TRANSCRIPT OF PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AT THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF THE CITIZENS' CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE OF RIVER VALLEY CONSTITUENCY AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY CENTRE HELD ON 19TH JANUARY, 1967

Mr. Chairman, Member of the Consultative Committee, Friends and Follow-citizens,

I am doubly re-assured this evening in attending this celebration first, in my capacity as a Minister responsible for the orderly growth and development of our institutions, the welfare and well-being of our community, but even more so in my capacity as a resident of River Valley constituency.

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I believe I can better give you a perspective of the changes that have taken place imperceptibly over these last few years more in my capacity as a resident and a voter of River Valley than if I were to give you facts and figures about our progress -- the things we have done, the buildings we have put up -- statistics to bear witness to a lot of activity and effort.

I have lived here in this constituency for over 20 years. If you ask me today, just as a citizen, what is the difference between the River Valley that exists today and the one that existed 20 years ago, I would say this -- there is a sense of participation; a sense of ownership and of belonging; of feeling, and of being a community. This was not present 20 years ago.

We were then tenants, licensees. Somebody else owned the place and ran the machine. You came like the washerwoman or the charwoman to clean, to do your little chores to get your little benefit. There was no sense of building upon ownership.

If you were lucky and either a shopkeeper, a pawnbroker or an owner of a chain of stores, then you owned more than the rest of the community. And you tried to make more, and paid homage to Caesar, and Caesar was represented by the Governor who lived down the road.

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There was no participation.

Today, not only does every one believe, but absolutely demands, as of right that he should have his chance in life as a member of the community and as a citizen to be educated, to get a job befitting his ability and training, and to make

a contribution to the well-being of the community. And this sense of participation, more than any other single factor, has taken out the bitterness and the frustration that used to fester in the old society.

Without this community centre and all the other organisational institutions which draw into one milieu of participation the various groups in our little constituency, we would just go on leading our own separate lives. And I think now, from the richest to the not very rich -- and indeed, to the very poor in River Valley -- everybody understands the inter-dependence of obligations and responsibilities that we owe to one another. And so the wealthy make a contribution; perhaps, buy the extra television set in the Community Centre so that somebody who wants to watch the other channel -- because he does not understand the language on Channel 5 -- can do so. And so it goes on. And this way we move forward.

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It is a great pity that we did these things so late. They should have been done earlier; and, had we been able to bring about a collective will, a collective conscience in the people earlier, long before 1957, long before Malaya obtained her independence -- had we succeeded in this -- the course of history would have been changed.

We created what we have today -- an independent Republic of Singapore. But we were 10 years too late. If we had been 10 years earlier in our process of jellying the various components into one community, we could have had a wider constitutional arrangement for our future.

But the problem of life is that whilst you regret the opportunities missed, you learn to live with what you have got. And you and I -- we have 224 square miles of the most valuable real estate in the whole of Southeast Asia. There is no other square mile of earth anywhere in Southeast Asia which costs more than Singapore.

You take Raffles Place. One square mile there will buy you five, six other square miles in any other part of southeast Asia. And it is you who have built this.

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One hundred and fifty years ago, when Stamford Raffles came here, there were 120 Malays and 30 Chinese. And you could then have bought the whole of Raffles Place for perhaps 5 bags of rice. It was valueless - swamp, mudland. And, of this, we have built a metropolis! Very few such cities on the equator -- the climate and the stupor, the heat and the humidity notwithstanding -- have the

cultural verve and dynamism of a migrant community which have made this place throb with life and vitality.

On this, we build. The future is a long and relentless process of living going on to the end of time. Nobody knows what the end result will be. Nobody can tell me what is happening today accurately -- either in Indonesia or in China. But great things are stirring; and lesser things are also stirring around us.

Every passing day, every passing year, we, as a community -- not just as individuals -- should consolidate and strengthen our capacity to live on our own, at peace and friendship and co-operation with our neighbours if we may.

This is the challenge that we face. I would like to admit to you one nagging doubt at the back of my mind which is Singapore's greatest weakness. That, being a migrant community with no deep roots, no deep in-built responses and reflexes, there is the danger of selfish complacency. Because we are doing so much better than everybody else for the time being, there is the danger of not pressing urgently in removing the weaknesses, the manifestations of selfishness in our society.

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You know, a battle goes on all the time in some of the schools in Singapore for the hearts and minds of our younger generation. All the time, this battle is relentlessly fought between the Communists who established their cells in some of the Chinese Middle Schools 30 to 40 years ago and who are trying to bring in more recruits and involve them in a Communist movement, and us, we who are trying to get the community to build an open, democratic society with free and equal chances for everybody.

And, as the Communists find their breeding-grounds shrinking, they begin to use force and terror, in order that teachers and principals may acquiesce, just do nothing to stop them, acquiesce in their continued evil. And evil does not need active co-operation. All evil needs to succeed, is quiescence; abstention on the part of good men who watch evil, feel it is wrong but do nothing about it. And, they then succeed.

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And, over the last 8 years, we managed to stiffen the will and resolve in a small but growing body of teachers, principals and educationists to get together and take a stand and fight this. The first blows are being struck by the Communists.

There have been good responses from some pupils perhaps, and from some community leaders. But, it is amazing that there are two big Chinese newspapers which write editorials criticising the Government -- what to do, what not to do. And we welcome the criticism. But, when they see evil being done, no editor in any of the big Chinese dailies have had the time to write clearly and unequivocally this violence against teachers is a wicked, vicious act. Many sit on the fence hoping that the Government will look after these things for them.

The Government will do this, without the help of people who want to make money at the expense of the rest of the community. But, at the same time, when the Government has to carry the whole of that burden, they must not expect the Government to give much weight to their views on other subjects.

If you want people to stand up and take note of what you say, then it is in a moment of acute pain, or crisis, or anguish that you should stand up to be countered.

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I am not impressed when people tell me now that they want to stand up for Chinese education in Singapore. If anybody stood up and said these things when we were in Malaysia, I would have taken note of him and acknowledged his courage.

This is the problem of our community -- that the process of identification -- first, of the person with the community, from individual survival to group survival, is a slow one. Because it was slow, we lost so many opportunities.

Finally, may I express the hope that in one of the most literate and probably one of the most comfortable of all the constituencies in Singapore, River Valley will, through its community effort, set an example of what the better-off sections of the community do for the less better-off.

It is not that the Government cannot do these things all by itself. We do. But it is very important for morale and for the psychological effect on our own people if we have a spontaneous ground leadership of the wealthier sections of the community making a contribution to the welfare and betterment of the less fortunate in their own midst. It makes a great deal of difference. It takes away all the bitterness, all the resentment of being poor, of being dispossessed when your neighbour of his own free will takes an interest in you, makes a contribution to your well-being.

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