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Speech by Mr. Hon Sui Sen, Minister for Finance
at the official opening ceremony of the new building
for Pearl's Hill School and Sepoy Lines Malay School
at 7.30 p.m. on Friday, 2nd June 1972

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Principals, Staff and Pupils,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am indeed happy to have been invited here this evening to officiate on the occasion of the opening of Pearl's Hill School and Sekolah Melayu Sepoy Lines in their magnificent new school building in Chin Swee Road in the Havelock Constituency. As Member of Parliament for the constituency, it enables me at the same time to extend, on behalf of the people of this community, their warmest welcome for the two new centres of learning in their midst.

Pearl's Hill School and Sekolah Melayu Sepoy Lines, though belonging to different language streams, have in common a long and very creditable history of educating children, most of them underprivileged children, in a district sometimes popularly characterised as Chinatown. The old Pearl's Hill School and Sekolah Melayu Sepoy Lines buildings were at Pearl's Hill Road and Park Road respectively, at no great distance from here. When those buildings were affected by Urban Renewal, the Government, in the interest of residents in this district, many of whom are in the lower income group and cannot afford to send their children to schools far away, chose the present site and spent over \$800,000 in the construction of a multi-storeyed building. For what it is worth, this school building can claim the distinction of being the tallest in Singapore. It accommodates over 2,800 pupils in both sessions. In addition to the normal school facilities such as classrooms, special rooms, principals'

offices, staff rooms, a tuckshop and a playing field, it also has a well-equipped dental clinic and two huge lifts.

Education has always had a very respected place in all communities in Singapore. There is no need, as there has been in many other countries, for it to be made compulsory. In practice, every child of school-going age is sent to school by his parents, ever conscious of the importance and value of education. In the past, not so long ago that we cannot remember it, it was not possible to find a place in school for every child of school-going age, although mission schools and community financed schools supplemented the insufficient number of Government Schools. This problem, happily, has been solved. Six years of free primary education are assured every child of Singapore citizens. Last year, it was even possible to introduce two intakes a year of Primary I pupils in a number of schools.

Strangely enough, the reverence for education in the East, reflected also in the West by the high regard for learning the 3Rs - Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic, has only fairly recently met a corresponding response in economists - at least those of the practising variety who lend money for investment such as in the World Bank. It was only within the last few years that instead of being labelled by the derogatory title of consumption expenditure, educational projects became accepted as sound investments suitable for financing because of their favourable effects upon rapid economic growth. Loans for education are now freely given by international lending agencies, hence our recent success in securing^a World Bank loan of US\$9.5 million for the University of Singapore's new development at Kent Ridge, and an Asian Development Bank loan of

US\$3.0 million for financing Ngee Ann College. Even now, however, while tertiary education, education in science and technology or technical and vocational education readily receive both technical assistance and financial aid, primary education, which must form the solid base for the educational pyramid, has yet to be similarly favourably treated.

Fortunately, the Singapore Government itself never had any doubts about supplying adequate or even over-abundant expenditure for primary or secondary education. Much more can, of course, still be done.

First, the convenience of going to a school in the neighbourhood cannot yet always be provided. My own constituents in Havelock sometimes come to me to see whether instead of going to, say, Toh Tuck School in Jurong, they can be transferred to the Outram Secondary School. I make representations on their behalf but very often, there are simply no vacancies. Perhaps with this new and more commodious building, it may be possible to accommodate more easily requests of a similar nature for primary school places.

Secondly, the quality of the teaching can perhaps be improved over the next few years, now that the school-going population has become more stabilised and it is no longer necessary to provide new schools and newly trained, and therefore less experienced, teachers for increasing numbers of students. Certainly, a period of consolidation would be valuable as there is need of better teaching if we are going to get our students trained not only to cope with the information and knowledge explosion of the modern age but also to abstract the good and to reject the false and meretricious in

present day values and attitudes. These represent on the one hand, an idealism, a concern and compassion for our fellowmen, especially those worse off, or a healthy revulsion against gross materialism and, at the other extreme, a degeneration into hippyism and filthy and degrading habits such as drug-taking and ganja smoking. Our schools will therefore have much to do in better education and character building.

In the important tasks of the schools' administrators, teachers and pupils over the next few years, I offer both Pearl's Hill School and Sekolah Melayu Sepoy Lines my very best wishes for their continued success, and I shall have great pleasure in performing the ceremony of unveiling a plaque and declaring this magnificent building officially open.