in matters of security. We in Singapore have fully appreciated the urgency of the situation, and we have put in great deal of effort to make Singapore safe. Behind the defence programme is the element of a historical and human perception — of our people understanding the challenges posed to their survival. They have now responded with imagination and dogged determination as a community to plan, mobilise and organise themselves for any short or long term eventuality.

No man or nation emerges from out of nothing. We are all circumscribed by our history, commercial orientation and geographic size. While it is impossible to escape totally from these restricting agents, our impetus for progress and our belief in it give us our strength and hope for the future.

And while mankind may with a great outburst of ingenuity, break the iron pull of gravity and reach for the moon, yet it is not among celestial constellations that the solutions affecting the world can be found. While an eventful and exciting trip could now be made to the moon, still the actual day to day business of harsh human existence have to be lived on earth. And in a period when Science promises to usher in an era of abundance in which everyone will be happy, it is paradoxical indeed that millions today are still in a grip of spreading famine and a feeling of even greater insecurity. So it is today that we are building with great care and cost our own defence. Likewise perhaps, when some of the excitements of the harsh events in South-east Asia has died down, let us hope that we may all be the more sober and astute in our assessment of our general overall security and defence position.

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We are quite clear that our defence build-up and the establishment of our units, schools and bases must be accompanied by an increase in the quality of our tough training and the quality of our organised and collective relationship. That is to say a strong foundation of viable discipline, evidenced in a dynamic thrust of morale, of prompt and ready co-operation must be maintained. The ultimate test of morale as it were, is that when the chips are down, whether our men have the stamina and tenacity to hold on, to struggle on and in the final accounting to give of their lives in the protection of our people.

This strength of character, this unity of purpose can come about only if we are able to make conscious to the understanding of our youth — indeed to our whole nation — the sharp perils, the formidable challenges and opportunities of the times in which we are living.

If we understand all this and if all of us can stand together as a cohesive and well-organised community, we will be able to build a stronger and more prosperous nation.