



SPEECH

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SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR DEFENCE DR NG ENG HEN AT THE DEFENCE SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS CEREMONY ON 20 JUL 2018 AT THE ISTANA

1. First, let me bid everyone a warm welcome to the Istana for this year's Defence Scholarship Awards Ceremony. Let me add my congratulations to all the recipients and your families. I am sure that your parents, your siblings must be very proud of your leadership. This year has been a bumper harvest – 84 scholarships awarded in all. Nine SAF Scholarships, six PSC (Engineering) Scholarships, a fairly new category, five SAF Engineering Scholarships, seven SAF Medicine Scholarships, one SAF Dentistry Scholarship, 16 SAF Merit Scholarships, 10 Defence Merit Scholarships, and 30 DSTA Scholarships - 84 in all. So it is a bumper harvest for us, and that is why we are very happy, but of course that means that the rooms are spilling over and it is a little bit crowded. But it is okay, it is intimate and it is a good occasion. Applications too went up, hit a new high – more than 1,300 applications. In fact it has been rising every year, the number of applications. Compared to 2014, a 60% increase in number of applicants. So this is a good sign for Singapore. Despite increasing affluence, young Singaporeans and I presume their parents too, still value public service.

2. I said it was a rich “harvest”, but I think a more accurate description of this annual and critical exercise is an investment. The scholarships we award today are the country's long-term investment, on a 20-year time-frame, to ensure that we have the right leaders, in values and aptitude to lead MINDEF, SAF, DSTA, DSO National Laboratories and other government organisations. It is what this generation's leaders invest in for the next generation, so that in the next generation we can secure our way of life and independence through a strong defence. Without a strong defence, Mr Lee Kuan Yew reminded time and again, there can be no economic or social progress. I quote, he said this, “From the day we

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started, I knew that we needed a strong SAF, and I believe that still remains today. Without a strong SAF, there is no economic future, there is no security". He said these words in a dinner organised in 2012 by Temasek Society – Temasek Society is a forum for SAF officers and civilians to discuss strategic and professional military issues. It was in 2012, he was getting frail, and I thought, I would like the cohort of young officers, Captains and Majors especially, to be able to listen and question Mr Lee. I say question Mr Lee, but it always ends up him interrogating you. I remember this particular Temasek Society dinner, I think somebody asked a question, he (Mr Lee) did not answer, he instead replied, "Are you married?" His health was waning, but not his convictions on this key pillar, on which Singapore's well-being is immutably predicated. He did not speak for long, but I doubt few attending that night's dinner would forget his admonishment, even a plea, to never forget this truth.

3. Apart from your families, many here at this dinner tonight have also invested in your journey to the Istana. Your teachers and principals who are seated with you have been our talent scouts. We thank them for their commitment and keen eyes. Our staff have been working very closely with them, and saying you spot someone who you think fits our bill, recommend them to us.

4. (Here) tonight are also members of the Public Service Commission (PSC), you have met them, some of you, who have spent many hours, carefully making sure that we get the right people for this investment I thank them the members of the PSC, especially Mr Eddie Teo, Chairman of the PSC, who is due for a much-deserved retirement after nearly 50 years. But as Chairman of PSC and Head Civil Service preceding that, he and the PSC members here have helped shape Singapore's strong defence today because they have selected and nurtured many of the leaders of MINDEF and SAF who host your tables today. So, some of us, your hosts, whether they had the same experiences going through PSC, being questioned and being sometimes scrutinised from all facets.

5. A strong defence not only ensures that Singapore remains sovereign and independent, it also expands our international standing and space. One key reason why

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recent DPRK-US Singapore Summit, why President Trump and Chairman Kim agreed for Singapore to host their Summit, in Singapore, was the stability and security that we provide. Singaporeans, and indeed the World, when it was announced that, yes first it was on, then it was off and then it was on. But two weeks before the meeting, it was again back on. And notice that there were very few, if any, I did not read any, comments or feedback was, “could Singapore could be safe or not”. Not one. They took it for granted. But imagine this, imagine that either US or North Korea, they want to host in Singapore because you know, it is beautiful and the state is modern, but it did not have an SAF or a strong police. Imagine that both sides insisted that they must provide their own security because they cannot trust our Police and SAF to keep them safe. Imagine that the US or North Korean security forces, soldiers, their machines, they can bring in helicopters and the big planes that they come (in). Imagine that they bring with them these soldiers and machines to ply our airspace, to watch our waters. And if we had inadequate security capabilities, we would have to have to say yes, yes I will host you. I admit I do not have these capabilities, so bring your soldiers. Instead, both countries left it to Singapore, and brought essentially their personnel, security staff. And the SAF was able, at two weeks’ notice, to stand up a multi-layer protective dome around Sentosa where they met. But imagine, that during the meeting, that an attack occurred on Sentosa. You may have read the terrorist cell that was captured in Indonesia who had planned to launch missiles against Singapore. So imagine that. Maybe nobody got hurt, and landed maybe 50 metres from the Capella or Capella ballroom. Just that alone, would have shaken our confidence to the core. Singapore cannot protect itself. What do you think will happen to the markets the next day? Investors will recalculate. You will have a negative impact, not only on our ability to protect Singapore, but our economic well-being and social fabric for the future.

