TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH MADE BY
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE
PEOPLE'S ACTION PARTY, MR LEE KUAN YEW,
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Comrade Chairman and Comrades,

Our comrade from Changi Branch raised two points. I do not know whether you followed his Mandarin on the headsets. They are cri de coeur, a cry from the heart, of the older generation, which I understood so well. First he said, "Why are we retiring our well-established, well-known leaders because they are the people who get the support of the masses." He knows Rajaratnam, he knows Goh Keng Swee. He does not like to see them disappear. He said, "Look at China, look at all these big countries. Their leaders are in their 80s, still vigorous, still active."

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Next, he raised the question of degenerating moral standards: gambling, horse racing, drugs, health clubs, sexual permissiveness, and the kind of lifestyle along Orchard Road. He represents a generation that understood, recognised, upheld certain basic values for which I have great sympathy. Singapore had 2.8 million tourists in 1981, more than its total population of 2.4 million. China, with 1,000 million, had less than one million tourists. At the same time, the Chinese

are complaining of degenerative influences in Canton, coming from Hong Kong, and in other big cities like Shanghai where large numbers of tourists and seamen visit them. We have to learn to cope with the results of new technology in transportation. We deal toughly with drug offenders. We cannot control video tapes as easily as films. We must do more to preserve moral standards, better moral education at home and in the schools. We cannot have the benefits of tourists without their less desirable lifestyles.

The world does not stand still. It changes. People get old. It would be ideal if we were able to stay as vigorous as when we were in our 40s - mature emotionally plus great physical and mental vigor. Then we can carry on forever. But we cannot.

Every year, not only do we grow older, others grow up. Every year, 55,000 new voters reach 21 and are added on to the electoral register. They were born 21 years ago. They have different impulses, different ideas, different experiences. By 1992, those below 30 years in 1982 will be the majority of the voters. Unlike the older generation, they would not be as familiar with Goh Keng Swee or Rajaratnam or me. Our duty is to make the party and its leadership relevant to this growing generation, sensitive to their aspirations and

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capable of mobilising them behind the steps that must be taken to make Singapore a better place for all.

We cannot do it as in China. There, the old leaders of the Long March just held on. They knocked out those comrades not in their tight group. Mao knocked down Deng Xiaoping twice. The 'Gang of Four' nearly succeeded in seizing power. They thought Hua Guofeng was going to be on their side when Mao died. But Hua Guofeng was wiser. He knew that they did not have enough power. He went with their opponents. Nevertheless, six years after 1976, Hua Guofeng is out of power.

But Deng Xiaoping has not got Li Xiannian (77 years) and Ye Jianying (85 years) to retire, with him, into a consultative committee with advisory powers. Those on this committee received the same salary, same perks, same houses, same cars. They prefer to stay on in the Standing Committee. This adds to uncertainty for the future.

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The PAP old guards will not be fulfilling their duty just by hanging on to power. Unless we throw up men of ability, dedication and drive, men who can make the party and a younger leadership relevant to the Singapore of the 1990s, Singapore is in trouble. There is no alternative party that can possibly provide

sound leadership for Singapore. For over 23 years since 1959, the PAP has been synonymous with the government. And the government is Singapore. The core group of men who have led the PAP are not indestructible. We can go on for several more years. Just how many are in the lap of the gods.

Five years ago, when Rajaratnam came back from an overseas journey, I would meet him the next day. Over lunch, he would fill me up on what had been reported in despatches. Now, I let two to three days elapse, to let him recover from jet lag. Ten years ago, when I returned from a long journey, the next day I was on the phone exchanging views, making decisions. Now, I take the first day quietly doing paper work, for I need two days to recover from jet lag. Of course, I have the advantage of experience, of seasoned judgment, of knowing what is important and ignoring what is unimportant. But my critical faculties alert me against stretching myself out till I am in my 70s. We live in the tropics. We do not have a winter. In those countries with a cold winter, for three to four months a year, people slow down somewhat, like entering a refrigerator to hibernate. Here, in the heat, we burn ourselves up.

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It is our recognition of the mortality of men and their declining capacity that makes us want to get a younger team in place. I am not saying that the old guard is washed-out and drained. They will be around until the younger team is

ready to take over. The younger team does not have to take over, not for a few years. Meanwhile, they are acquiring the experience; they are learning how to administer, what to do, what not to do, how to come to an objective judgment of a different situation.

Do not forget that the process of injecting new blood has been going on since 1965. In 1965, we became independent. Barisan Sosialis boycotted Parliament. Then they resigned. In 1966, 7 by-elections, we put in fresh men, Yeoh Ghim Seng amongst others. He is not getting younger either. 1967, 5 by-elections. In the 1968 General Elections, we put in 15 new men. 1970, 5 by-elections, we put new talent in. 1972 and 1976 General Elections, 12 to 15 new men in each. 1977, 2 by-elections; 1979, 7 by-elections; 1980 General Elections, 18 new men. The urgency to test out MPs and ministers started from 1976.

