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SPEECH BY MR CH'NG JIT KOON, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
TO THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE NATIONAL JUNIOR COLLEGE'S
14TH COLLEGE DAY ON SUNDAY, 15 MAY '83 AT 5.00 PM.

Today is the 14th birthday of your College and I am very pleased to be able to join you in your celebration.

There are at present nine junior colleges and Pre-U centres in 20 secondary schools to provide post-secondary education for the top 20 per cent of our student population. The junior colleges are given some of our best teachers, good learning facilities and equipment and a challenging environment, all of which are aimed at developing the students to their fullest potential.

Being intellectually well-endowed, junior college students are more likely to do well in examinations. However, is good academic results the only objective in a college education? The answer is 'No'. Besides preparing students for admission into institutions for tertiary education, how successful are we in inculcating in our ablest young a sense of commitment and in providing them with the necessary skills to assume leadership roles later on in life, both in the community and in their respective professions?

At this juncture, it may be worth our while to reflect on the words of our Prime Minister when he projected his vision of what a junior college should be at this very College on May 14, 1970: "Bright students tutored by experienced and dedicated teachers in

junior colleges should achieve a rounded development. A robust constitution and a keen intellect are two qualities for a productive and worthwhile career. Given that extra strength of character which makes for leadership, the verve and dynamism of our society will surge upwards to new heights of achievements".

Good leaders, as envisioned by our Prime Minister, should not only be intellectually bright, physically fit and morally principled but should also be socially skilled and emotionally strong.

In Singapore, the education system takes the form of a pyramid structure in that the higher one goes, the fewer places there are available and the pressure to succeed is therefore even greater. At the same time, our meritocracy system tends to reinforce the Asian view of scholarship as the key to economic security and social status. For this reason, it is natural that able people should aim for higher rewards. It is also inevitable that society tends to become elitist. This has its dangers.

The young may grow up to be selfish and with a myopic outlook. They are concerned with themselves and do not feel that they have a responsibility to others. Faced with mounting pressure to succeed and excel in examinations, students may refrain from participating actively at tutorials and discussion groups for fear of giving away too many of their ideas and some may even go to the extent of tearing out pages from reference books so as to stay one up above their classmates. These acts of selfishness and undesirable forms of individualism run counter to the spirit and ideals of our schools, junior colleges and tertiary institutions. Indeed, there is nothing wrong with wanting to excel but students should not resort to unethical means.

Students must not have a short-sighted view of success. Their personal interests are inextricably tied up with the interests of the society. We must remember that economic advancement and affluence alone cannot hold a nation for long. It is the culture, moral virtues and good traditional values that give us the social order, the identity, the conviction and the strength to build a robust Singapore. Like the tree with shallow roots, which is easily toppled by the wind, a rootless people without values will not be able to withstand the social and economic pressures. Hence the emphasis on the study of second language and moral education in our schools.

In conclusion, I would like to urge you to keep up the good track record of your College and at the same time to develop a strong social concern. Help your fellow students and neighbours as much as you can. An atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence can give added meaning and purpose to college life. Learn to be 'givers' and not merely 'takers'. By so doing, you will make your endeavours truly satisfying and meaningful experiences.

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