6. Last week, I was in Paris as part of Prime Minister (PM) Lee’s delegation. PM Lee was accorded the honour by President Macron to be guest-of-honour at their 14th of July National Day Parade – I think many of you would have seen the stunning pictures in press reports. My two favourite pictures, one showing in front of that thousands of soldiers, tanks, cavalry to come later was four SAF soldiers from the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF), because they were at the head of the parade, beautiful close up picture of the Arc

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de Triomphe behind them. The four SAF troopers were leading the parade on the Champs Elysées, holding our national flag high, and leading thousands of French troops and military hardware that day. And above, my second favourite picture our M346 Advanced Jet Trainer that the RSAF uses to train its pilots, soaring above the Arc de Triomphe. We are a small country and, in comparison to the French Armed Forces, a small military, but we were given pride of place in their National Day celebrations.

7. Our steady investments into building a strong defence over these past 50 years have paid off. That, we can categorically say, investments are not only in terms of dollars that we present at each Budget, but more importantly investing in the right people to lead, protect Singapore and serve Singaporeans for the next generation. You are now in your 20s and you will live to see Singapore celebrate its 100th anniversary, SG100. I do not think some of us will be that lucky.

8. Will the next 25 or 50 years for another generation be as progressive and illustrious, as we had the previous? Because in all honesty we have had a good run. No one can really tell or shape the future, especially when it comes to security threats. So MINDEF's job, the leaders of today, (their) key mission is to raise a strong defence for the next generation. How do you do it? If that is your *raison d'être*?

9. Historians highlight a recurrent mistake made by countries whose military leaders plan to fight the next war based on the way they fought the last one. You fought one war and especially if you won, you plan to fight the next one with the experience that you have had, it is a logical extension, logical argument. On Netflix now is a series on the Vietnam War. I encourage you to look at it, very well curated, very well presented. First-hand accounts, graphic pictures. It chronicles in detail how US fell into this very trap that I have just mentioned. Whatever the rights and wrongs of that war, the US employed a strategy in Vietnam which they used in WWII and they were victorious. But in a counter-insurgency battle, they were outmatched, outlasted. Not only were thousands of lives lost, think they lost about 60,000 lives, and at the peak of it they had, about 550,000 US troops in a foreign land. The Vietnamese had many more deaths and casualties, but not only were lives lost,

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more hearts were embittered and turned away. So tactics you may not be able to predict, how to fight the next war. Can you discern what the security challenge or where it is likely to come from? For this, I like a particular quote by former US Defense Secretary Robert Gates, a man I respect immensely, and he was giving a speech, something like this to West Point graduates. And let me quote him, "When it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never once gotten it right, from the Mayaguez (*in Puerto Rico*) to Grenada, Panama, Somalia, the Balkans, Haiti, Kuwait, Iraq, and more – we had no idea a year before any of these missions that we would be so engaged,". Not 10 years before, not five years before, even a year before, they had never guessed where they would be a year hence. Not once, their record is perfect. Secretary Robert Gates, before he was Defense Secretary, was the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the world's most powerful military with the world's most equipped intelligence agencies – the National Security Agency, CIA, tells us that you cannot predict where you are going to fight next. You do not know where you are going to fight, you do not know what methods to use because if you use the last one, you are going to get it wrong or likely to get it wrong. The challenges for Singapore are that, and much more. No one could have predicted even a decade before it happened that today, the SAF would be deployed in Afghanistan or Iraq. Why would we be there? So as I flew across the deserts during my visits to our troops there, on a C-130, was a very odd experience, first time I was asked to wear a bulletproof vest in the plane. I said, why do I have to put it on. Because people can shoot at you. I said okay I will put it on. Everybody put it on. I reflected how surreal this reality is. Or for that matter, that today we would today have to deal with jihadi terrorists, including suicide families, who commit suicide bombings using their wives and children. I talked to the Indonesians and they say, never in their imagination could they believe that they could have suicide bombings, even they themselves are shocked. The cyber sphere is also an entirely new battlefield that can have devastating consequences if not properly defended. When I was starting this speech with the help of staff, we did not know that this paragraph would be so relevant. You would have read if you go on your phones, Ministry of Health (MOH) has just announced that there has been a massive cyberattack on our health system – 1.5 million health records, personal data – name, NRIC, personal data, but not medical information. And 160,000 prescriptions. Their favourite

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target was PM Lee, who has posted about it, you can read it on his Facebook page. Not only can sensitive information be lost or physical resources stolen, I thought if you were going to go through all that trouble, why do you not just go after the banks? Or maybe the banks have better defences. Not only can sensitive information be taken or physical resources stolen, even the choice of a country's leaders can be manipulated and social compact destroyed. Look what's happening to the US. Look what's happening to Europe. Huge arguments about how they're manipulating their elections. But even as recent as five years ago, I would tell you that this was not envisaged, or at any rate, seriously planned against by even developed countries, even us. And our solution was internet separation. Separate it, because this is just too difficult, for certain things. But that push only came one to two years ago.

