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TEXT OF PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH TO NANYANG UNIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP UNION AT NANYANG UNIVERSITY ON 9TH NOVEMBER, 1964.

Some old problems in new perspective

More than five years ago when I first talked about the future of Nanyang University at a meeting of its students I touched upon the problem of language and culture in a multi-racial society, such as Malaya. I was struck, in re-reading the text of my script, by the thought that after all these years nothing has changed to make our problems any easier to solve. So long as language and culture do not become immediate political issues, so long will we be buying time in which we can try to resolve some of the problems of building a nation out of the many diverse linguistic and cultural communities now in Malaysia.

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In a few instances we have made some progress. The national language is accepted by the people generally, provided, they are allowed to continue the use and study of their mother tongues. There is a greater realisation that tolerance

and patience help to blunt some of the sharpness of conflicting views on the way we should shape our future. Indeed, without these two qualities Malaysia could never have even been formed. Now more than a year after its formation, the turn in the political kaleidoscope in South East Asia following upon the Indonesians showing their abiding intentions to their smaller neighbours in the region has brought about an acute situation in the country.

Malaysia has presented its component parts with the need for some fundamental re-thinking on old problems. Solutions which may have been open to individual states are now no longer practicable or feasible in the wider context of Malaysia. The need for adjustment must be recognised. It is with these preliminary remarks that I come back to discuss some old problems about the future of Nanyang university in the context of Malaysia.

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Now for the first time since the University was founded, it is possible to consider the problems of the content of education in Nanyang University, the raising of the status of the university and improving the standards of instruction without it becoming an acute political issue to be exploited by pro-Communist groups. This is an advance and we can now resolve the problem of getting this university to play its role in training our youth for their task of developing the economy of Malaysia.

There is a place in Singapore for more than two universities, and in Malaysia there is need for at least one university which can provide higher education for those who have been trained in Chinese as the main medium of communication. But the graduates who come out from any institution of higher learning must consider their suitability for employment. The first reality that must be faced in that he who is literate in only one language is at a disadvantage in getting himself gainfully employed in Malaysia. More and more people now recognise the fact that even in Singapore, and more so in the rest of Malaysia in the years to come, no young man or woman can hope to be considered equipped and qualified if he does not know the national language. And the person who has also a working knowledge of English will always have an advantage. In the schools in Singapore, more and more of our children are being brought up bilingual and trilingual and more and more universities and other institutions of higher learning will find their students also able to take instruction in two or three languages.

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Life is a continuous process of adaptation to changing environment, and so Nanyang University, together with the Chinese medium schools in the country, must be vigorous and resilient enough to adjust to our changing conditions. It is not possible for anyone to predict what conditions will be like twenty years ahead. Suffice it for us to plan for next five to ten years. And the immediate

Nanyang University are how to improve the academic standards in order that its graduates will be better equipped to discharge their jobs either as administrators, teachers or commercial and industrial executives.

As part of the educated elite in Malaysia, it is the duty of all university graduates to give leadership in the formulation of public opinion and attitudes. The first task we face in how to mobilise and galvanise thinking and feeling in the country for the defence of Malaysia. Nanyang University has a future in so far as there is a Singapore, and there is a viable Singapore only if there is a Malaysia that can withstand absorption or conquest by her neighbour. This is the first message we must bring home to the people.

If we survive the next ten years, than the long term future is reasonably optimistic, for by then the various communities in Malaysia would have learned how to accommodate each other's susceptibilities and idiosyncrasies. We need not worry too much over the extinction of Chinese language or culture.

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All ancient cultures have a remarkable capacity for adapting and enduring. We should not be too timorous in adapting and adjusting ourselves to the new mood and temper in Malaysia. Let us get closer to the feeling of being one people in Malaysia. We have shown that by accepting Malay as the National

Language it has not meant the weakening of the mother tongues of the other communities. So, similarly our learning to live together in a more closely integrated society as Malaysians will not mean that we will suddenly lose all that was good and valuable in our past traditions and values. No people, no community, ever progressed without the stimulus and challenge of change under the impact of new forces and new surroundings.

When we first said in 1959 that Nanyang University graduates should be taken into the service of the Government of Singapore, many thought it was a dangerous decision based on political considerations which may seriously undermine the security and integrity of the Civil Service. Now, after nearly six years, these graduates, selected by the P.S.C. on the basis of merit, integrity and loyalty to the State, have adjusted themselves remarkably well and become a valuable addition to the Civil Service in meeting the problems of representative government in a community where the people speak a number of different languages.

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The future of Nanyang depends on the future of Singapore. The future of Singapore depends on the future of Malaysia. The future of Malaysia is fortunately still determinable by what we and our fellow Malaysians in all the other territories of Malaysia choose to make of it. If we work together in

tolerance and harmony, we can set up standards of life and development unparalleled by any other country in this region. But at the same time, we must remember that if we get at odds with one another then the misery and degradation to which we can reduce our country will be equally unparalleled. For the various peoples in Malaysia need each other's co-operation to maintain out country's success and economic progress.

When Nanyang University was founded, there were some who wanted it to be a Chinese university for Chinese in South East Asia. That was in the days of colonial rule when most of the Chinese and no political stake in this country. But today, within Malaysia, the role that Nanyang must play is that of a Malaysian university, turning out loyal Malaysians, proficient in the Chinese language, but competent and disciplined to discharge their duties to all fellow Malaysian and to further the interests of their fellow Malaysians whatever their language, race or religion may be.

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Success in this will have arrived the day Nantah can boast of both teaching and undergraduate staff, with representatives from all various communities in Malaysia. And when that day arrives, then Malaysia would have become something more than just a formal constitutional arrangement to keep

economically afloat some 11 million people who were brought together in about a century of British colonial rule.

9th November, 1964.

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