ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW PREMISES OF RAFFLES INSTITUTION ON SATURDAY, 28 JULY, 1973

Nearly 7 years ago, my colleagues in the Cabinet and I had to decide whether we should (1) renovate Raffles Institution, reinforcing and rebuilding the inside but keeping the external structures of the buildings, or (2) demolish these buildings and rebuild Raffles Institution on the same site, or (3) build a new R.I. on a new site.

Had they been stone buildings, architecturally unique and artistic, we would have been justified in refurbishing them at great costs. But they were not. The continual repair and maintenance would become increasingly uneconomic. There were too many old timber struts.

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Rebuilding on the same site was uneconomic. The area had become part of the business centre, with heavy traffic. Many of my colleagues in the Cabinet and I had been educated at the old Raffles Institution. It was a difficult, but, I believe, the right decision to move it to this site in Grange Road. It is a handsome site to resite a famous old school. It was in the suburbs. We thought

traffic would be easier, though the traffic problem has increased even in Grange Road.

In my days as a student, one advantage R.I. had over all other schools in Singapore was that it drew the best students from all the government primary schools throughout Singapore. A student got in on the basis of merit, not his father's status or wealth. It was student meritocracy. It brought together the best students from all segments of our society.

I did not know then that I was to be in politics. But being in R.I. turned out to be an advantage. I got to know and to get along with boys, rich and poor, of various races and cultures, and not only from Singapore, but other parts of Southeast Asia. This quality R.I. must maintain.

Another feature of R.I. was its pride in consistently high performance. This was the result of bright pupils stimulating good teachers to give of their best effort. It was an educational institution of excellence. R.I.'s objective was to nurture the well-rounded individual -- a scholar, a sportsman, an organiser -- so that he can meet the problems and the challenges of his time.

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No education in any school, however good, in another part of the world, can teach a Singaporean to meet the problems of life in Singapore. Unfortunately, some wealthy parents, partly for reasons of social snobbery, believe they can buy their children a better future, by sending them to expensive private schools in Britain, America, Australia, or elsewhere. But, in fact, they are doing their children great harm. If they want their children to emigrate to that country, that is another matter. But to be trained in one's teens, at a most impressionable age, in British schools geared to British society, or Australian schools designed for meeting Australia's evolving society, and then to come back to Singapore, is to be gravely handicapped.

We are forging a nation. It can only be done in Singapore, by Singaporeans, in the home, in our schools and in the armed forces. We are inculcating common values necessary for national survival. We are acquiring the will and the wherewithal, to advance, and to protect our national interests. A new generation is growing up, sharing a common experience, having more of a common perception of a common future, prepared to act jointly to protect its collective security and well-being. The most important years for the development of these attitudes are those in school and the armed forces.

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R.I. can, and will, make a valuable contribution to this end. The principal and teachers will inculcate values and disciplines that can make us proud of those who come after us, better prepared for their roles in a vastly different Singapore.

The presence of so many distinguished old Rafflesians symbolises their continuity between the old and new R.I. R.I. must compete with other schools in training our students not simply how to get on as individuals, but most important how to get on as a distinct people, able to care and fend for themselves.

It now gives me pleasure to formally declare open the new R.I. buildings.

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