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SPEECH BY DR. AUGUSTINE H.H. TAN, M.P. FOR
WHAMPOA AND POLITICAL SECRETARY TO THE PRIME
MINISTER, AT THE FOUNDER'S DAY CELEBRATION OF
MONTFORT SCHOOL ON FRIDAY, 25 MAY 1973 AT
8.45 A.M.

YOUTH ACTION BRIGADES

I am pleased and honoured to be invited by my Alma Mater to preside over the celebrations this morning in honour of the founder of Montfort School. The excellent work begun by St. Louis Marie de Montfort in the field of education continues in the hands of the dedicated teachers of the Brothers of St. Gabriel.

Schools are universally acknowledged as the foundation stones for the future of any society. The knowledge gained by students, and, more importantly, the values and attitudes acquired in schools shape a person's subsequent career and life. Government has, therefore, made extensive investments in education because, investment in our youth is insurance for our future.

For us in Singapore, more than for any other nation, the proper development of our youth is critical for our future viability and prosperity - indeed, our very survival as a nation. We are a young nation in many ways. As often noted, in particular, our population is youthful, with more than half under the age of 20. Hence the qualities that our young people possess or do not possess, naturally evoke the close attention of our policy-makers.

Our nation is also a very open economy, dependent on the health of the world economy and, consequently, vulnerable to external disturbances. Lacking a natural resource base, we cannot insulate ourselves from major

external events and self-sufficiency is virtually impossible.

We have either to live or to die in a fiercely competitive world. This, our youth must be taught to understand. It is the skills, the organisational abilities and the sheer ingenuity of people that give us the high standard of living we enjoy today.

The openness of our economy poses threats to the values and attitudes of our young people. For sheer survival and prosperity, we must never be insular but, we must not allow ourselves either to be inundated by cultures inimical to our development as a viable nation. Our youth must, therefore, be highly selective in adopting values and attitudes, rejecting those inappropriate and dangerous to our survival as a nation.

Our youth must also have a proper commitment to the future, by using wisely the educational and training opportunities available.

They should develop a commitment to society, especially to their immediate community. We are caught up in a competitive world where development requires much individual drive and effort. Our youth must learn when to moderate their self-interests in the interests of the community. We certainly need a lot of individual drive and initiative, but, being a small nation, it is imperative that we learn to pull together whenever necessary.

Our youth must also develop compassion for the underprivileged. Talent should never be wasted for want of financial means to pursue studies and training. Unnecessary suffering can be avoided if remedial action can be taken in time. By involving themselves in community activities, our youth can contribute to the continuity of honest and effective leadership, so critical for our survival. It is always easier to fritter away ~~our~~ legacies than to enhance them. Good leadership, to ensure enhancement of our future, must be cultivated in our young people.

Much can be contributed by our young people at various levels of society. I believe a lot can be achieved at the Constituency level. I propose to set up a Youth Action Brigade for Whampoa Constituency. This is to foster a commitment to society by the young. The members of the Brigade will engage in identifying community problems and contribute towards their solution. They will help young delinquents, and provide tuition for those who need it but cannot afford it. They will promote healthy recreational activities in the Constituency. They will help to combat drug addiction among the misguided young people. They will help to stamp out gangsterism by alerting the authorities concerned of clandestine or illicit gatherings.

I am fully confident that the young people of Whampoa will respond enthusiastically for the betterment of society. I hope, in time to come, similar brigades will be set up in other constituencies.

Our forefathers, by their sweat and sacrifices, gave us the Singapore of today. The next generation of leaders must improve upon our legacy.

May I now offer my good wishes for the continued progress of Montfort School? Thank you.