ADDRESS BY THE SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER ON INTRA COMMONWEALTH RELATIONS AT THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING IN OTTAWA, 8TH AUGUST, 1973

Mr. Chairman, when I arrived in Ottawa, I thought this would be a very difficult subject to introduce. So far our discussions have given cause for optimism. It has not been a futile meeting. However, it can still become fractious when we come to the other items later in the agenda.

In 1971, when we met in January in Singapore, Britain was not a member of the EEC. The sterling area was still in being. Today, Britain is a member of the Community. Every passing year, the transitory provisions will make those of us who are not associates or associables, who are not in the Mediterranean Basin, in Africa, or in the Caribbean, less and less relevant to the policies of Britain. And the sterling area is in considerable disarray, together with the whole of the International Monetary System. Therefore, perhaps it is useful that we re-examine the Commonwealth in perspective, not so much in nostalgia, but why it came about, and whether if it has a specific destination or role.

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The Foreign Minister of India, Swaran Singh, struck an historic note that it was in Ottawa, some 40 years ago, as the world was getting out of the depths of

depression that the white dominions -- Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa -- decided on Commonwealth preferences. And these decisions bound all of us as we were then dependent territories. After the Second World War India got independence in 1947, then Pakistan. And in rapid succession Burma and Ceylon. The bottom had gone out of the empire. The British tried to keep the main Commonwealth links.

My mind goes back to 1962. The then Prime Minister, Mr. MacMillan, spoke eloquently why Britain should join. Mr. Heath demonstrated his superb mastery of the intricacies of the rules and regulations of the treaty of Rome, and how it would affect us. But the Commonwealth was given notice that Britain had done its sums. She had discovered that there was more in Europe than in the Commonwealth.

Some 3 years ago I did a little exercise for a Jan Smuts Memorial Lecture.

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I looked up the figures of trade. World trade for the decade of the sixties grew between 8 to 10 per cent. Intra-Commonwealth trade was half of that rate of growth. Intra-EEC trade was 30-plus per cent. So it was obvious that what MacMillan said in 1962 was still valid. I can only paraphrase what he spoke with great eloquence and profoundness -- that if future greatness was to be found for Britain, it could only be as part of a larger whole. Only large continental land

masses with massive populations, good communications, high technology and consumption providing economies of scale -- that is what the Americans had got with Canada, Mexico, Latin American and the Caribbean as additional markets for the American economies of scale. If the British had not been so immersed and imbued with their sense of destiny as an overseas nation, a people who found adventure and greatness overseas, founded civilisations in North America, a part of what we saw in your ballet last night, perhaps we would not be around this table.

We are here, in a way, to decide whether such further meetings are to have much relevance. It is useful having heads of governments meet. But it could become as disadvantageous as holding Olympic Games. People used to make bids for Olympic games, but they discovered it was not worth it. That is the crux of what intra-commonwealth relations is about.

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Is it worth it? I think we have the following advantages. There are no other forums, whether the UN, OAU, ASEAN, The Caribbean Grouping, OAS, ASPAC (for East Asia, now in cold storage) where we bring together diverse peoples from all the continents of the world. There have been changes. Instead of our lines all going to London we are having lines with our immediate neighbours. And most important, lines to Washington, Moscow, Brussels,

Peking, Tokyo, for these are the centres where the big decisions made are going to affect us all, whether we like it or not.

We share several qualities which none of the other organisations have. When we meet at other conferences we have got to put earphones on. In the EEC, they used to speak French as their working language. Now with the British, Danes and the Irish in as members, more members speak English than French. But the key people make it a point of speaking French, just as they do in Quebec, even though they speak perfect English. However, we do not pretend that we speak English. We all do. The direct exchanges have helped in this last week of discussions. We got to know each other better since we last met. We felt the mood of this conference. If we go on in this constructive vein, some governments will find it politically worthwhile to have another meeting in 2 years time. I hope this time, it will be at a climatically more congenial time of year. We were not in favour of August. Neither were my friends from Jamaica and Britain.

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But we came, nevertheless. Because we hoped it would be useful, that perhaps this conference may not be the last. However, if it has to be, let us give it a decent burial. But I think that would be a pity. It is because there are all these new regional groupings which will pull us away from each other that we meet only in stylised settings like the non-aligned summits in Belgrade, Lusaka, now in Algiers, and in September, the UN, that we should keep this regular informal meeting of minds of Heads of governments on. At other forums, we tend to make set speeches, designed to impress, designed to gather votes. They are not really conducive to understand the other person's point of view. We horse trade our votes.

