TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
AT NATIONAL SERVICEMEN SENDING OFF DINNER
AT TANJONG PAGAR COMMUNITY CENTRE ON
29TH AUGUST, 1967.

We are a young community with a short history. Tonight is a special event in our lives. It marks a significant beginning which, if pursued successfully, will ensure a permanent chapter for ourselves in the history of Asia. For over 150 years, four great cultures have met here in confluence. The British held sway and left their imprint. The Chinese, Indians and other came and settled. Now we have to look after ourselves.

We have no tradition to guide us. But instinct tells us what we must do. We must build into our young that spirit of togetherness. Through common training and common experience we must inculcate the qualities of valour, comradeship, discipline, common social purpose, pride in themselves and their community. Only then will all that we have built be safe for posterity, a relatively advanced urban community with one of the highest standards of living in the region. If we do not have this we will be brought down to the filth and squalor, the degradation and corruption, the poverty and misery, which prevails in large parts of the newly independent countries.

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The young men we honour tonight have been chosen for full-time National service, a special responsibility, and also a great privilege. They are the 10% of their generation who, if they make the grade, will serve a full period of 2 years and then go in to Reserve Service. Those who make the stern standards we require, at the end of their 2 years, will be assured of a job . We are creating a tradition tonight by gathering here the elders and leaders of the community to do them honour in the presence of their families and friends. It will remind them of the need for perseverance, grit and effort to achieve the high standards we ask of our armed forces. For on this will depend the security and happiness of all of us.

Soldiers and uniforms of any type used to have unhappy memories for us. We were a people governed by others; the British, then the Japanese. Even in the course of riots after independence within Malaysia, there was never a sense of being at one with those in uniform who held the bayonet and enforced compliance. These memories, coupled with the Chinese tradition that good sons do not become soldiers, plus the factor that most of our Indian community are from non-warrior castes, are a disadvantage. This means a special effort must be made to honour and respect those of our citizens in uniform, those who carry the guns that will protect us.

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It also requires those we put in uniform shall always have high standards of moral rectitude and personal courtesy to win the respect and affection of the people. Too often with the new armies of new countries, the soldier becomes a brigand. From his original role as protector of the people, he degenerates into their tormentor and preys on them in the midst of growing chaos. Our soldier must and will be different. To all of you called up for National Service, let me remind you: You are citizens first and last. Remember that the more the authority the community invests in you, the more it expects you to be of exceptional discipline and keep a high code of honour. Never sully the good name of the unit you will join.

Finally, when you leave tomorrow from the Community Centres, remember that your family and your friends, your whole neighbourhood will watch your training and follow your progress with deep interest. They will visit you from time to time in your camps to applaud your achievements and to cheer you on in the hard training awaiting you. You cannot let them down. However hard, however rigorous, however trying the tasks that you will be asked to undertake, you must give up. When we welcome you back as a fully trained warrior, you will be a better and a stronger citizen.

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I wish you well in you careers.