ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE ANNUAL DINNER ON THE LAW SOCIETY OF SINGAPORE, HELD AT THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, ON 26TH MARCH, 1977

Mr. Chairman, Chief Justice,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is seven years since I last met you.

There are many reasons why the parliamentary system has failed in many new countries. I propose to touch on one of the factors. Democratic government requires, inter alia, that the government alone should not have to carry the responsibility of influencing public attitudes and opinion. To work with democratic system, leadership at all levels, in particular non-political functional or professional group leaderships, should play their part in educating the people. They should help create a climate in which difficult problems arising from changing circumstances can be met with new solutions.

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Perhaps, you can take comfort from the fact that lawyers are not the only ones lacking the will for self-discipline and the strength to shoulder the responsibilities not only for their members but for society as a whole. The

Singapore Stock Exchange Committee is the saddest example of the weakness of functional group leadership. They have shown a singular lack of discipline, responsibility or strength. They have used the authority the government has allowed them to exercise, to protect their own sectional interests at the expense of the public investor. The result is that the government may have to intervene.

"Half of the problems stem from our past. For a 140 years, a paternal colonial administration governed Singapore entirely on its own. The responsibility for the well-being of society was not that of the individual Singaporean. We've had just over ten years of representative government.

"Unless we learn very quickly as individuals and as functional and professional groups to take the wider view and uphold first, the public interests and only next our sectional interests, the democratic system cannot endure, let alone flourish."

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I said this on 11 March, 1970. It is as valid today as it was then. As for the Stock Exchange, it was prophetic.

What went wrong? Many things. First, we have not had time enough for people to adjust and adapt themselves to a new situation, where we are in charge of our own destiny. To be in charge means to exercise authority, and, from time to time, it means having to do the unpleasant, but the unavoidable.

I want to discuss some problems which we face as a new nation.

The political and economic prospects for a people have a profound influence on the young especially the brightest and the best, in their choice of jobs. The figures in the Appendix show the kind of people who opted to study law in the last 17 years since 1959. They reflect the changing prospects of Singapore.

Entrance to the University is based mainly on the points system. It is fair, without bias, without favour. The maximum number of points you can score for your 'A' levels is 64. Medicine has always been the top choice. The lowest cut-off point in 1959 for medicine was 36. For the Arts Faculty, 24 points, Law, 19 points. Law went down in 1961 and 1962 to an all time low of 15 points, against 37 for Medicine, 25 for Dentistry, 22 for Arts.

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1961 and 1962 were years of riots, arson and assassinations. Few parents in Singapore and their bright children believed that "the rule of law" would continue in an orderly society in which lawyers would play a role between the legislature, the executive and the people. But the political, economic and social conditions turned for the better. By 1969 the cut-off was 32 points for Law. 47 for Medicine and 40 for Engineering.

I am happy to tell you that the cut-off points for Law, last year, went up to 44 points, against 49 points for Medicine, 40 for Engineering and 40 for Dentistry.

We are mature enough to talk about these things without causing alarm or distress. If you take up Medicine, you get a universal profession. You can practice anywhere, in Britain, in Australia, New Zealand, Canada. You can take the American examinations they conduct from time to time, and the whole English-speaking world is open to you. This is a fact of life.

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There are today in Singapore, nearly 600 lawyers with practising certificates in a population of 2¼ million. This compares to about 1,000 lawyers for a population of 10 million in West Malaysia. We have many lawyers, but not enough good ones. The reasons are in our recent history.

In 1965, we had 235 lawyers. The numbers have gone up nearly three-fold in a space of 12 years. But the great increase was in the 1970's. In 1968 we started the Asian Dollar market. Between 1970 and 1973, the number of banks and financial institutions proliferated. Companies were incorporated, debentures, loans, mortgages and corporate business boomed for lawyers and accountants as we developed as a financial centre handling nearly US$20 billion, known as the Asian Dollar. Much as I would like to believe that more bright students and their fond parents have decided that they ought to take the Law because the future promises stability and the continuance of the rule of law, the figures tell me a different story. Unexpectedly, despite our manpower planning, we found ourselves short of lawyers. The dimmest, dullest wit can make a living at the Bar and did so comfortably. The attractions of high rewards quickly brought about this switch.

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These figures do not give a complete picture. Every year, an average of about 100 of our best students go on scholarships overseas to universities in Britain, English-speaking North America, Australia, New Zealand, and now West Germany, France, Japan and even Russia. Because Asian parents are careful over their daughters' upbringing, those sent abroad are mostly men. In another five to ten years, whoever occupies the office of Minister for Law will

discover that his best lawyers are young women and not young men. Of the bright young men sent abroad over the last 15 years, only eight have opted for the Law. Three of these 8 were in the last two years.

So we have a curious situation. Because people were conscious that the law is tied more than any other profession to language and to the political system, bright students had opted out of the profession, until the banking boom in 1970-73.

Hence I do not share, Mr. Chairman, your optimism that we will produce the legal experts in all relevant fields of the law Singapore is concerned with, like shipping and banking. With few exceptions the bright ones have opted otherwise, especially the men.

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Our children are already going to schools where more than 75% of the teachers are women. In another five years, 90% of teachers will be women. This will be so even in the secondary schools. The 10% men are the brawny, not brainy ones. They will take the boys out to the playing fields for rugby, soccer, hockey or what have you. The brainy ones who have to run the schools as head masters and senior teachers will be women. That will nearly be the position of the lawyers, unless the trend changes.

