TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER

AT A SEND-OFF DINNER FOR NATIONAL SERVICEMEN

AT THE TANJONG PAGAR COMMUNITY CENTRE ON

23RD MARCH, 1968.

There is nothing I want to tell you this evening which I have not already said before. The problems we are facing we knew for many years. What we did not anticipate was the speed at which they would come. Had we known that the British would want to go by the end of 1971, not only would we have an army today but we would also have the core of our air force and naval officers being trained. But these are the unexpected turns of events. I have every confidence that, provided each and everyone knows exactly that this is no play, but a very deadly serious business, we will be able to defend ourselves.

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You remember what happened to Singapore when the Japanese troops came in? The people were defenceless. We were spectators. Then we were the sufferers. This time we are the participants. We will defend ourselves. Whoever else want to help defend us, I will say to them "Thank you very much. But please remember I can defend myself and make no mistake about it."

Modern weaponry gives the people who have high education and high intelligence the advantage. You know, when you fly an aeroplane it is not the same as driving a motorcar. Perhaps flying an old-fashioned aeroplane is like driving a motorcar. When you fly a supersonic plane at twice the speed of sound, you must be a scientist besides being physically fit. You are lying flat on the aeroplane and watching the metres on the screen. And I am quite sure we can do that.

I am also quite convinced that if we do not forget what is the long-term purpose, namely, to build a harmonious multi-racial society, we will succeed. We have Indians, Malays and Eurasians together with the Chinese. There is no such thing as a Republican Chinese battalion or a Republican Indian battalion or a Republican Malay battalion. We are all Singaporeans. Commanders are sometimes Chinese, commanding Malays, Indians and others. Often there are Indian, Eurasian and Malay officers commanding Chinese soldiers. With us this is an article of faith. We are quite convinced if all of us are educated and have gone through the same experiences, we will know a multi-racial Singapore is in our common interest and we must protect it.

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How do you protect it?

You and I, we know the best way is to be ourselves and to get stronger and stronger. We will get richer and richer. Nothing can stop us. I am sure of it. You know the reasons and I know the reasons: we work hard, we are well-organised and there is no corruption here. But the richer we get, the more dangerous it is for us unless we are also strong.

So I say to the young men today in whose honour this dinner is being held: this is a sacred task we have entrusted upon you. Not just the two years' training: that is just the beginning of a life-time job. For two years they train and after that annually. We guarantee them a job if they complete the two years' training. And every year they will go back to keep fit and keep up with new weapons because every few years new weapons and new tactics appear. And this goes on until they are 45. They are young men 17 or 18 years old. This is just the beginning of a life-time of service. I am quite sure that everybody here this evening would want to wish them well and hope that they will bring pride and glory to their parents and to the community in Tanjong Pagar.

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