

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW,  
AT A DINNER HELD AT THE CHINESE SWIMMING CLUB  
ON 5TH FEBRUARY, 1966.

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Mr. President and Friends,

This evening, I want to say in a few words how proud we were at the performance of our young men and women in the recent SEAP GAMES at Kuala Lumpur.

Once upon a time, many people used to believe -- in the kind of society we then lived in here -- that sports, recreation was a good thing but politics was a different thing. Politics was evil and sports was good -- provided sports was not organised!

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But the people who disseminated those philosophies themselves knew how important it was to the survival of a people that the physical vigour and vitality -- the verve -- of a nation should always be kept up.

There is no beginning and there is no end to the history of mankind in this world. It does not mean that because the Russians made a soft landing on the moon the day before yesterday that that is the end of history. That is the beginning for them and it acts as a spur to other people.

Whether you are training men to go into satellites to conquer space or whether you are just getting enough muscle on your people to get enough courage to defend their country, it is the same thing. A people that is weak and flabby and afraid to fight, afraid to die, will be a people which will go down. History is full of these examples.

You read the history of the last war. Those who fought and won did not fight and win because they had superior guns. Many a battle was won by a people with inferior guns but with superior spirit and vitality and verve. And, you and I had the singular privilege of seeing it ourselves.

So, small though we may be in Southeast Asia and with an independence thrust upon us, I say we grasp it firmly with both hands and make sure that this is ours for all time. From here, we build.

And, the destiny of a people is not measured by its numbers or the area of its territory. What matters is the quality of its people, the spirit in them. We want to breed a generation that will stand up and be an equal to anyone in Southeast Asia -- man for man, woman for woman.

And so it is that we have recently, this new emphasis on not breeding people who are just going to pass examinations and do well in earning a living. Because the whole basis of your society depends not only on people being clever at earning a living but also on their having enough organisation and strength and vitality to prevent our society from being destroyed.

So, whether it is swimming, gymnastics, rugger; whether it is Chinese boxing, the Chinese art of self-defence or the Malay art of self-defence, we must build up a generation with a discipline, with a confidence, with a strength, to stand up for its rights, and to take on whatever challenges that may come our way. We should not go and challenge people because that is not a wise thing to do. But, if anybody challenges our right to survival, then it is up to us to defend what we have got.

And, sports and politics are closely inter-related. The very basis of our survival is politics; and sports is one of the ways in which you inculcate that physical discipline and stamina which alone can give you high performance.

So, when they take people out to these Olympic Games, each nation is really showing what it is capable of -- whether it is the Russians or the Americans. It is not your technological skill alone that puts your men in space. It is the quality of your people, a question of whether you have got the men with the calibre to rise to the occasion, to new challenges -- weightlessness in space, whizzing round the world without losing your nerve and manipulating scientific instruments. All these are great challenges to the human race, to the human spirit.

There are very few nations that can afford to respond to such challenges but ultimately, it is those that have both -- the intense mental effort and the great physical verve and stamina -- that must lead the world and that must show the way to the future.

And so, in Southeast Asia, I would say -- looking at our own people and looking at the others and seeing what they are eating and we are eating -- that we stand a good chance of surviving.

On that note, I wish you many more Happy New Years.

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