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Let me repeat what I have said. The older generation leadership came from all over Southeast Asia. It took me a long time to discover the significance of that. If we leave it to the ordinary processes of recruitment, we shall fail. Amongst the MPs and ministers above 45 years old, Singaporeans are in the minority. Our talent came from a wide field outside.

Let me be brutal. You either have the talent or you do not. My job is to find out, quickly, whether a person responsible for the fate of over two million Singaporeans has got it in him. If he has not, I am wasting my time and his. Whether you teach a man how to play golf, or a dog how to be a sniffer of drugs, the first thing you must know is has he got it.

I remember in 1967 Dr Goh Keng Swee, as Minister of Defence, was given four champion Labradors by an American armaments firm. He sent them to the Army Training School to learn to sniff drugs. Alas, these champion dogs were bred for good looks. They were not bred for intelligence or ability to smell. After a week, the trainer said, "Let us not waste time. Give them away."

For a hundred plus years, talent came into Singapore from India, Sri Lanka, Guangdong, Xiamen, Malaysia, Indonesia. Today, of the first seven on the protocol list - President, Prime Minister, the two Deputy Prime Ministers, Chief Justice, Speaker, Minister of Finance Hon Sui Sen, or eight if we include Minister for the Environment Ong Pang Boon - I am the only one born in Singapore. This is of profound significance: that had we depended on only Singapore talent, six of the seven top slots would be vacant, and we would be scouting around looking for lesser men to fill these jobs.

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Of course, any opposition group also has to select from the Singapore pool. So unless we have been willfully blind or deaf, it is doubtful if they are gifted men in their 40s capable of political leadership hiding out on the wings. The younger men in Cabinet are not here because they are my proteges or because they have wormed their way into the hearts of Dr Goh, Rajaratnam or me. The MPs know me. I am impervious to flattery. I have a duty: to assemble the best team to take charge of the government of Singapore.

If I were a young Singaporean of 40, I would approach my office in the government with considerable trepidation. We can find the best team in Singapore. Yet they can fail. After 23 years of office, I have learned how to judge a good man with a good mind and his heart in the right place. I study his past record: what has he done, at what age did he do what, not simply the examinations he took and how he passed them, but what he has achieved since; how did he manage people, how did he interact with people, has he inspired his fellow workers and subordinates, has he good judgment? Has he strength of character? Is he selfless? Is he committed to any cause beyond his career? I know which Minister can do what job best. In the 36 to 46 age group, we have combed, searched and re-searched. We have got the best of that crop, the highest helicopter quality or vision. You have heard and read Jeyaretnam in Parliament. You have heard Chiam See Tong prattling about democracy. They

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are like the old Dakota DC-3. They can reach 7,000 feet and that's their political level. They cannot go higher. Nor can they travel faster than 250 mph.

I know that the younger team can go up to 35,000 feet like a Boeing 707 and travel at 650 mph. They are not yet of 747 size, but they have the B-707 height, speed and range. Unfortunately, I cannot tell what problems they will face, or how they will surmount them, just as I could not say in 1959 that we would succeed, or that in 1965 when presented with an almost unsolvable problem, we would solve it. They have certain advantages. We have consolidated the party. We have strengthened the organisation network of the government throughout Singapore. They can reach out to every constituency. We have a better civil service than before because we have been training and choosing the best students each year.

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The whole task of human resources development is to train and to grade people, and to know which man can do what job. Take the SAF. When we started in 1965, it was confusion. Slowly, we built the nucleus. Then more quickly, through nucleus, we can tell who can do what, who will make a combat officer, who will make a good staff officer, who has got qualities of leadership with both combat and staff potential. We have improved our capacity to assess officers year by year.

So the instruments to tackle problems have improved. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was zero in 1965, can today, given time, put up a brief, on almost any major problem confronting Singapore. How was it done? Not by selecting any old person who joined, which was what happened in the early days. Division 2 officers resigned to become diplomats. We had little choice, so we took them. But they still had the cruising height of a DC-3, a Dakota. Just by changing names you have not changed a Dakota to a B-707. So we started looking for people with the B-707 cruising level. Slowly, we spotted them. Now, there are enough, not abundant, but adequate, to concentrate on major problems.

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So with the SAF. It was zero in 1965. Today, we have got young men doing very big jobs, young men with the potential to do the jobs better than older men who may be out of their depths.

What we do not know is whether the problems which will confront the younger team in the 1990s will be so huge, so enormous that even the old team, 20 years younger, as vigorous as in 1962, would still fail. Then they would be unjustly condemned. If I were a younger man aged 40, I would be chary of the future. The external circumstances can be so complex and adverse that the problems become unsolvable. We can have worldwide depression. It cannot be ruled out. The banking system of the world is in great peril. The big banks in America, Western Europe and Japan have lent $500 billion to Third World countries who have used up this money not to increase their productive capacity to export and to pay back the loans. Most have just consumed the money, burnt it up in imported oil. Others have looted parts of big contracts and kept the money in secret accounts. The fact remains that the loans cannot be repaid. Another $100 billion lent to East European countries, like Poland, also cannot be repaid. So the banking system is in a fragile state. If it collapses, trade will suffer. We may go back to barter trade because there is no international currency people can trust. Such grave problems may come upon them, that they may fail,

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not because they were not good but because even the old team, at their prime, could not have solved them.

