SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW FOR THE OFFICIAL REOPENING OF THE SINGAPORE RECREATION CLUB (SRC) ON SUNDAY, 13 JUL 86

In June 1883, over a hundred years ago, a few Eurasians met to found a sports and recreation club. They named it the Singapore Recreation Club. A year later, a pavilion was built on this site and the membership roll was 37. Our population then was around 140,000. The club has grown and developed with the rest of Singapore.

Mr President, your club occupies an historic site. On this Padang, Governors took the salute at parades on the king or queen's birthday. There were regular evening military displays with Beating the Retreat. At the City Hall, Lord Louis Mountbatten accepted the surrender on 12 September 1945 of the Japanese Armed Forces. Also at the City Hall, my colleagues and I were first sworn into office on 5 June 1959.

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What photographs of those days could not convey were the smells from the Stamford Canal and the beach at low tide. After more than a century of pollution, we are succeeding in cleaning up our rivers and canals. Fish, prawns

and crabs have come back to the Singapore River. This is the result of years of painstaking work by the Ministry of the Environment, relocating squatters, hawkers, stopping the rearing of pigs and ducks, and connecting toilets to sewers.

In the last century, tigers used to attack Singaporeans so frequently that complaints reached London and were reported in the London Examiner of 24 April 1858. The Governor in 1859 replied that tigers were not a serious problem, as not more than 200 persons were devoured every late 1920s on Punggol beach. But nobody saw the tiger. I suspect the tiger saw the ugly Singaporean, decided he was not worth the eating, and swam back to Johore.

After the war, in 1955, this club admitted non-Eurasians as subscribing members, membership without the right to vote. Eight years later, in 1963, ordinary membership accorded to all in Singapore. Your club now has about 1,200 members of whom only 240, one-fifth, are Eurasians. It has become more a Singaporean than an Eurasian Club. This is the way our history evolved. We did not pass laws, or issue orders. In a quiet sensible way, your members brought the club up to date and moved into the mainstream of Singapore life. You have chosen this route voluntarily. Others like the Indian Association and the Ceylon Sports Club, which also use public land, have admitted associate

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members, without voting rights. It does nobody any harm. We are a society relaxed about our diverse communal origins, and we feel no compulsion to make ourselves uniform through forcing the pace of integration or assimilation. Indeed, we have not even designed a national dress.

The Eurasian community in Singapore has declined by half as a percentage of the population. In 1940, before the war, we had 8,145 Eurasians or 1.08 per cent of the population. In 1980, we had 10,172 Eurasians or 0.42 per cent of the population.

Many have emigrated to Australia, New Zealand, Britain and elsewhere. It was the great political changes of the 1950s and 1960s. Like other Eurasian communities in India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia and Indonesia, they felt uncertain of the future and insecure in the nationalist fervour of new independent countries. Many Eurasians who left Singapore were of more than average ability with specialist skills and considerable experience. Their emigration was a loss for Singapore. Other minorities, like the Jews, also emigrated. This was also a loss to Singapore. I believe the position has settled and stabilised, and your numbers should not decline further. Indeed, with the increasing numbers of inter-racial marriages of our students with white students they meet abroad, your numbers should increase. There is a difference though. Many children of such

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marriages now carry the Asian surnames of their fathers. They may consider themselves Chinese, or Indians or Asians. This is a matter for time and society to settle.

This club has always been a sports and recreation club. You have been best at hockey. Before and after the war, your were supreme at the game, as indeed you still are.

My friend, Eddie Barker, has told me of some of your prominent sportsmen: Mr Noel Hay. He represented Singapore at soccer and hockey in the early 1930s. He played for Malaya against the Indian Olympic Hockey team in 1932.

Mr Ronnie Barth, the best hockey full-back this club has produced. He played for Singapore before and after the war. He had the eye of a hawk and seldom missed converting a short corner.

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Mr Freddie Milne, who has done much for this club in committee and on the sports field where he umpired at cricket and hockey.

Mr Jocelyn de Souza, aged 86, is the second oldest member of the Club. He was a hockey player who joined the Club in 1917.

Mr President, I hope this Padang will always be a padang. The backdrop has changed dramatically. St. Andrew's Cathedral still stands, but Raffles City towers 70 storeys above it and you. The seaside has been pushed back by over a kilometre. A tunnel is now under the Padang for our mass transit system.

With the new high-rises sprouting up around you, try not too drastically to alter your colonial period building. To see the Padang green and undiminished, with the SCC and the SRC, buildings of another era, guarding two ends of it, is to be reassured. It is a piece of the Singapore I knew, a reassuring sight of the familiar in a vastly changed city.

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