PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AT A DINNER GIVEN IN HONOUR OF THE PRIME MINISTER BY THE INDIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AT THE AUDITORIUM OF THE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ON 16TH NOVEMBER, 1965.

Mr. President and Friends,

In some parts of South East Asia, prime ministers themselves usually write the speeches which eulogise them. And I have often wondered how they must face up to such occasions when others read the speeches which they have so assidously penned and which are so full of praise for themselves!

I can assure you, however, that I had nothing to do with the Master of Ceremonies this evening. He is a friend of mine, undoubtedly of long standing. But I can assure you I had nothing to do with his praises, either of reverence or of kind regard.

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But it has been my great privilege to have been associated with the Indian community and the Indian Merchant community for quite some time. Not only since my colleagues and I were entrusted with the problems of our tumultous island, but long before that -- as Mr. R. Jumabhoy will testify ... and the boats

that regularly used to sail from Singapore to Madras, and the trade unionists who insisted that they should be allocated certain passages on these boats....

So you see, I do know something about Indians, the Indian civilization, the Indian culture and the problems of Indians in South-east Asia. And their problems are very much the same as the problems of other human beings in Southeast Asia.

We all want to be left alone to get on with the job of making a better life for ourselves. That is the beginning and the end of why we are in South-East Asia.

Let us not pretend like the British used to do that they came here in pursuit of higher objectives -- to bring civilisation to this place.

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You know, for centuries fleets used to pass by the Straits of Malacca and nobody wanted to settle in this part of the world because the soil was inhospitable, the climate was unpleasant and they moved on to more fertile islands to the south. And so it is that archaeologists have been digging and digging in this part with very few rewards apart from a few porcelain and clay pieces. But, the British came. Somebody had discovered tin before they came

and they learnt how to exploit it with much greater vigour. And, what was most important, the inhospitable climate turned to be most suitable for a tree which produces juice which was called latex and which became rubber. And to a world which was going on wheels, that meant tremendous economic development for Malaya and for its outlet -- Singapore.

Well, that is how history began for you and for me. But I am not quite sure whether that is how history will end. We don't know. It began a certain way; but it ends the way we decide it.

Never believe in pre-destination, though it is comforting. I have Indian friends in my party who regularly look up my horoscope for me and they are amongst my staunchest supporters! And they tell me that all will be well till I am 70 years old -- which is quite a long time for me! But when I look at Mr. Govindasamy Pillai in front of me, I say to myself, "Well, they have given me only 70 years....what if I were to live as long as Mr. Govindasamy Pillai...!" I hope my party comrades have taken note of this, and that the next time when my horoscope is read, they will read into my 80's.

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But I think more important than my 80's are your 80's and what it holds in store for yur children and your children's children.

And, as I said just now, I start off on the basis when nothing is pre-destined except inevitability of the fact that the sun rises in the east because the world turns from west to east, and it settles in west because that has been the way that the world has been turning for the past million and millions of years.

For better or for worse, you and I have met in confluence in this corner of South-East Asia. And I think we can determine that it shall be for the better of humanity and, most important, for that segment of humanity which you and I represent in this corner of the world.

I think I understand you, your hopes, your aspirations, your fears, your uncertainties. And I think you also understand me. But what is most important that we not only understand each other but we also understand the others around us; not least of whom are the Malays.

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I have been round Africa and Asia. And I have seen isolated communities -- cut adrift and stranded on some foreign beach after the tide had run out. And it is a very painful operation picking up one's belongings and trying to go back to a country one does not really belong to anymore. And I am determined that that

shall not happen here; and I think we can between us make quite sure that it will never happen.

This, as I have said so many times in the last few weeks is an exercise first, in survival; second, in human progress.

Man from the beginning of time has -- like other living beings on this world -- always migrated, and usually in herds: whether cows or buffaloes, antelopes, lions, tigers or jackals -- if you don't like jackals. They have moved on in search of fresh pastures. And in the process, one or two things happen: either they discover fresh pastures for which there is no contestant for ownership and they settle there and claim to be owners from the beginning of time; or, they find -- which is most likely -- that somebody else has been there... Where upon, one of two other things can happen: either they get expelled or they stay.