I want to add that like old cadres, I am deeply attached to old comrades, particularly those who went through fire with me, who I know are men to be trusted. In battle, they had not let me down. Chor Yeok Eng and Chan Chee Seng are two such people. Without them, their support and their stoutheartedness, the PAP would not have had a majority, we would have been finished as a government. Yet, faced with the problem of self-renewal, I have appointed two members to office: Ch'ng Jit Koon as my Senior Parliamentary Secretary to help organize the PA and the CCCs, MCs and RCs; Wan Soon Bee as political secretary. I have to ask Chor Yeok Eng and Chan Chee Seng to step down. It grieves me. But if I do not do it and simply add to the numbers in government, people will ask: has he gone soft in the head? Or has he become like some Eighth Route Army commanders who stayed in power and kept out all those who were not in the Long March?

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The attitude of the old communists is: where were you when we were fighting the Japanese? You were not there. Then you do not deserve it. Is that a wise criterion? We can ask where the younger ministers were when we fought the communists and the communalists? They were in university; some were in

school. The key question you and I must ask is: can they do this job? I know who cannot because they have not the capacity.

The yardstick is: who can best protect and advance the interests of Singaporeans? By asking this question, we shall get a good team together. They may not be as rounded, as multifaceted in their skills, as the original team. That must come with challenges and experience. That original team was special, comprising men who had been accumulated over many years of resentment against the British colonial system, like a dam that held up large logs banging to break through the dam. Furthermore, the original team was solidly backed by a people who had suffered. The older people knew the meaning of hunger, privation, hardship and unemployment. Hence, they were willing to work hard and long for very little.

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Our new generation Singaporean only knows that if he married and registered with HDB, he can expect a flat in three years. We can meet these expectations for another 8-10 years. But after we have built up the whole of Singapore, they will have to inherit their parent's homes. If they do not understand this, or the new leadership cannot get the message clearly across, then Singaporeans will quarrel amongst themselves and the economy will collapse. There will be little free land after we have built another 8 Ang Mo Kio's or

400,000 units by about 1995. One day we shall reach the limits, saturation point. It is not that the younger team is not as imaginative or as creative as the old. It is just that the old team inherited from the British Armed Forces vacant land, with squatters who were easy to resettle. The younger team will inherit high-rises on which they can only build higher high-rises. The net increase is limited. We reclaimed land. Can they not reclaim more land? Maybe a bit here and there, at margins. But the major reclamations - the easy shallow waters - have been exhausted. Now it is deep water. You just go out of the caissons, the breakwater, and you will find the seabed drops away. So landfill is expensive.

Another example of a change in attitudes: the younger voters do not understand that the PAP, or any other party, must present a balanced slate of Chinese, Malay, and Indian candidates. The old voters, like our cadre from Changi, understood that there must be a balance, there must be accommodation. The young voter wants as his MP a well-educated man he thinks can better get things done for him. Jabbar, a proven trade union leader with PAP backing, in Radin Mas in December 1980, against that lightweight candidate, did not get a good majority. They did not think him educated enough. A younger generation in Anson wanted priority for their homes and protested when we could not promise this by voting against the PAP.

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As it turned out, it was not a bad thing for the PAP that Jeyaretnam was elected. I have come to the conclusion that we have to ensure that several better and more intelligent opposition members are in Parliament. Without opposition members, the younger team has no sparring partners. They need real sparring partners to keep fit and agile. We may have to make some changes to bring this about.

There is one constant in life: change. Change is the only constant in life. There will be new issues, new expectations, new norms. So long as the electorate are willing to work and earn what they want, a thinking leadership can get the electorate to face up to realities and succeed. The final handing of the baton is not going to happen immediately. But it cannot be delayed beyond this decade.

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At 65, most chief executives of big corporations step down. One can stretch it a few years with political leaders. But for how long? Brenzhnev went on till 75. Was it wise? The years I have left are best spent on testing and getting better men to take over the task, not hanging on. That is best for Singapore. We all have children. We all have given hostages to fortune. If our children are grown up, we have grandchildren - further hostages to fortune.

In a totally changed world - and a vastly changed Singapore - our talented must be exposed to gain experience so that the leadership team can work out competent and realistic solutions to almost unsolveable problems. We must find more problem solvers, leaders who must be able to communicate what they have worked out and muster, marshall, and mobilise people behind their solutions - the way as we have done in the last 23 years.

The job of the party cadres is to ensure that the cadres and the leaders stay as a team. The one lesson that we have kept on impressing on them is: Do not go for numbers in an organisation; go for the quality of the men, their loyalty, their steadfastness in crisis. When the younger team has weathered their first crisis, on their own, you and I will breathe easier because we shall know that they can see Singapore through another 20 years.

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