

RAFFLES JUNIOR COLLEGE



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PRIZE

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3RD PRIZE

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Royal Commonwealth Society Essay Competition 1982/83

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Date of Birth :

Essay class : A

Essay Number : One

Length of Essay : 2 000 words

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Certified by : W. THOMAS, HEAD OF ENGLISH DEPT, AS BEING
THE STUDENT'S OWN COMPOSITION.

CERTIFIED CORRECT

W. Thomas

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*well thought & argued. Comprehension
and to the point. But long intro.
Rather a high-flying ending?*

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A 1. What are the main changes you expect to see taking place in any Commonwealth country in the next twenty five years?

The Republic of Singapore is an island country at the southern end of the Malay Peninsula, consisting of the main island and 60 adjacent islets. With a land area of 238.5 square miles, it is one of the smallest states in the world. The population is predominantly Chinese, with large Malay and Indian minorities. It was founded as a trading post by Sir Thomas Raffles in 1819, and became part of the British Colony of Straits Settlements in 1826. Self-governing from 1959, it joined Malaysia as a constituent state in 1963 but withdrew from the federation in 1965 to become an independent state. Since then, it has remained a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.

✓ In this fast and changing world where little is permanent and predictions about future events vague, it is indeed a herculean task to attempt to foresee major changes in this Commonwealth country in the next twenty five years. The changes which I anticipate to occur are based on the assumptions that the peace and security in my country, the skilful leadership under which it has been governed, the economic and political conditions of the world today do not alter too drastically in twenty five years' time.

✓ Singapore has at present a population of 2 362 700 people, consisting largely of immigrants and the descendants of these immigrants. At first, these immigrants were separated into their own communities in various parts of Singapore. Each group had their own customs, their own religions. Interaction between the groups was minimal. Today, the scene has changed. The descendants of these immigrants live together today in flats constructed in satellite towns. They mix freely and easily with one another, using either English or Malay to communicate. They respect one another's customs and religions and manage to live together harmoniously. Indeed there has not been a single racial riot since 1964. In view of the increased interaction between the different races, I foresee the possibility of these people becoming

as one people, of one common culture and national identity. Already the Chinese, Indians and Malays in Singapore behave in ways vastly different from those in the countries from where their ancestors came. They do not perceive themselves as Chinese, Indians or Malays, but as Singaporeans. By projecting current trends, it is possible that all these people would truly see and feel themselves as one people in 25 years' time.

Nearly half the Singaporeans are under 21 years of age. With the government's policy of encouraging only two-child families to avoid overpopulation of our tiny island, it is expected that there would be a lesser percentage of Singaporeans in the younger age groups in 25 years' time. This could place considerable strain on the economy as there will now be less young supporting more elderly, especially since Singaporeans are leading better and longer lives with vast improvements in health care and hygiene. Since the government has always avoided a policy of too much social welfare, it is possible that compulsory legislation may be enacted to make the younger generation look after their own parents, thus relieving the burden of the government. Moral education courses on Confucianism, teaching filial piety, have already commenced in schools.

At present, more than 99 percent of Singaporean children attend school, far more than their ancestors ever dared to dream of. Thus, one important change would be the dramatic rise of the average educational level of Singaporeans in the future. The impact of this change would mean a higher standard of living, stronger economic growth and a better lifestyle for every Singaporean. These children are also much more exposed to Western ideas and influences, and less influenced by the traditional values of their parents. This leads me to speculate on the emergence of a Singaporean culture, which would be a unique blend of Eastern and Western values in the future.

Singapore is a small island, with limited land area and a large population. One major change would be the intensive optimisation of scarce land resources in Singapore. Buildings would have to be built higher, thus increasing the population density to maximise the usage of land. The islets surrounding the main island may be developed too as requirements for land

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Name

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Date

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become more acute. Massive reclamation projects would also have to be undertaken to provide enough land for housing and industry. Yet despite such intensive and widespread construction projects, the government's objective of making Singapore a 'garden city' would be remembered, and these projects would go hand-in-hand with simultaneous to plant trees, shrubs and flowers to soften the effects of intensive urbanisation.

Being a small island, an increase in the quantity and quality of public transportation systems, and measures taken to discourage private transportation will be unavoidable in the future. If such measures were not taken, there would be too many vehicles, and traffic congestion would be acute and widespread, as it already is during peak hours. Construction on a complex subway system, the 'Mass Rapid Transit' (MRT) has already commenced, and additional taxes imposed on the sales of all vehicles have already been in effect for several years. Thus, I predict less private ownership of vehicles, and greater use of an efficient public transportation system for travel in the future.

