ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW AT THE CONFERMENT OF HONORARY DEGREE IN LAW FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS IN AMHERST, AT BOSTON, ON SATURDAY, 15 OCTOBER 1977

This honorary degree from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst is due to the drive and efforts of the people of Singapore for which I have been credited. They translated into reality plans drawn up by experts and specialists from the World Bank and other international agencies. These plans were designed to create an industrial and servicing sector for an economy based largely on agriculture, trade and British military bases spending, and which was by 1960 unable to cope with an unemployment rate of 12½ % in a population of two million growing at 4% per annum. A group of practical and dedicated administrators reshaped these plans to make the best of local material and conditions. It was fortunate that there were enough trained indigenous manpower to put ideas into action and bring about rapid growth.

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Per capita income, which reflects, if broadly, material progress for Singaporeans, went up from US$450 in 1965 to US$2,500 in 1975, measured at market prices. If adjustments were made for inflation, the per capita income went up by about four times in 10 years.

This could not have been done without the booming economies of the industrial nations of America, Western Europe and Japan throughout this period. It was an unprecedented period of sustained expansion. Singapore's external trade expanded at more than 15% per annum through the 1960's up to 1973 with the energy crisis.

Since 1973, further economic development in Singapore has been at modest rates, averaging 6% in real terms. Much of this was provided by the momentum of what was achieved before the oil crisis.

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In per capita terms, Singapore, with a population now of 2.2 million, is only slightly better off than the population of the main cities of developing East and Southeast Asia. But in per capita terms compared to a total country, Singapore has been uncomfortably placed with middle-income countries of the Mediterranean with a large percentage of workers in the agricultural sector, like Spain, Greece and Israel. This is a dubious distinction. It is this absence of a

sizeable agricultural population which has distorted the comparative per capita picture.

However, the price for this progress has been a change in the attitudes of Singaporeans as they enter the consumer society. Amongst the more unexpected changes was the adoption of contemporary Western attitudes to work by our young. There is the same desire to avoid taking jobs which are considered demeaning or are dirty or heavy. However adequately compensated these jobs may be, young workers prefer less pay for easier, more pleasant conditions of work. So domestic service, garbage removal, road making, construction work exposed to the weather, these are now to be done by guest workers, though there is 4% unemployment.

Perhaps if we had not made the learning of the English language compulsory in all schools, exposing a whole generation to the mass media of the English-speaking world, television, newspapers and magazines, these values and attitudes may not have been absorbed. But without the English language, we might not have succeeded in teaching so quickly a whole generation the knowledge and skills which made them able to work the machines brought in from the industrial countries of the West.

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Singapore did not succeed as well as the Japanese in preserving the ethics and values of their traditional elders. Perhaps, in some other place, another people are succeeding in making the transition without the widespread introduction of a foreign language. And if they then fend off foreign attitudes and lifestyles, they will be an infinitely superior model for rapid development and modernisation.

Finally, may I thank you, Mr. Chancellor, President, and also Senator Edward Kennedy for his warm message of praise and congratulations. I have no more than a suspicion that perhaps his visit to Singapore some 11 years ago may have been the scene that finally led to this occasion.

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