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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. LEE KUAN YEW, ON THE OCCASION OF
TEACHERS' DAY HELD AT THE HAPPY WORLD
STADIUM ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 5, 1961.

It is nearly two years since I last spoke to you in a gathering such as this during National Loyalty Week of December 1959. You will remember that I then discussed the problems of national loyalty, and national unity in our multi-racial, multi-lingual society. It was fortunate that we had posed these problems early. It made everyone conscious of the dangers of language and education issues becoming burning political issues which will then divide the country not on class, but on communal lines.

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By and large we have been fortunate in keeping the interest of all sections of the community reasonably balanced. Equal treatment of teachers and students in all language streams of education, while fostering the growth of Malay as the common and national language is a slow and delicate task. But because this delicate task has been tackled with a sensitive and patient policy, language and

education have not become the burning political issues. And we shall have to continue to meet the fair interests of all groups whilst maintaining overall balance.

It is most important that the problems of language and education be resolved by the free will of the parents, not by the orders of a government. It is our duty to point out the road to national unity by equal opportunities of learning all mother tongues while encouraging the learning and use of the national language. Then it is up to the fathers and mothers of our community to decide how their children should be taught and trained.

It is clear that many parents consider that their children are best equipped to meet the future if they are tri-lingual. They want their children to learn first their mother tongue, second the national language, and last English, the language of commerce and the key to lucrative employment for the foreseeable future.

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This desire to learn two or three languages brings about curious results. One of them is that more and more people are reading two or three different language newspapers daily. The student who passes out from the Chinese stream is also reading the English and Malay papers. The student from the English stream is also reading the Chinese and Malay papers. We should allow this

natural development. This is one way of breaking down the communal divisions between our people.

All this requires more teachers to teach the additional language subjects in all schools who want them. It will take some time to train them and make all schools of all streams equally competent to teach the Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English languages. I am aware that many schools are complaining of the lack of teachers. We will do our best as quickly as possible to increase the flow of teachers from the teacher training schools.

Now, let me touch on a matter which affects the future of us all.

In the last two months, our constitutional future has loomed large into the foreground. No one disputes that Singapore and the Federation are one. No one disputes that it was the British Colonial Government that divided these two territories for their own political convenience. We are one country and one people. We must re-unite. The only question is when and how.

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It is for the government to settle the terms and conditions which will be fair and just, and protect the legitimate interests of all parties. Then it is for the people to endorse it.

One of the legitimate interests that we will protect is education. The Government has said that there should be local autonomy on labour and education policies for Singapore. The ideal would be for complete and absolute merger with the Federation. But the divisions of the past 16 years since 1945 have created new problems that are best resolved slowly and carefully.

There are other matters where special considerations require different treatment, such as our free port economy, the preservation of free competitive selection and entry into the Government Service and all other public institutions, and so on.

We have done our best to create stable and relatively fairer conditions for all in Singapore in the past two years. It is our duty to continue to do so whatever the difficulties. At the same time we will prepare the way for the next step forward, a re-united, free and independent Malaya.

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As teachers you have a special task in the community. You can help to bring up the next generation, more united, more at one in outlook and sentiment. The past generations were divided according to the countries from which they emigrated to Malaya. The present generation are sometimes finding it not very

easy to come together because of the different languages they learnt in different schools none of which taught them a common language. Let us bring up our children the future generation to be proud of their cultural traditions and heritage, but prouder still of the new nation that we are now forging out of the different races who have come to settle and build up the Malaya that we know today. Differences and disagreements amongst the people in a nation there always will be. But we in our schools can ensure for the future that disagreements do not divide the nation on race or communal lines. We must succeed. Failure in achieving national unity present so ghastly and bleak a prospect that we must press forward, however difficult, however slow, however heart-breaking the road to national loyalty and unity. This is the task that all of us must accomplish.

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