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They can get expelled either because the climate and the environment are unsuitable and inhospitable and they decide it best to leave; or they stay --in which case, again one of the two things can happen: either the herd that was there before begins to live together with the second in peace and in harmony; or, it begins to bicker with the herd which has come in.

Now, whatever the provocation, we should never bicker. We should always want to live in peace and harmony. If the other side chooses to bicker, we should neverthless, also not bicker and, short of the utmost provocation, we should always be tolerant but stand our ground.

We have not only brought to this fresh pasture out ourselves but also skills. We have brought in a great deal of industry which has transformed what was once an inhospitable corner of South-East Asia into one of the most highly developed sectors of South-East Asia.

I would like to believe that our two years in Malaysia were not altogether a waste of time.

I know, for quite a number of my colleagues and myself, there are moments when we tot up the credit and the debit and we tell ourselves, "What a prodigious expenditure of human energy for so little return!" And, what is more, as my colleague, the Minister for Finance whom you so wisely garlanded... I always knew that the Indian merchant community had the instinct for survival, and this evening I saw it demonstrated in ample measure.....!

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You see, my colleague suffers from a disability which prevents him from enjoying the meal which his friend on his left enjoys. But how wise of the Indian Chamber that, whilst it might perhaps be for the good health of my colleague to participate in the vegetarian adventures of his friend on his left, nevertheless, the best was laid out before my colleague even though it would do him no good whatsoever!

But if I could just come back to this -- he is now doing the very unpleasant exercise of totting up the debit and credit of our joining Malaysia. And as far as we can see, we were "done in" to the tune of about $70 million during the period of the 2 years. We overpaid for no rhyme or reason because, in expectation of a common market, we agreed to 40%... You know all the argument that went on.. We said, 28% and they said it was 60%. And finally, it was agreed -- for no other reason than that because an agreement had to be reached -- that it was to be 40%, subject to review after 1 year and thereafter, every 2 years.

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As you know, the review never took place even after 1 year because they suggested that it be postponed. So, we have been looking up the figures and looking up what we have paid out and so on and we find we have been done in at the rate of $35 million per year by way of overpayment! So, if there is any consolation to you and me, we are now $35 million per year better off!

But the fact remains that we have paid very nearly $70 million because we missed the full 2 years by about 7 weeks, with the 9th of August. And you can trust Dr. Goh to have made quite sure that it stopped from the 9th of August! And since it had to stop, it stopped as from midnight, the 8th of August. No more payments were made on the 9th of August. I can assure that nobody on the ministerial side or on the official side can even be surcharged for letting down the Singapore people!

Now, what happens? Have we paid this -- for nothing? I would like to believe not. Because I think in that 2 years, we learnt something.

We educated ourselves, our people in the necessity for tolerance in a multi-racial community -- racial tolerance, linguistic tolerance, religious tolerance. And tonight, you have done me the honours: an Indian Chamber in the building of the Chinese Chamber, and nobody felt the worse off for it.

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I say all that is to the good because it shows the gradual integration of the herds: the Brahmin cows and the non-Brahmin cows are all getting together, and we are getting on all right! And, we will get on. And the two years were not wasted years because whatever some people would like to think, it is never

possible to turn the wheel of Karma back. The wheel, as far as I know, moves in one direction relentlessly towards the grave from the time of your birth to the time of your death. It never moves back, whether it be for Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak or for Malaya -- or for Indonesia for that matter.

But I console myself with this thought that if we had lost only $70 million for this signal experience in our lives -- the educating of our people in the necessity for tolerance, multi-racialism, multi-lingualism, multi-religionism -- just think what an awful price the others paid, all for nothing: just to take on the burdens of confrontation. It has cost them so bitterly.

They thought they were acquiring an empire, but lo and behold, there was one part which was not digestable as an empire. That is why we are still enjoying our meal this evening. If you and I had decided to go into the timber business, it would have been very sad!

