ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE SAFTI COMMISSIONING CEREMONY AT THE ISTANA ON WEDNESDAY, 20TH MARCH, 1968.

Eight months ago, on the 18th of July last year, in this same room, 114 officer cadets, the first graduates of SAFTI, received their commissions. It is a source of satisfaction and pride to all of us present today for your commissioning. The promise your predecessors held out, of ever higher standards of discipline, training, dedication and leadership, have been sustained by you. Your bearing, your demeanour, the rigorous training which one out of three of your original group of 150 cadets could not complete, leaving 107 officers at the end of a course, all these reflect the standards we demand of leaders of men of loyal, patriotic and courteous citizens.

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In the eight months since the first SAFTI graduates, the world has taken on a much more sombre hue. Instead of the middle 70's, the British Government has decided to leave by the end of 1971. As we solve one problem – the building up of our land forces – we are presented with an even greater challenge, to build up within four years an air defence capability which, together

with Malaysians and others, will give us a joint air defence which is both credible and, if and when put to the test, will not be found inadequate.

This means the selection of several hundred young men of more than average intelligence, education and physical fitness. They will be trained to man the radar screens, to operate ground-to-air missiles, to fly and to maintain aircraft. For a start, most of them will have to be sent abroad for training. But, just as we have set up our armed forces institute, so we will set up an air force training school. And later, another section to master the techniques of naval operations.

What we lack in quantity, we make up for in quality. The weaponry of the technological age puts a premium on high standards of education, particularly in the sciences, for the effective and efficient use of modern gadgetry. Fortunately high intelligence and diligent application has been our forte. But healthy physical attributes and quick responses are also required. Hence the emphasis on extra-mural activities in our schools to rear a robust generation.

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By 1972 we must demonstrate that we have the wherewithal to make it extremely unpleasant for anybody contemplating taking liberties with us. We welcome co-operation with all our Commonwealth partners in common defence arrangements. But, most important, all must know that we are not passengers in such an arrangement. Our survival must not depend only on the charitable disposition of our friends and neighbours.

A third of you will go into the Second, Third and Fourth S.I.R. battalions of national servicemen. One-third will go on to become engineers and signal officers; the remaining third will help to train the new Companies for future commanders in SAFTI.

Be of good heart. There are not many communities that can start from scratch and in 2½ years build up the infrastructure, the administrative network, and the organisational institutions to produce an unending stream of officers and soldiers, men who besides being trained for combat will, after their two-year national service is completed, contribute to the developing of our economy.

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Events around us constantly underline the lessons of weakness, the terrible price those who are caught in positions of weakness, not of strength, must pay, when they are the wealthier sections of the populace. And we happen to be the wealthiest community per capita of population in South Asia.

Foreign observers trained to discern and assess the fighting qualities and military skills of others must be left in no doubts that this is a community that cannot be subjugated and turned to economic serfs for the wellbeing of others. The fate of your mothers, your sisters, your wives, depends upon how carefully we plan our limited resources to provide maximum security. But however good our planning in the final analysis it is the quality of leadership, the elan of our officer cadre, that will decide whether a well trained and patriotic people can produce an elite fighting force.

My good wishes go with you for your success in your next assignments.

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