SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE RAMAKRISHNAN MISSION ON 18TH ARPIL, 1965

I felt that I profited today when I read the pamphlets which Swami Siddatmananda so kindly sent me. This morning after going through the voluminous newspapers in three languages and finding nothing of any value in it except more trials and tribulations, I turned to my evening's programme which included circumcision feast in my constituency which delayed my arrival here to this evening's celebrations of the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and after this, the Speaker's reception for certain members of Parliament from New Zealand.

I didn't have to do much about the other two. But I thought since I have already been here once, and remember having seen dormitories where orphan boys were looked after by religious monks, I wondered how the institutions kept going.

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And since they have kindly sent me these pamphlets, I turned over the pages. I was struck by this thought that over the last 200 years, really over the last 300 years, and discovered easy means of communications and mobility, and so I found you have got branches in the United States of America, in Argentina, in France, in England -- where I hear you have just got a gift of £100,000 from a much impressed

Englishman, impressed by your activities -- the Mauritius and Fiji Islands, and Ceylon.

And I saw this evening's entertainment, Indian musical instruments, a bit of music, culture and language which you are teaching to the orphans, and my mind went back to what I have just seen in New Zealand, where two-million Europeans who were not there had settled, and some 170,000 Maoris now have, as a result of this enormous migration of man, to adjust themselves to new circumstances. And in Wellington, which I was fortunate to visit, I was entertained to an evening not dissimilar to this, by a population of about four, five hundred Maoris who lived there. And the thing which struck me most was the tenacity with which man held on to his cultural heritage. I was told the instrument, I can't quite remember what it was, but I quite remember they had two vessels on both ends, and somebody was explaining to me that I required a deep and abiding silence to appreciate the tonal qualities. Two thousand years! And I have not the slightest doubt that it would be performed in Singapore, in Malaysia, if man survives, then I would be performed here 2,000 years from now. At least that is my hope, and I am quite sure that is your intention. I went to New Zealand, and saw these Maoris, they were there about 700 years before the White man arrived. And they were somewhat reduced in numbers as a result of wars and tribulations, and they were somewhat also intermarried with the Europeans. But it was the tenacity with which they hung on to these songs and dances, which

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depicted their heritage, of how seven canoes sailed the South Pacific and landed. I was struck by the nexus man felt to his past. And in the same way, the Indians have settled in Mauritius, Fiji Islands, and Singapore. I am quite sure that in the course of time, the vigour and vitality of the Indian community in Malaysia, of the Malaysian Indian community will see that all these things are kept alive.

And this creates a new problem for all of us, in that we got to learn to appreciate, not just to tolerate --- I mean toleration is one thing, you just hear your neighbour's radio, and you say "What an awful din", and you hope he would shut it down, and if he didn't shut it down, you close your window and turn on the air conditioner and you try to shut it out.

But you know, I went through myself the process of this in the last six years, and from toleration I am exposed to this constantly all the time to the Malay Gendang, Indian music and the strident martial qualities of Chinese opera. And from toleration, one begins through sheer exposure to reach a kind of harmony with these sounds, and ultimately I hope understanding and appreciation what these things, these sounds, these other cultural patterns are supposed to convey.

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I am quite sure that whatever we do, the one thing we should not do is to try and stifle the other man's culture, his language, his religion, because that is the surest

way to bring forth all the acute conflicts in which he is quite prepared to abandon reason and rationality and stand by his heritage. If nothing else, this is what the last ten years od active life, active public life in Singapore and the rest of Malaysia has convinced me of. And I am hoping that in the next ten years, that others who I am sure are less exposed to these influences will have the opportunity first to tolerate, then to appreciate that the other man has got something, may be better than what he has got. And in this way, we hope, instead of hearing people in strident notes, shout about one race, one language, one culture, one religion, which is the surest way to the destruction of this fragile society which we all nurture and which nurture us, in the process of this exposure, which I am quite sure you could help in bringing about, they will slowly begin to appreciate, that just as the Indonesians treasure the sound of their bamboo music, the dances, of the what they called the quintessence of their culture, so other people have the right to keep what they consider good.

Now what is to be the end result I do not know. But one thing I am quite that if we continue to be tolerant of each other, ultimatley a multi-racial society with a great deal of common values will emerge, the ultimately some common culture. There is no other way, and I would like to congratulate the Indian community for having kept this Ramakrishnan Mission going for so long, and purely from private contribution to establish this foundation and to be able to get so many cultural and

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other social welface activities going for the benefit of the less fortunate in our community.

This is something I do not understand, I'll be quite frank with you. But it doesn't mean that I do not appreciate that perhaps it is quite a driving force. Indian mysticism, the self-negation, is something quite different from the heroism of Western politicians or generals, writers or poets -- the self negation of the man who is prepared to give up his wordly possessions, all out to do good. Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, well you know, they are not to be found in other places in the world. If you tell a European, or if you tell a Malaysian other than an Indian, a Malaysian other than of Indian descent, that he ought to give up his wordly possessions and go out with the purely essentials of human decency, the stripped-off cloth, a bowl for his food, and to preach goodness, he must think you must be cut of your mind to suggest that. Having acquired all this wealth, to give it away is all nonsense. He wants to will it to his children, and what is more, he often goes to see his lawyer and does not trust his son and says "I want to make sure that my son could not do too much with this, and it is going to go to my grandchildren", and it is possible that if the grandson is born, the lawyer will tell him, "You could give it to the grandchildren, because you could control it to the life in being and 21 years thereafter."

