TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF EUSOFF COLLEGE ON 5TH OCTOBER, 1968

Principal, Ladies and Gentlemen,

"If I had to be born a girl in Asia, where would I choose to be born?" I would choose Singapore. There are two reasons for it. First, in nearly all the other countries in Asia there are patriarchal societies where the male ascendancy is so complete that the female is almost an atrophied social version of the male. Next, they are mostly polygamous societies.

There are also other advantages for women in Singapore. First, ours is a society where the weight of tradition is least stifling and the debris of history can be more easily sloughed off. When the traditional social fabric of old societies do not offer the women an equal place, it is extremely difficult to change this quickly. This is true not only of the unindustrialised Asian nations. It is true also of the Japanese. They are a highly industrialised nation. But the process of modernisation has not altered the social relationships between their males and females.

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Secondly, as a centre of communications, exposed to almost all contemporary thinking via the newspaper, the cinema, the television screen, the contacts with visiting men and women and new ideas, our society is stimulated by what has been and is happening in all the main centres of human civilisation. So we are the better prepared to meet the challenge of the modern world.

Third: there are very few countries where women have equal educational opportunities, equal job opportunities, and equal pay. Singapore women pay separate income tax on their earned income. Recently when Government servants had their salaries and salary scales revised, the government decided that it would convert all women officers, like the men, to the new salary scales as if they were married with children. Now women in the Government service have an advantage over the men – the men cannot have full pay maternity leave.

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I wondered whether this will tend in the long run to leave most women graduates in the Government service as the private sector shies off the equal pay plus maternity benefit given to women.

What will happen in the next generation? What quality of men or women will they be? First, it depends on what genetic qualities we have in our

present generation. I found when visiting our schools that most of the children in the not so good schools have brothers and sisters by the dozen, but in the better schools, children of educated parents have only one, or two or three in the family. So unless the better-educated and better-equipped stake out a bigger part of the future for their progeny, then the future will be that much poorer for all. Educational experts, psychologists and physiologists agree that education begins almost from the day the mother communicates with the child, not from the day the child goes to kindergarten or school. There is a very big difference between having an educated and an uneducated mother.

Let us for purposes of argument, accept that educational and social performance, more or less, are equal to intelligence and the other qualities which make for better performance. If you look at the population I.Q. pyramid of Singapore, then as a community we want that pyramid to get steeper and higher. At the moment that pyramid is getting broader and lower. And this is happening in several parts of the world.

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There are almost no substitutes for the nurturing and nourishing a child receives from his or her parents, principally the mother. So I rejoiced when I read that nearly 50% of our university undergraduates are women. For this augurs well for the next generation. Later on, there will be other problems, such as the conflict between the home and work. The creche and kindergarten are inadequate substitutes for the home. Perhaps we shall have to learn, like the advanced societies, that the investment a country puts into its women does not give the same kind of returns one expects to get from male citizens. For five to seven years after marriage there may be a hiatus in the economic returns as the women devote most of their time to rearing the family. The industrial societies, the advanced nations, particularly America and Russia, use their men and women power, their women's physical and brain power.

Finally, you may not have noticed that my colleague, Dr. Toh, looks younger, these days. I thought it was because the chores of state are no longer on his shoulders. I told him that dealing and meeting with academics must be a welcome relief from the previous pressures of his old Ministry. He assured me that it was not so. He suggested it came from the stimulus of meeting young people. If you do have that effect on me then you can be sure that I will accept your next invitation to dinner.

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