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SPEECH BY MR EUGENE YAP GIAU CHENG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (TRADE & INDUSTRY) AND (THE ENVIRONMENT), AT THE MOUNTBATTEN CONSTITUENCY NATIONAL DAY DINNER AT THE OASIS SEAFOOD PALACE RESTAURANT, KALLANG PARK ON FRIDAY, 4 AUGUST 1989 AT 7.30 PM

We are gathered here tonight to celebrate Singapore's 24th birthday. In fact, it was only like yesterday that we were celebrating Singapore's 23rd. It's true to the saying isn't it that time flies. I've been your Member of Parliament for nearly eleven years. Look at it another way, we are all nearly eleven years older today. Before we know, a new Member of Parliament will be here to replace me and speaking to you from this rostrum. Yes, time passes very fast indeed - the environment around us; the scenes around Singapore and life in Singapore have changed so fast that it is becoming more and more difficult to recall old Singapore because it has been mostly replaced by a more modern and new one. Some of the things we did, some of the beliefs we had in the past are also gradually fading from our memories. It is a pity because some of these things, at times even a common problem, can help keep us united and working together for the good of the community. Remember the eclipse of the moon in the good old days? Some of you would probably recall in those days when there was an eclipse of the moon, we almost invariably hear some kind of noise, some kind of din, far away in the background created by a whole community within a village beating that odd drum; that rusty tin can or the discarded van by the roadside. They all worked together in concert to create as loud a noise as possible to frighten the so-called dog that was about to swallow the moon in the hope that it will throw it out again to give us moonlight. We don't do that anymore today because we all

know through our geography lessons that the eclipse of the moon is simply the shadow of the earth cast on the moon by the sun's light. But the shadow that we saw was the mouth of that dog that threatened and it was that foreboding that drew the community together to act in concert. Try getting the people to do the same things today. You can't. It would be near impossible. The more cynical among us would of course dismiss this old practice as we have better things to do. So we go about doing our own things. We get a little bit more individualistic in the process. As long as it is a myth to a person, he does not bother. Of course, we have better things to do, but I suspect that for many of us, we would spend most of our evenings watching the television. Not bad, but let me put it to you that if we go on doing this, the side-effect of all this entertainment that we get is going to help us bring up, besides the more informed adult, also the more individualistic being. It's a complex social problem. But one thing for sure, this new being is expected to be more informed, more dissenting, and harder to govern.

I think it was easier to govern our forefathers in the past. Not only was the culture different, people were less educated and they were more concerned with eking out a living. Under those conditions, I presume the British needed only to provide that kind of education that was sufficient to churn out enough of the "chai hoos" to man the civil service and the trading posts. The rest, even if they left school halfway, was not much of a worry. The British probably accepted the fact that they would eventually end up as labourers, sweating themselves out carrying sacks of rice, bags of cement and so on at the wharves as a way to earn their keep. It was easier to govern such a group of people because they were easier to lead, more ready to believe. And in order to survive, more ready to compromise. For the sake of their survival, they compromised a lot.