Although a small country, Singapore possesses at present a creditable standing army of 45 000 with 150 000 reservists, an air force of over a hundred airplanes from Tiger F-5E's to Skyhawks, and a small but efficient navy. The armed forces have become self-sufficient in ammunition, small-calibre weapons and repairs. I expect this self-sufficiency to expand farther to cover other munitions. The armed forces would also move farther into higher technology and concentrate on high efficiency training courses, patterned after the Israeli and Swiss armed forces. This would all be to deter potential enemies from invading our homeland, and although we would still be a shrimp of a country, to make Singapore a very poisonous shrimp! All this is not impossible, remembering that only seventeen years ago all that we had were two battalions of one thousand men, fifty officers and less than two thousand rifles, with no navy or air-force to speak of. The government has already embarked on a massive publicity campaign to recruit more personnel for the armed forces and to caution the populace against complacency regarding our defensive capabilities. For such complacency could mean the destruction

in a few days of a prosperity so painfully gained in the past few decades. If current trends in the military continue, Singapore will have a very potent defense force to protect her prosperity and boundaries in 25 years' time.

Singapore has no natural resources whatsoever, and her only assets are her fine natural harbour, her strategic location and her people. Since her founding, she has been an entrepot, trading in textiles, rubber, petroleum, timber and tin. A major effort was made in the late 1960s to develop manufacturing industry and to reduce dependence on the port. The industrialisation effort has been successful, and today, Singapore produces electrical goods, petroleum products, textiles and foodstuffs for export. She is also South-East Asia's foremost commercial and shipping centre, conducting a flourishing international trade as a free port.

Within a quarter of a century from now, the emphasis will be on producing high technology products like electronic equipment and computer software, as such products are less labour-intensive and more profitable. Mechanisation will also be undertaken on a large scale to ease the labour shortage from which we now suffer. Industrial productivity will be enhanced, especially with the formation of the National Productivity Board with that aim in mind last year. The Tourist Promotion Board will probably play a greater role in the economy, with greater efforts in tourist promotion to gain more revenue for the country. It has already embarked on projects to restore the colonial architecture in the older parts of Singapore and to preserve historic sites. These projects will be completed in 25 years' time, and the city of Singapore will be an interesting place, with modern buildings standing beside historical monuments. Improvements will also be made in port facilities, trade-related financial, shipping and communication services to fully capitalise on her strategic location and excellent natural harbour. Shipbuilding and repair, an important new industry, will probably gain more momentum if present trends continue. Although founded as an entrepot, Singapore is gradually diversifying and widening the scope of her services to include knowledge-intensive services like investment, engineering, construction, medical and legal consultancy, sophisticated testing and inspection, surveying, computer software research and other 'brain' services to become a global city. This will be the most important economic change in the next two and a half decades that

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I anticipate to occur.

In order that such objectives may be accomplished, enough men and women trained in the appropriate disciplines must be available. The government already has a policy of attracting and recruiting foreign brains to Singapore by offering them attractive accommodation, good salaries, fringe benefits and citizenship. Two committees, the Professionals' Information and Placement Service (PIPS), and the Committee for Attracting Talent to Singapore (CATS) have already been established for this purpose. Many highly trained expatriates are already working in Singapore. Thus, in the nearning 25 years, if things go as planned, Singapore will have more foreign intellectuals coming to stay, and a country highly concentrated in brain power would emerge with a society of intellectuals.

Until quite recently, all the seats in Parliament have been occupied by a single political party, the People's Action Party, for more than twenty years. When Singapore first achieved independence, she was in a precarious position both economically and politically, and Singaporeans chose a one-party rule to prevent unnecessary squabbling and to save the country. Now that her economic and political situations have stabilised and shown themselves to be strong, and that the younger generation, which has come to take the country's prosperity for granted comes of voting age, it is foreseeable that opposition politics will play a bigger role in government in the coming quarter century.

Singapore depends heavily on her neighbours for food and water, as she does not possess the capabilities to produce them herself at the moment. I think that intensive farming, agriculture, livestock breeding and efficient water collecting facilities will be developed in the approaching years. This will be done in order to ensure self-sufficiency, and to reduce her vulnerability to the threat of starvation and thirst if relations with neighbouring countries ever deteriorated.

All these predictions have been made by observing current and past trends in the economic, political, social and military conditions in Singapore, by analysing the vital factors of our success and survival, and on assumptions

that no calamity nor war will befall Singapore over the next twenty five years.

Not too long ago, Singapore was just a sleepy fishing village on a remote tropical island. Today, she is a flourishing trading and industrial centre, an economic miracle. However if the political leadership of Singapore ever fell into unskilled or myopic hands; or if some disaster or calamity like war, earthquake, typhoon or epidemic were to occur, then all the efforts of generations would be destroyed and all that would remain in twenty five years' time of this beautiful city would be literally rubble and ashes.

For unlike other countries, Singapore has only two alternatives: total success or total failure. She is too small, too weak, and too insignificant to remain contented with her current conditions.