The practice of the law is believed to be a tranquil profession, with regular office hours. It is nearly as good as the schools, from 8 to 1; a meal break in between; with long annually, pre-determined school holidays.

This means that in an emergency, if the Minister for Law is not a trained lawyer, I shall be having to look directly to an Attorney-General, who in ten years' time may well be a lady. And she may not like to be summoned at awkward hours of the night. And crises have a strange way of happening at awkward times.

I have no answer to this problem. We have tried several solutions over the last ten years, including an offer of special scholarships to the best universities that any student chooses, provided he or she can score three distinctions at "A" levels. There were no takers, even with less qualifications.

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This problem was noted ten years ago. Perhaps we may be turning the corner. Last year, 1976, two scholars took up this offer, and the year before, 1975, one scholar did law. But perhaps they are bright enough to calculate that there will be 10 to 15 years in which they would have qualified in time to make good within this time-frame. And they will take their chances after that in

management or other cognate professions if the political situation becomes adverse. It is a sobering thought that bright young minds may be calculating in this way.

Another reason for this development is the school system. Streaming took place and still does, as early as 15 plus. Students go into the science or the arts stream. The traditional cultural attitudes of parents and students have made girls believe they ought to be doing Arts. This means that they study English language and literature -- and so they go on with greater ease and facility to the study of the law. The boys have gone into sciences and on to engineering, architecture, and the hard sciences. But this is changing, albeit too slowly.

Finally, some matters nearer the bone. Yours is the one professional body that has the dubious distinction of having a confessed communist, on its governing body. He has admitted he helped a wounded terrorist escape. For some time I have questioned this premise of self-regulating professional bodies. We inherited a system of self-governing guilds and professions from the British. They arose out of British historic experience which the British exported to their empire. It worked with British lawyers and doctors in charge. It was a closed system controlled by British lawyers, engineers, architects and so on. The Freemason's Lodge in Hill Street saw to it. It was a secret society of the ruling

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elite, membership means a dedication to helping each other. Freemasonry demanded, however, amongst its positive aspects, a certain minimum standard of decorum and propriety for the system to work.

In the last few years, from time to time, I have read in the newspapers of advocates and solicitors who were being sought by the police -- their names were not mentioned, even when their clients' accounts were found to be short. It is unbelievable. I have wondered why you, Mr. Attorney have not told the press that they should publish the picture of the man who is being sought, with his name and his address and the last known place he was found frequenting, not necessarily the same thing as his last known address.

All this adds up to the necessity to amend this self-regulation mechanism.

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Voting should be compulsory. This was what we did for general elections in 1959. We had seen how the communists operated. We decided, rightly as it turned out, that compulsory voting would lead to more representative government. The activist requires no encouragement to exercise his right. It is the passive majority who must be told they have got to exercise their rights, or

these rights will be usurped by a minority up to no good. That will cure half the problem.

The second amendment that will have to be passed is what we have already done in the case of the architects and the engineers. The Minister will have the right to appoint a senior government architect or engineer to sit on the governing board, amongst other things, to determine admission and to decide whether a person is fit to continue to practise the profession.

There is with lawyers -- as with jurors, which we have had to abolish, -- an unwillingness to do the unpleasant. If we are to maintain standards of integrity it means axing those who do not measure up to these standards. You know as I do, Mr. Chairman, that when it came to several crunches in the past few years, what the Council did was to flinch from the unpleasant. Instead of seeking to strike a member off the rolls and pressing for it, it has allowed members to be suspended for 6 months, or for a year, or for two years. This is not the way to maintain standards of honourable conduct. Who is to say it is not honourable enough if the lawyers will not? My colleague, the Minister for Law, an honourable and fair gentleman, since you have shown no wish to exercise your right to punish the erring, my minister in charge will nominate a senior legal officer who

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understands the necessity of having to be firm in insisting on high professional standards.

You have one consolation. Whoever succeeds me is not likely to be a lawyer, and to know you and the legal profession and its shortcomings so intimately. If I fail, you have seen what has happened elsewhere in Asia and in Africa. Only foolish students believe that their riots change governments. The general and the soldiers know better. Worse, sometimes, it is not even a general, but only a half-colonel. If I succeed, then the next Prime Minister will inherit a sophisticated economy. Without a sound grounding in the theories of economies and practice of finance, he will not be qualified to direct the government policies.

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CUT-OFF POINTS FOR ADMISSION TO COURSES 1959-1968

	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968
Arts	24	24	21	22	20	21	24	23	26	27
Science	23	23	13	14	22	18	22	25	24	27
Medicine	36*	34*	34*	37*	37*	30*	34*	39*	36*	37*
Dentistry	20*	19*	18*	25*	25*	25*	23*	34*	32*	30*
Law	19	18	15	15	17	23	21	26	25	22

* Admission to Year I

CUT-OFF POINTS FOR ADMISSION TO COURSES 1969-1976

	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976
Arts	30	30	30	32	32	32	33	34
Science	30	30	32	32	32	32	32	32
Medicine	47+	40+	38+	38+	40+	40+	40+	49+
Dentistry	40	35	35	35	32+	32+	34+	40+
Law	32	32	35	35	38	38	40	44
Business Administration	35	30	35	35	35	35	38	38
Accountancy	37	30	35	39	39	39	40	43
Architecture	30	30	32	32	33	35	35	40
Building/ Estate Mang	40	30	32	32	33	33	35	35
Engineering	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Chemical Engineering							40	40

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* Admission to Year II