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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR LABOUR, MR. ONG PANG BOON,
AT THE 13TH NATIONAL DAY DINNER OF THE TELOK AYER CONSTITUENCY
HELD AT THE HONG LIM GREEN COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SATURDAY,
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Today, we celebrate the 13th Anniversary of our independence. We have cause to be proud of our achievements. Our success is written in our national statistics: the GNP figures, the expansion of trade, the rising annual tonnage of shipping at our port, the growth of industrial sectors, the number of housing units built by the HDB and HUDC, the number of schools built, and the diversification of the educational system to sustain industrial growth. These are among the developments that lead others to classify us no longer as a developing nation but as one that has developed.

We believe we still have much to do before we can consider ourselves a developed nation. But what is said of us, even if we do not quite agree, is a tribute to Singapore, and should spur us on to greater efforts. This tribute is all the more encouraging because we have no natural resources and have shown what can constructively be done with human endeavour and organised ingenuity.

Yet, we must never take our success for granted. We cannot assume that the relatively good life we have had in past years will always continue. As with the life of an individual, so it is with that of a nation: there are good times and there are bad times. This is the unavoidable rhythm of life, a fact recognised especially by those who have lived through the last war, the emergency of 1948, the constitutional struggles with the British colonialists and later with communist united front over the fate of Singapore, and the uncertainties that surrounded the early years of our nation's independence and orderly development. All this is little known in its full force to most of those who grew up since independence, either because they have not read their history, or simply because human memory tends to be short and frail. Yet, this is a very

important generation /2

important generation, for on their shoulders must eventually rest the responsibilities of keeping Singapore viable. It is not merely a matter of having a few capable leaders who run the country: it is also a question of collective responsibility of every Singaporean in every walk of life in the sense that the strength of a nation is the strength of its individual citizens.

The factors that will continue to challenge us are both internal and external. External factors are not within our means to control, but not entirely without our power to influence or shape. The greatest immediate threat to our future is the growth of protectionism. We can on our own and through ASEAN play our role in keeping the markets of the industrialised countries open to the produce and manufactures of the developing countries. Liberalisation of trade within ASEAN will benefit the signatory nations and help to convince other countries of our belief in freer trade as the key to ASEAN economic development and world trade expansion.

ASEAN economic development is a decisive prerequisite for political stability in the region. Politically stable and prosperous neighbours are in the permanent interests of Singapore. We can contribute towards our own national security by playing our role in regional economic development and by ensuring that Singapore will never be turned into a base for subverting our neighbours.

The external environment is not ideal. But it is sufficiently adequate for us to look at the future with sensible optimism, if we look at our problems squarely in the face and take realistic measures to resolve them.

One of the keys to our future lies in the will and character of the Singaporeans. In an increasingly competitive situation, we have responded to the challenges in a positive way. However, in our necessary emphasis on economic development, we have produced some unintended results. We can only estimate their extent, as we cannot quantify them. In fact, we only know about them through such manifestations as complaints of shoddy workmanship and job-hopping among skilled and unskilled workers, instances of dishonest practices by company directors, business executives and professional people, and a lack of a sense of service to society among some doctors. All this sadly points to lapses and deficiencies in moral standards, a loss in the pride of workmanship, craftsmanship, and proper

professionalism leading to a decline in the sense and feeling of humanity. In addition, there are signs of a lack of commitment to Singapore, the disturbing evidence of which appears, for instance, in the number of people who have migrated overseas.

These developments are manifestations of weaknesses in the evolving social framework. It is time, therefore, to take stock of what is happening. In the quest for economic growth, within the context of our internal and external situations, we have rightly stressed meritocracy, the development of applied science and technology, and the spirit of economic enterprise. But it was not intended that in the process, we should weaken the sense of commitment to our country in the quest for a better life, lose pride in our work, and forget our morality and humanity in the achievement of results. Economic growth alone will not sustain Singapore as a nation, if it is achieved at the expense of moral and human values, and commitment to the Republic. It is, therefore, time that we looked into these questions so as to improve on the value framework underpinning our economic development. We need to have an achievement-orientated society. But for it to be also a healthy cohesive national community, we must seek a proper balance between the needs for economic and social growth.

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