SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT MC.MA.37/64(PM)

TEXT OF THE SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. LEE KUAN YEW'S SPEECH AT OPENING OF CONFERENCE OF NATIONAL UNION OF FEDERATION STUDENTS AT THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, KUALA LUMPUR, ON 20TH MARCH, 1964, AT 9.30 A.M.

Mr. President, honourable delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

For more than a decade we have been accustomed to seeing the student movement in Malaya being exploited by activists on behalf of the Communist cause. So it comes as a welcome surprise to find this conference, which includes some student organisations of the tougher breed, led by men who have the courage to speak their minds.

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When I first received your telegram inviting me to open this conference of eight student organisations you listed as being present, I confessed I had some reservations as to the ideological loyalties of those who were in charge of the conference. My acceptance in principle thus consequently guarded. But I am happy to say I was agreeably surprised to read the report of your 5th Conference

and some of the conference papers that you kindly sent me. I wish to congratulate the organisers for having brought about this conference and hope that you will again speak your mind freely.

Importance of independent non-Communist leadership

I was encouraged to read that last year you took a stand in support of Malaysia, based on principles that it was the free expression of the will of the people that it sought to unite. At the same time you regretted the strained relations between Malaya and her two close neighbours. You urged an amicable settlement. But you went on to state quite clearly that you would not tolerate any infringement of the sovereignty of our country. At the same time you went on to discuss the problems that the student movement is confronted with the restrictions that the Government has had to impose on the freedom to travel and to organise Pan-National organisations. You deplored these prohibitions which you feel have fettered the free activity and expression of views of your movement.

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If you can keep up a firm and independent line resisting manipulation by groups that would have you more subservient to the Communist line or to the Government line, then the future of the students movement augurs well. A

student movement well organised in non-Communist hands will be an asset to the country and the propagation of your views on the student population in general and its influence on the active sector of students in particular, will help to form the attitudes of the next generation of political and civic leaders, leaders of opinion who will help shape thinking in the country.

Student movements in emerging countries part of national movement for freedom

Student movements in the young countries of Afro-Asia have an intensity and importance which is so absent in the established societies of Europe. There the student movement is really concerned about themselves as students, and not themselves as leaders of their nation. But in countries where the older generation have for too long been subservient to the political order which the young generation considers intolerable a situation develops in which the role of the student assumes all the characteristics of a nationalistic movement, a full-fledged political movement voicing the aspirations for a new and better order of society. It is inevitable that when the older generation abdicates from its responsibilities of political leadership that these responsibilities are thrust into young hands. So it was in the India in the days of the Viceroy and in the Egypt of King Farouk and his Pashas, student demonstrations and collisions with authority as an inevitable

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and a regular phenomena. It was only when the new political leadership of Nehru took over in India, and Nasser in Egypt, that the student movement withdrew from active agitation against the established authority. But even then it still continues to assume a much more important role than that of student movements in established societies. This is inevitable when there are enormous responsibilities to be fulfilled in the leadership of the nation which the roles of student leadership is training them for. There is a vacuum to be filled in the newer societies which does not exist in the established ones. No European or North American leader can aspire to national leadership within 10 or within 20 years after ceasing to be a student. But in so many of the African and Asian countries the nationalist leaders of today were the student leaders of yesterday.

Task to imbue youth with patriotism and zeal to build new society

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We in Malaysia have just emerged from the old political order. There are many important positions of leadership in our society that have to be filled by younger men who more sensitive reflect the mood and spirit of the new generation that is growing up longer in colonial servitude and so upon your shoulders fall greater responsibility.

You will have to inspire and mobilise the youth of our nation with a spirit of nationhood, imbue them with patriotism and zeal to help build a better and a more just society. So many of those brought up in the older order of society have grown up socially negative and sterile. They have been unable to escape the values of the old order when personal wealth and gain and stature is an escape to comfortable positions in the old society. Not many have been unable to adjust themselves to find fulfillment a society where a man's worth in society is not measured by the size of his car or the number of his matrimonial establishments. Yours is the exciting task of forming the values of the new generation that will find fulfillment and satisfaction in achieving different goals so that we can get their best contribution to a better society for all.

Idealism of youth

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The idealism is a natural and desirable quality in the young. If you have no idealism when you are young then you must become an intolerable cynic long before you get old. If, when the whole world is before you, you are unable to think in terms of absolute perfection and strive to achieve these ideals, then you cannot make much contribution to the leavening-up of our society.

Dash of realism vital

You have listed three issues for this conference. First Indonesian confrontation and the role of students. Second, the formation of a Pan-Malaysian student organisation, and third, the Post-Secondary-School Ordinance.

I do not wish to go into the details of the last two items on your agenda. Suffice it to say that I believe you can get the support of the Government to allow the growth of a strong Pan-Malaysian student organisation, provided you can demonstrate that your idealism is tempered by a touch of realism. You must show that you are prepared to find safeguards to prevent such a Pan-Malaysian organisation from doing incalculable damage to the community if it should fall into the hands of Communist activists and be exploited for their subversive purposes. If, however, you naively deny that there is any danger of such an exploitation by more cynical members who must be amongst your midst, then you may find the Government unable to entrust you with the responsibility of having to fight your own battles. For it is the Government's duty to ensure that the will of the majority of these students can express itself freely and fearlessly without being manipulated and distorted by Communist activists. And such elements are bound to be found even in the best of student organisations.

