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Speech of Mr. L.P. Rodrigo, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs, at the Prize-giving and Speech Day of the Serangoon Garden Secondary School, on Saturday 4th September, 1971, at 2.30 p.m.

I am happy to be here this afternoon to address you on the occasion of your Prize-giving Day. This is an important day of your school year and I am sure it has been much anticipated by you and especially those who will be coming forward to receive awards of merit. It is a day for the triers and the non-quitters who have worked hard in studies and in sports.

But there is a greater prize which you collectively must strive for. The prize is a secure, prosperous and happy nation. In striving for this great prize, you should now discipline yourselves to develop in studies and in character.

This afternoon, I wish to dwell on the question of character; not the ethical aspect of character but the civic aspect which must be the common urgency in the character of all our citizens.

As you know, the people of all countries aim to be secure, prosperous and happy. Some countries become secure, prosperous and peaceful easier than others. This may be because these countries are rich in natural resources like oil, gold, tin, copper, iron and other minerals. But there are countries which have few natural resources and there are others which have none at all. Countries which have no natural resources have difficulty in becoming secure, prosperous and peaceful. We are one such country.

But even countries without natural resources and with other shortcomings have managed to succeed and become secure prosperous and peaceful. Such countries have succeeded because of the character of their people.

Let me try and illustrate what I mean with the help of a Dutch legend. You must have heard the story of "Hans, the Hero of Haarlem". But before I tell you the story, let us visualise the country in which the drama happened. The country was Holland as it then was. Now you know that the entire country of Holland is almost a plain and that large parts of it are below the level of the sea. The sea has been kept from overflowing the country by means of dykes. Should these dykes break, the waters of the sea would sweep across and flood the entire country ruining the crops and drowning the people. At the time of the story which was long ago, the dykes were not as strong as they are today. So the people of Holland lived in constant fear of the sea and depended upon the dykes to protect them. This was the shortcoming of their country. But they had to live with this shortcoming because they had no choice.

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Hans was the son of a fisherman in the town of Haarlem. His father lived near the dykes. One day, Hans and his younger brother were playing at the top of a dyke when Hans saw a small hole in the side of the dyke. Water from the sea was flowing into the hole which was as small as his little forefinger. Without a moment's hesitation, Hans jumped down, put his finger into the hole and told his small brother to run home and call for help. As Hans knelt at the bottom of the dyke with his finger in the hole, his arm ached and his body grew cold and he was frightened. But Hans believed that the safety of his country depended on him. After a long wait, he saw his father and his small brother running towards him with some men who were carrying pickaxes. They soon repaired the dyke and Holland was saved. Hans became a hero.

Hans became a hero - the Hero of Haarlem. Hans had great character. The character of Hans was moulded by the hopes and fears of his country. He was only a little boy but he was very aware of the first danger to his country - the sea. He could have taken the chance of leaving the leak as it was while he went for help. But he decided against doing so for if he had failed to get help in time, the sea would have destroyed his country and his people. The threat to his country had gone deep into him and had fashioned his character so that at the first sign of such a threat his action was to stop it and save his country.

Indeed, Hans was a boy with great character. But a number of people could be credited for his character. Hans's parents might have frequently impressed upon him of the importance of the dykes. Hans's teachers in school might have also talked a great deal about how much the country depended upon the dykes for protection from the restless sea. Thus a keen awareness of this weakness of his country made up the character of Hans.

You must develop such a character for our country and its weakness, and you must be very much alive to them so that collectively you all can make up for this weakness and shortcomings and ensure the security, prosperity and happiness of our people.

I now wish to refer to 4 shortcomings or difficulties of our country of which you must be so intensely aware that they become ingrained in you and form your character. These are the smallness of our country, our shortage of water, our economic limitation and our multi-racial society.

We are a small country and a small country may be easily bullied. We hope this will not happen. But if it does, you who are going to be the future citizens of the country should be ever ready to stand firmly against bullies. You should be proud to serve your country in the Army, or in the Sea or Air Command.

Then you also know that most of the water you get from the pipe is precious to us because we depend upon another country for it. This water is bought from a neighbouring country and purified for your use. You can imagine how difficult it would be for all of us if we were to run short of water. There would be great hardship for everyone.

I have told you that our country has no natural resources. This is a severe economic limitation. We have no choice but to set up industries and manufacture goods to sell to the peoples of the world. We also have to sell our services like repairing ships and refining oil. To be successful our people must be able to undertake these jobs efficiently. Everyone of us must be a productive worker. We cannot afford to be idle or useless. It is important to the country that every single citizen does a worthy job if our nation is to be prosperous.

And lastly, we are a multi-racial society made up of Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians belonging to different religions. We must be strongly conscious of the need to respect each other and develop a tolerance for each other's ways of life so that together we can live happily and in peace.

These are the 4 shortcomings or difficulties of our country, of which you must be very conscious all the time. You should be told of them constantly. You should discuss them very frequently and understand their threat until they become a common responsibility in all of you. These shortcomings and difficulties of our country should then sink into your person and become part of your character so that you make it your duty to be ready and willing to defend your country. Treat water with concern, become an economically useful citizen and a tolerant and peaceful member of society.

Just as Hans of Haarlem was so conscious of the threat to his country, so should you be of the difficulties of our country at this stage of its growth.

This is the character which all of you must develop for yourselves if your generation is to win the prize of national security, prosperity and peace which await you in the future.

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4th September, 1971.