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But it is not possible for them to go back. They are there confronting a very truculent neighbour over a thousand-mile border; and, as another beloved Prime Minister has so aptly said, he has got a thousand and five hundred miles of coastline to guard, and he was thinking of multiplying his fleet by 5 times. I shuddered at the prospect of my Finance Minister suddenly having to multiply

our defence expenditure by 5 times. So, it was lucky that it cost us so little in the end.

Looking back now in retrospect, I think it was a salutory experience learning in which part of the world we are sited; what the climate is like, what our neighbours are like; and what we must do if we want to survive. And if we survive, I have not the slightest doubts that we will prosper.

You know, there is an instinct in some herds. The instinct is this herd that has gathered here is to strive--whether it be to get more passages to India in order to farm out to your friends or to your trade union supporters; or whether to get more passages from the Indian Government or the Rajula or the S.S. Madras in order that there shall be more commission generally to spread bonus in your firm or whatever other charitable projects you may be interested in... The thrust is there. There is the bite; the spurs are always making our people surge forward. And this is our biggest asset in survival.

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A people that sits back waiting for deliverance is a people that will perish. A people that is always searching for fresh avenues to secure its abiding desires for security, for plenty, for peace -- they are a people that deserve to, and will, survive.

And I would like to thank you President and the members of the Indian Chamber of Commerce not only for the gesture which for me has been most meaningful ... because this is something which I treasure very much as an essential ingredient of our success.

If we become sectarian, narrow, selfish; if we yield to easy slogans and sentiments, then we will perish. And there are any number of other chaps around us who can shout slogans louder, more vociferously, more stridently than we can. I say we can counter their slogans by talking softly, in modulated terms. Where they preach in tolerance, we preach tolerance. Where they preach dominance of one over another, we preach peace and harmony between ourselves. This is the surest guarantee of our survival.

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Let me be the first to assure you that behind all the idealism, my colleagues and I decide policy on the basis of its efficacy: we ensure that policies are worth pursuing. It is no use preaching peace and the milk of human kindness between human beings if at the end of it all, having preached it, we will die and perish because those are not the qualities which are required. But, I can assure you that my motivations are much more practical, much more down to earth: I want this place to succeed because that is the only way in which you and I have a stake in

it. And I would like you to slowly understand that in our considered view, this is the only way in which we can succeed. For any one group to preach dominance over the others in the surest way to collapse. Of that I am convinced.

You don't have to convince me. My trouble is I have got some lunatics still amongst some sections of the community who need convincing. And from time to time, my colleagues and I are experimenting with new douches and syringes -- how to put dry ice in a syringe and give the man a quick astringent douche so he will wake up! But I would say that the most valuable asset that we have got in building this tolerant society are the last 2 years -- what could happen when those in authority were prepared to preach intolerance... And that is really the end of the road.

So, you see, whenever we now put it to the test, I know that there are, I hope, more than 50% of human beings in Singapore who having lived through this, will never want to see that happen ever again, and who would like, through patience and perseverance, to bring peace to this part of the world and to our neighbours.

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Finally, to those of our neighbours who in spite of our peace-loving intentions towards them are still unable to live in peace... As your President so

eagerly asked , "when are we getting Pulau Senang going?" ... Well, even there, I was roundly castigated for wishing the Indonesians well. I wanted to give them beer and whisky and rice for dirty copra and dirty pepper. And I was told it was an immoral and a wicked act.

You see, you cannot please everybody all the time. But this is one exercise which will grow in dimension over the years and which will give a lot of pleasure I am quite sure not only to the Indian community but to lots of other communities in Singapore; but which I hope, in the end, will not lead to so uncomfortable position as to make life with our neighbours difficult. Because never forget: in the end, they must put their house in order. And, there must be a day of reckoning. So, whilst you and I live day by day, just keep an eye for that day of reckoning when the accounts have to be struck. And when that moment arrives -- whether the British are here still doing their import and export or whether they have decided to pull out not only from the merchant enterprise but from other enterprises on this island -- we are here to stay, and we must ensure a situation which will make sure that regardless of the wishes of some of our neighbours, we will stay.

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It is on that note that I am quite sure I will strike complete unanimity in Singapore: we are here to stay for the next thousand years.

And I wish you and your progeny happiness, prosperity and success.

16th November, 1965.

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