10. You do not know how to fight the next war, you do not know where, it would be entirely new. How do you prepare to defend Singapore for the next generation, if you cannot rely on tactics previously employed, predict the origin and the form of the security challenges to come? Today's ceremony represents a vital piece of our strategy. It is a default strategy, because we have no other means. We have to invest in the next generation of servant-leaders. All recipients tonight must protect Singaporeans to the best of your abilities as public servants. Some of you here will be placed in the highest positions of Government in time to come. In whatever capacity you serve, remember that as a developed country, Singapore needs to be humble to recognise that change is constant, but agile enough to constantly update our strategy. It may be in small things that we change, like this ceremony. This ceremony was only held previously for SAF Scholarship (previously known as SAF Overseas Scholarship) scholars. Today we have nine, so every year, just for those nine or many that we have. But to hold it then, when previously five or 10 percent of Singaporeans who went to university, in the 70s and 80s even, I think was the right tone and message. And also because joining the military by Asian tradition was not the top choice of parents for their children. You know the famous saying –好男当兵。 In fact, the soldier is quite low in their ranking. So you give it prestige, Singaporeans change their mindset, the parents will encourage their children to apply for an SAF Scholarship. But we changed the ceremony to

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include more, and now all scholars, because the feedback was that even the SAF Scholars wanted a new format that was inclusive, in keeping with the zeitgeist of your generation.

11. Another big change is the type of scholars we are awarding to. We certainly have more females – the number of female recipients of MINDEF and SAF scholarships this year has doubled compared to a decade ago. I am also glad that our scholars come from a wide number of schools and polytechnics – guess the number. Schools and polytechnics. Not two, not three, (but) 17 different institutions. Some come from humble backgrounds – living in HDB three-room flats or smaller. As a system, we ought to maintain meritocracy because it has served Singapore well. But like the format of this ceremony, I think we need to update the applications of meritocracy to keep its ethos even as circumstances change. I have therefore asked MINDEF and SAF senior officers to work with the Principals of schools and polytechnics to facilitate more of those living in HDB one to three room flats, those from poorer families, to apply for our MINDEF and SAF scholarships. The selection criteria must still be merit-based. But we should also give due recognition that those who come from families with fewer resources will need more encouragement and support. I do not want that situation ever to arise in Singapore, where someone who comes from a poorer family says, “I won’t apply for a scholarship because I won’t stand a chance, even if I have done well in my exam.” If you see that happening in Singapore when you are in MINDEF, change it. It is in MINDEF and SAF’s interest to have such scholars succeed.

12. So for the next few years, complete your university education with all its offerings for personal development. But when you return, remember that as much that has been given to you, much will be expected, and that the well-being of many lives and that of our nation depend on you.

13. To have all scholars at one ceremony is also meant to remind us, to remind you, to work together as a team to secure Singapore’s future. Look around you, these are 84 people that you will work with for the next 20 to 30 years. You better get to like each other. We do not have two ceremonies every year. It is one. This is it.

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BEING LEADERS WITHIN THE DEFENCE COMMUNITY

14. You have many mentors to emulate or even surpass. At the top rung of Government, whether in Cabinet or Civil Service, many were from MINDEF and SAF. But there are also good examples of younger officers who are making a difference early in their careers through their professionalism and commitment to excellence. We have past scholarship recipients like Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Ronald Tong. LTC Tong is an F-16 pilot, and when Trump and Kim were shaking hands meeting at Sentosa, he was up there, making sure that there were no planes who could attack us. Major Winnie Tan, who was a part of the team to lead Combined Task Force 151. What is that? It is a multinational force of 31 countries, in Bahrain, and this was in 2016, against pirates. Mr Josiah Liang, he helped organise (the) inaugural Bug Bounty Programme, some of you may have heard it. It was a very radical move. MINDEF started it, our Defence Cyber Organisation, we invited hackers to hack us, so that we could spot our weaknesses. Mr Ong Khoon Kiat from the DSTA, he is using Artificial Intelligence to help our commanders make better decisions. Captain (Doctor) Andrew Tan, he was sent to the UK for a Defence Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Clinical Course, graduated among the top. So it was very handy when Trump and Kim met. We asked him, you plan for contingencies. I am confident that you will keep and even surpass the standards set by scholars before you.

15. Let me end by congratulating all of you for doing very well and getting these awards. Wish you the best as you embark on your studies and career. Make a difference and improve the lives of Singaporeans through your contributions. Thank you very much.

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