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Singapore Government

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**SPEECH BY BG (RES) GEORGE YONG-BOON YEO, MINISTER OF STATE
(FINANCE) AND (FOREIGN AFFAIRS) AT THE ALJUNIED GRC
NATIONAL DAY DINNER AT SIN LEONG RESTAURANT
ON 5 AUGUST 1989 AT 8.00 PM**

Introduction

In August last year, Encik Wan Hussin invited Chin Harn Tong and myself to Kg Ubi's National Day Dinner at Neptune Theatre Restaurant. We were then campaigning for the General Elections, as a team of three candidates. We called ourselves the A Team. Since then, all three of us have gotten to know each other well, and not only us but also our supporters. Tonight, for the first time, we are celebrating National Day as a GRC. It is a happy occasion, like a big family re-union.

This is a good time for us to reflect on the past and the future.

The Past

There is no doubt that we have done very well as a country. Most of us are proud to be Singaporean when we are overseas. When I was studying at the Harvard Business School a few years ago, I was surprised at the number of business case studies written on Singapore - SIA, NOL, SBS, HDB and others. Being the only Singaporean in class, I was called upon as a specialist every time Singapore was discussed. I naturally felt very proud.

Our national servicemen and our reservists are also very proud of being Singaporean when they are overseas. When they are in Singapore, they complain a lot about all kinds of things. But when they are overseas, especially when foreigners are present, it is quite remarkable how on the ball they become.

I visited an SAF unit on training in a foreign country not long ago. A few generals from that host country were also present to observe our troops at an exercise. Our soldiers - mostly reservists - performed very well. Why? Because they knew they were representing Singapore.

In 24 short years, we have become a nation which other nations respect and admire. We are now an NIC or an NIE. Sometimes we are called a young tiger, sometimes a young dragon. It is a great achievement. The economy is doing well. There is racial harmony. There are problems of course, but they are small compared to the problems which Singaporeans faced in the past.

Every time I talk to the older MPs, some still serving, others retired like Hj Yacob, Hj Arif Suradi, Hj Mansor Sukaimi and the older grassroots leaders like Loh Shu Cheow, Teo Juay Kiang and Charlie Foo, I am reminded how big were the problems they faced in the 50's, 60's and 70's and how much their determination and hard work made possible today's Singapore.

The Future

What of the future? External conditions are on the whole favourable. With glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union, there is a general relaxation of political tension in the world. East and Southeast Asia have made

much progress and are likely to continue making good progress despite the recent setback in China. All this is good for us because trade will grow and Singapore will prosper with it.

We cannot prosper if others do not prosper. This is an important point for us to remember. While we invite Hongkongers who wish to emigrate to choose Singapore as a destination, our intention is not to make conditions more difficult for Hongkong or China. That will be short-sighted indeed. We want Hongkong and China to prosper because that is good for trade and good for us. But if Hongkongers want to leave Hongkong anyway, it is better for them to come to Singapore and remain in the region than for them to cross the vast Pacific Ocean to North America and Australia. Then they will be lost to Asia. By coming here, they will continue to contribute to the prosperity of East and Southeast Asia. By air, it takes only three hours from Singapore to Hongkong, which is about the time it takes to fly from Hongkong to Beijing.

Those who argue that we should instead encourage professionals and skilled workers from our ASEAN neighbours to come are wrong. If we drain our neighbours of their able people, that will harm their economic development. That is the last thing we want to do because we have a strong interest in their prosperity. The more dynamic their economies, the better it is for us. If they are in trouble, we will also be in trouble. It will therefore be very unwise and un-neighbourly of us to actively encourage immigration from our ASEAN neighbours.

We must also be very sensitive to the multi-racial character of our society. No group should be made to feel threatened as a result of our new immigration policy. If we manage the programme well, all groups will benefit and Singapore's future will be bright.

Conclusion

But nothing comes without hard work. We must remain alert to dangers and opportunities. We must always be prepared to change with the times. We will then be able to take our rightful place in the next century of the Pacific.

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