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As for these restrictions on travel which have been imposed upon post secondary societies, here also I feel that you are likely to get the Government to adopt a more liberal solution to the problem of excluding Communist activists from exploiting these freedoms if you are prepared to help devise ways and means to ensure that unfettered right of association to travel, to organise and to express yourselves will not be similarly perverted by those who seek to destroy the democratic state. All students the world over assert the principle of unfettered rights and privileges against authority which seeks to inhibit the misuse of these rights and privileges by elements inimical to the nation.

In all the newly independent countries the student movements have been strenuously engaged to established their right to educate and agitate against the existing unjust society by invoking these freedoms. It is only in highly controlled society, as in Russia, that students never demonstrate or riot. But even there recently a few thousand African students not subjected to the same rigid discipline were prepared to face expulsion in order to express their disenchantment with the existing conditions.

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Protest must be constructive

So I consider your attitude to existing legislation which conscribes your activity as basically a healthy one. But I urge you to take a realistic approach when you struggle for wider freedoms. Make it easier for the Government to have more confidence in the maturity of your leadership. That whilst you seek all these freedoms for good and healthy causes you are at the same time prepared to fulfill your obligations to the nation by ensuring that these freedoms will not be perverted to wrong ends.

I am convinced that there must be intelligent men in the Ministry of Defence and Internal Security who can see the difference between protest and agitation for the sake of denigrating a government in toto and protest and agitation to bring about an improvement on the present situation moving it towards a more tolerant and liberal society. When Communists lead agitation they deny that any Communist exists or that there can be perversion to absolute rights and privileges by anybody let alone Communists. This kind of agitation is sterile and futile except for Communist purposes which is to break the whole democratic state. When sincere liberals lead protest and agitation they seek to rectify unnecessarily harsh and stringent measures while ensure safeguards to meet dangers that undoubtedly exist, I am confident that if you pursue your cause, to liberalise rules and regulations without opening the gates to Communist penetration and subversion, you will meet the sympathetic response.

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Student role in meeting "confrontation"

The first subject "The students role when we are facing Indonesian confrontation" is a fruitful subject for discussion. Here in a positive way, you can contribute towards the strength and unity of the nation. You can demonstrate how in response to threats to our survival, we can rise above simple jingoism to a mature patriotism.

So many of the older generation of our parents did not go to school and are not literate. It is left to our generation to be educated, to be literate and to have the desire and will to be a nation. We must inform and mobilise the people behind policies which can unite and defend the integrity of Malaysia.

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So many of the parents of our student population are immigrants and in the nature of things they cannot feel and think in Malaysian terms as strongly as you who are born and bred here can. But through you, we can inform and mobilise the parents in this crusade to build a better society for all in Malaysia.

The alternative to our success is the destruction of everything that we have -- a relatively comfortable and happy life in a liberal and tolerant society. All this

will vanish if we were to absorbed by our neighbour. You have another important contribution to make. Through all the asperity of confrontation by Indonesia, you could do well from time to time to show that the student movement in Malaysia has nothing but goodwill and friendship for the people of Indonesia, and in particular the student movement of Indonesia. For however much they may be influenced and influenced in guided democracy, they are also young and like you must share the idealism of youth of a free and equal world in which people live in amicable brotherhood. You can make an appeal to them in their idealism, to uphold the principles of Bandung, mutual respect between countries, big or small, non-interference in the internal affairs of each other. You can remind them that the solidarity of Afro-Asia does not consist of the solidarity of a few temperamentally incompatible Afro-Asian leaders but of the Afro-Asian peoples.

If you could do this well, you would have demonstrated to the whole world the difference between state sponsored student movement and an independent one in a democratic and tolerant society, allowed to take a stand, distinct from that of a government, yet still able to protect and defend the legitimate interests of a nation.

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In quite a number of countries in the world and not just in South-East Asia, the student movement has been organised to become just an adjunct of the state

apparatus, to echo its slogans and to chant jingoism. We are not such a society in Malaysia. An intelligent, radical and yet mature attitude on your part can help create the student movement which can give an enormous fillip to Malaysia's battle for Afro-Asian sympathy and support. For we need this in our battle for survival against confrontation by our neighbour ten times our size and with 40 times our military might.

Finally, let me wish you, Mr. President and your Committee, all success in your work for the coming year. This is probably the most momentous year in the history of Malaysia. Statistics show that the infant mortality rate is at the highest in the first few months of birth. So it is with a nation. If we can emerge in the end of our first year of birth and confrontation more united, more cohesive and more determined, with our people more aware of the issues at stake than we on 16th September last year, then we would have eliminated the possibilities of a premature collapse.

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Despite all the many hasty and unwise things that will be said and done on all sides, if at the end of this general election the nation emerges more alive to the problems that confront us, and a Government emerges which can unite the nation behind a forward-looking and dynamic policy to accelerate the growth of national unity and speed up the social revolution, then all should be well. We would be

that much strengthened in building an enduring base for a tolerant, harmonious society embracing so many communities with so many different racial cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

20th March, 1964.

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