They were probably even very innovative. Try asking a person who knows no English to pronounce Queen Elizabeth Walk. It will be a difficult business for him. But he got on nevertheless, he didn't quite try to pronounce Queen Elizabeth Walk. What did he do? He gave the road another name. So I would imagine that when an educated China man hops onto a rickshaw, and said he wanted to go to the Queen Elizabeth Walk, the rickshaw man would have asked if it was "Gor Chang Chew Kar Lor". Why "Gor Chang Chew Kar"? Because he identified the Queen Elizabeth Walk with the five huge trees planted along that road. Early Singaporeans enjoyed the evening walk under the cool shade of these trees and the breeze from the sea. And so it was with Serangoon Garden Estate. How do you expect the illiterate to pronounce this mouthful? So he coined the term "Ang Sah Lee". Why? Because somewhere near the Serangoon Garden Estate, there was a fairly large piece of land fenced in by red zinc roofing sheets used as an open-air theatre. That was a very popular open-air theatre in the past. Try a few more. Fort Canning - "Ong Ke Sua Kar" meaning "at the foot of the Governor's House", because of the old Governor's house on top of the hill called King George V Park; Balestier Road - "Tua Pek Kong Lor" - we all know even today there is this big "Tua Pek Kong" temple along that road; Clifford Pier - "Ang Teng Beh Tow Lor" - attributed to the red warning light used as a signal there; Upper Circular Road - "Be Chia Koi" - this was once the terminal for horse-drawn carriages. So you see, how a not very educated lot of people were so practical and survival-conscious, they innovated. That was the type of people that was. Today, most of us are more educated. As a result, we want to be precise. You want to go to Serangoon Garden Way. The taxi man will very likely know exactly where to go. Today, when you want a taxi driver's licence, you are made to go through an English test, which includes road names. Most of us are more precise today. More informed. And we tend to want to know the reasons for doing things. That is what education

has done for us. It's good but it has also made governing harder. However, it is not all that bad. We can't avoid it. We can't possibly live with the old education system today. We know for a fact that if we want our economy to continue to grow we have to keep on not only providing education to the people but we must keep on refining the system. If we want to compete, we cannot only produce the "chai hoos". On the other hand, we cannot have a system that only produces good engineers or doctors. Of course, you need the engineer to design the television set. But you also need good skilled craftsman to make the cabinet and the well trained electrician, the wireman to link up the components, and so on. So it becomes compulsory for us to have a system to train every child in such a way that when he completes his education, he would have sufficient training to contribute his best to whatever he does. There is no choice. There has to be provision for the needs of our economy so that we can compete with the world. It would not be much good if we can only produce the best engineer to give the best designed television on paper. If that happens, we face a crisis because we do not have the right people to form up a team - the craftsmen, the electricians, and so on to produce the product. You cannot hope to give shape to the engineer's design on paper, no matter how perfect the design is. So the days of the "chai hoos" are gone and gone forever. The days of easy government are also gone and gone forever. Instead comes a more questioning society which demands more skilful government as well.

So what does it take to govern Singapore successfully? Given the very competitive nature of the world, and internally, the perpetual problem of a total absence of natural resources, worse still, the very limited number of skilled, honest and able men, it will be an uphill task to run and govern Singapore. As industries become more sophisticated, and have to constantly modernise and compete for the very limited markets, both inside and outside Singapore, they too have to recruit better and better men.

The universities and the schools, the hospitals and the medical centres and all the other industries will also be doing likewise. There will be fewer and fewer able and capable men left who will be prepared to move into the more uncertain world of politics where not only integrity and ability are demanded of them but a lot of self-sacrifice as well. Can these people be found? Possible, but difficult. However, standards cannot be compromised and Singaporeans can ensure this by supporting only good and sincere men. For the future, it would appear that the people, the voters, will play a big role in deciding who they want to represent them in Parliament. If we select our men carefully, then we can get value for our votes because we know that we have a group of people in Parliament who can stand up to the challenges of the future where even the Meet-the-People sessions will not only be a session where you go to get the odd taxi licence or the hawker licence. It may well be a session where men and women go to seek the thinking of his Member of Parliament on various issues. Others would probably write to their MPs asking them to represent their views in Parliament. The future MP will be a very busy man. Besides listening to various views, he will also have to be manifestly present in the constituency and be seen to be working. The burden on a politician, whether he be from the PAP or an opposition party, will be great in the future. But whatever it is, for our own survival, the bottomline must be, whoever is the leader, PAP or opposition, there must be a real love for the country. There must be this element of loyalty, hardwork, integrity and ability. We cannot allow anyone to destroy the country through sheer self-interest. Such self-interest would drive away good and honest men who may not want to risk their future in such a system. We will then end up with mediocres. That is bad for the country.

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