PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE OPENING OF THE SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PLANNED PARENTHOOD ON SUNDAY, 10TH FEBRUARY, 1963, AT THE VICTORIA THEATRE.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, may I welcome you to Singapore. We are happy that you have chosen our city as the venue for the Seventh International Conference sponsored by the International Planned Parenthood Federation. Here in a relatively modern city, in an Asian context, you will find a microcosm of the problems of population control. Modern science has checked the ravages of disease and pestilence. Floods, drought and famine no longer occur. But old habits and ancient traditions built out of centuries of experience of natural disasters and uncontrollable plagues, still prevail. Old cultural patterns and family values, designed to meet conditions which prevailed hundreds and

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thousands of years ago still persist, with grave consequences to the problems of economic and industrial growth.

Quite apart from religious principles, by and large, Chinese and Indian families believe that the more children a man has, the greater is his good fortune. In the old days the more wives a man had, the higher his status. Just like motor-cars, wives and children were a status symbol. All this proliferating made sense in an age when periodic plagues, drought, floods and famine regularly decimated the population. But the same habits in a relatively affluent society, whose public health standards are high, lead to a phenomenal increase in population growth that cannot but dampen the spirits of those who are entrusted with our problems of economic growth, industrial expansion and the maintenance of standards of living.

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For instance projections based on our 1957 census indicate that the number of families in the reproductive age group of 15 to 44 years will in 20 years' time be four times what is now. Our rate of growth has been nearly 4% per annum. The indications are that with intensive propagation of birth control methods we may be able to check it to 3% but this gives us very little joy, when we compare it to the rate of 1 to 1.5% which other countries with higher standards of living than ours have. Any Minister for Finance charged with

finding revenue for universal education and public housing and health services will wilt at the prospect in 20 years of a population of 3.2 million, nearly double our present figure.

One of the curious things about social values is the time lag between changed social conditions and established values and attitudes. I have mentioned how the larger a man's family the higher his status. But it is not only the people who are slow in adjusting themselves to new circumstances.

Even we, as a Government, find ourselves pursuing contradictory policies. On the one hand, we want to discourage large families and spend considerable time and effort and money to achieve this. On the other hand, we have inherited and are still practising a system of values which gives the advantage to the man with a larger family. For instance, in public housing the number of points a man scores for priority in getting accommodation increases with the number of children he has got. So too with social welfare benefits, the bigger the family the bigger the relief and the same with income tax reliefs. We are aware that this is a contradiction. But humanitarian values and sentiments stalls us from any change.

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I will be grateful if in the midst of the deliberations of this gathering of distinguished scientists and scholars some time could be found from your more important deliberations to give a lead to some of our sociological problems connected with population control.

Of course I have assumed that Asian governments want to increase industrial growth by population control. But perhaps this is an assumption which is dangerous to make. For us, a small people, the decision is obvious. There is no hope of fulfilling any expansionist ambitions. It is disturbing, however, to think that there are some bigger nations whose population expansion can become phenomenal if health, nutritional and sociological conditions which modern science has brought to Singapore were also to prevail over some large countries in Asia. What happens if one nation controls its population growth and others do not? What happens in the long run if one country becomes overwhelmingly more numerous and more powerful than the other? The problem of the balance between nations is a delicate and sensitive issue. Sometimes even the balance of population within a nation can also become a sensitive issue. I have read that in a particularly advanced country one religious group which does not permit birth-control has expressed its confidence of gaining political dominance because numerically it is growing in proportion to the rest of the population. Is the world

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then to be finally inherited by those nations or religious which do not practise birth-control?

These are the wider imponderables with which, fortunately, we in Singapore need not concern ourselves. We have decided that it is in our interest to check our population growth. Our only problem is how to disseminate knowledge of simple birth control methods as quickly as possible, and how to educate our people to new social values to meet our new social and economic conditions. If we do not, then we shall face grave problems on standards of life.

In the midst of an august body of so many distinguished specialists and scholars, it would appear impertinent of me to make these remarks at the opening of your conference. May I say in mitigation that I have drawn these special features in Singapore to your attention in order that in between your labours, if you were to wander through the city you would appreciate the social phenomena more easily. And when you see so many little children and young people, you can recall that 60% of our population are below 18 and are being fed and housed and schooled by the efforts of some 25% of the total population.

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Finally, may I wish you all a pleasant stay in Singapore. I hope that you will find our reception hospitable, the city friendly, our people courteous and

that you will take back with you happy memories of the few days you will spend here.

10th February, 1963.

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