This is one forum where we can speak frankly and generate least rancour. We can keep this up. We have got a group, not so intimate as it used to be when it was a white 5. Or even after it became 16 or 17. The next time we meet, we shall have two more to make for 34 Heads of Government. Nevertheless, we have the same backgrounds, use the same term of reference. We inherited basic institutions and concepts of government and society. We understand each other better than any other group do. We use the same diction and concepts. It does not mean that we all stay put. We are all evolving and discovering our own personalities. Just following the forms and institutions of the British, or the Canadians, or the Australians or New Zealanders, or God forbid, of South Africa,

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is not what will bring about cohesive societies and effective government to raise our people's standards of life. For this generation, we have all been brought up in similar institutions, with ideas and ideals which make it possible for us to speak with an informality and intimacy which is not possible elsewhere. Whether our successors can keep this up is another matter. But if we are going to use this as a forum to harangue and harass each other, then what is the purpose of another meeting?

We have had a series of fractious and rambunctious meetings in London over UDI and southern Africa. We then had a very flexible, but robust predecessor to Mr. Heath. He rode all the punches with a smile. He just absorbed the punishment. He ducked. He weaved. But, obviously, the British public did not like what they read and saw on television. They did not think it was funny. It affected domestic British politics. Even Mr. Wilson thought it was a good idea to change the venue to Singapore. As it turned out, I welcomed Mr. Heath to Singapore.

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We are going to be more and and more preoccupied with regional groupings. There is a grave danger in this for all of us small and middle countries. The big economic blocs of the non-communist world, wealthy and powerful -- America, the EEC, Japan -- they are going to come to terms with

each other. They have to. They have preserved peace, stability, and prosperity for themselves. The British feel the pinch of Japanese ball bearings and TV sets. And on shipping, the whole of Europe is being pushed against the wall by Japan. The Europeans just cannot compete against the efficiency of the Japanese shipbuilding industry except in specialised vessels with a higher innovative content. But if they and the Americans shut off Japan, there will be big trouble. Japan's trade with Southeast Asia is very small -- her exports comprise only 12 per cent of her total exports, and her imports only 8 percent of total imports. Her productive capacity is for the whole world. If Japan is cut off she will have to make up her mind, either to go with the Soviet Union or China. And if it is going to be along race lines, then this may become far from a peaceful world.

Prime Minister (Trudeau), you were extremely candid last night in the ballet you invited us to. First the Red Indian and the Eskimo, then Newfoundland. I admired your complete candour. I know that you have a great feel for the present position of the Red Indian and the Eskimo. What has happened cannot be undone. You cannot resurrect the past.

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You cannot bring a bison back to life. This is what has happened to all of us. I listened to my friend from Uganda. Is it possible to go back to status quo ante? Can Uganda even go back to January 1971?

I make no apologies for being in Singapore. My great grandfather went there as a coolie, seeking the jackpot at the end of the rainbow. He found a small one. He went back. But his wife and children did not . So I am in Singapore. But we helped build a city out of a mud flat. We did not kill any Red Indians. We did not kill any Aborigines. We want to be friends with all, those who were there and those who migrated there in the British period. We want to help development, and not only in our immediate region.

It is this dialogue which may make the Commonwealth a worthwhile association after empire. Marlborough House was bequeathed by the British, in the expectation that the Commonwealth would amplify Britain's voice in world affairs. It is a very experienced voice as those of us who have had dealings with her know so well. Unfortunately, she has no longer got the economic strength to use effectively the accumulation of wisdom over 3 1/2 centuries of empire. The Commonwealth has not got the cohesiveness of the French community because the French hand out aid and subvention. It is not the associate status of the associated states that keeps them in the EEC. It is because France makes it worth their while to vote for France in world forums, like the UN. The ironic tragedy for Britain was that she left us with effective institutions that have enabled many of us to become viable and we have voted in accordance with our

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wishes against Britain on crucial issues. Compare this to the French community. When there is a revolt in Chad, the French foreign legion helped to keep the revolt down. So they know who their friend is. I think I know who my friends here are. I can speak frankly and forcefully, only because I know Ted Heath, Gough Whitlam, Norman Kirk, Pierre Trudeau and other leaders well. And in this form, the others understand what we are talking about.

Perhaps we shall go back feeling only subjectively not only better. But we shall also mull over what has been said. If we make the Commonwealth valuable for this kind of interchange, it is something one day which even the British will find it to their interests to help sustain. I was asked yesterday whether Britain had not deliberately downgraded the Commonwealth. I said "benign neglect" was appropriate. But Mr. Heath is here in Ottawa; he has missed his sailing. For in Britain, there is still considerable sentiment for the Commonwealth, this aftermath of empire. We are peoples whom they had used for their interests.

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Two million Indians fought and thousands died in the last war. There are monuments in Ottawa, Canberra, Wellington, and Singapore for people who died in two wars which did not directly concern them. The British have no legal obligations. They have been scrubbed off with independence. But we are all human beings at the end of the day and that is why we are here. And because we are human beings temporarily endowed with power which affect the lives of

many other human beings, perhaps if we understand each other's problems and difficulties, we may help each other and make for a slightly better world. That, I hope, will be the result of this conference.

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