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Well, if you ask me to do that I have often wondered whether it is possible. Because it is an enormous sacrifice. And I doubt whether the average man, even the average Indian could face up to this challenge. But what it is that make a whole series of illustrious Indians to this. The Englishman does not understand this. He calls them "naked fakirs". Well, how did they acquire this mystic quality that ultimately gave them a saintliness on earth, a gift with tremendous power to mould man's minds and attitudes over millions of their fellow countrymen. Well, this is something I do not understand, but I try to appreciate. But one thing I do understand, that we live and let live.

Some Indians want to do this. It could only be to the good of the community, and if we can find a Malaysian Vinoba Bhave, well I say, well, to the good of Malaysian, and perhaps we have less chaps running around the world on free jaunts taking the football teams all round the place. Maybe something gets done about the poverty of Malaysia. You see, we are not asking them to give up all their wordly pleasure. We are much more tolerant, much more understanding of their future comforts. But if they can be fired by some of these other qualities, perhaps something will get done about the poverty of rural area.

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I was fortunate in getting a certain amount of publicity in the course of what I said in Australia. And I have to clarify what I meant. When I said, "Well, very

strange, Australian farmers, New Zealand farmers all wealthy men. But Malaysian farmers, all poor men." So it doesn't mean that farmers are poor. So I thought to myself that perhaps if Government spend some time, seed selection, fertiliser, improving the kind of crops that could be grown on the cash market, the marketing boards, perhaps standard of living, the earning capacity would go up. And I had a long tirade. You see, they were not moved by the spirit of Vivekananda and Ramakrishna, instead of feeling sorry for these chaps, they denounce me heartily for pointing out that they were poor, and they say, "No, that is quite wrong, they are rich now, that is completely untrue, they spend so many millions on this, and one point so many millions on that, few hundred thousand on that." And you know what it amounted to? Something I dared not say in the course of the last Budget debate -- $18 million out of a budget of $1,400 million was allocated for agriculture, where 40 per cent of our population finds its living. $18 million out of $1,400 million! Of that $18 million, half goes to paying the Minister, his Permanent Secretary, his clerks, and the stationery. So you were left with another $9 million or thereabout for research into seeds -- $9 million out of $1,400 million for 40 per cent of our population, their future.

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So you see, I felt a bit sad, because I thought perhaps if the people who are inspired with love of their fellow-men, like Swami Siddhatmananda, if he went into politics, don't join the MIC, (laughter) form another party, something may get done

about all these things. But, you see, this is sometimes the tragedy of human life. The people of the material capacity, to help fellow human beings, the mechanics of the modern state, revenue collection, expenditure, development, they have never heard of Vivekananda nor Ramakrishna. But if you tell them that there's a good show in town, the latest French musical team, has arrived with all the paraphernalia, you can be quite sure that they will be there, at the dinner party.

So you see, I am torn between the purely spiritual values, which I greatly admire, and the hard material facts. So that if you ask me to give up my wordly belongings, and go to a monastery and do good, I'll ask myself, well first of all, is this wise? What happens? I'll do a little bit of good, may be feel tremendously uplifted, but what will happen to my family. I don't know. Well, what would happen to the country? Will it take all that much of difference? Perhaps it will. And I am looking for more people who will run homes like this. Because you know, the Social Welfare Department have got institutions like this. With honest men, dedicated to the welfare of their fellow-men, then every dollar's worth will be obtained. The tragedy is sometimes we have got to set up these institutions, hire them, selection board, advertisement, supervisor of so and so home, salary scale, university graduate, starting off $450 x 25 -$650. So the man arrived. But he is not really interested. So he has got a deputy supervisor, who is only a Higher School Certificate graduate -- so it ends up with the food sometimes not of the quality which

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was arranged with the contractor. So you have to hire an inspector to make sure that the food is of the quality, in order to make sure that with the public's one dollar you get 80 cents out of it, and the 20 cents you defray for the supervision to buy all these things to run the services.

If I have the men to run these homes, and they'll do it for nothing, apart from their feed, then you have got a good society. And I am hoping that through patience and tolerance, which is very important, you must be tolerant of other people's pleasure, ultimately light will dawn on them, that they can't get away with this type of nonsense, that the human being is tired of waiting for goodness to be thinking, that will utilise all the best of old spiritual value in the most efficacious way.

Finally, may I once again congratulate the elders of the Indian community who have brought this institution to what it is, and hope that they will continue to nurture and succour this foundation, if for no other reason than that the more you do, the less I have got to tax the public in order to give you all these things.

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