

SPEECH BY MR LAWRENCE WONG, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SECOND MINISTER FOR FINANCE, AT THE SEMBCORP MARINE SCHOOL BOOK ASSISTANCE GRANT (SCHOOLBAG) PRESENTATION CEREMONY 2016, ON 4 NOVEMBER 2016, 4.00PM, AT YISHUN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mr Ong Poh Kwee, COO, Sembcorp Marine Ltd

Principal and teachers, Yishun Primary School

Parents

Boys and girls

1 A very good afternoon to all of you. I am very happy to join you at Sembcorp Marine's annual School Book Assistance Grant, or SchoolBAG presentation ceremony.

2 As you heard just now, the SchoolBAG was introduced by Sembcorp Marine in 2001. It really is a big help for families with school-going children to tide them through financial requirements, especially as the children prepare for the new school year. It is a scheme that has been going on year after year since 2001. This year, Sembcorp Marine continues to provide bursaries to more than 1,100 students from 85 schools.

3 It is something worth noting because as was noted just now, we are in a period of economic difficulties, challenges and the economy is slowing down. In particular, the industry that is facing the most difficulty this time is the marine and offshore sector. All the industries are affected, but the one that is most affected is the marine and offshore sector. This is the industry that Sembcorp Marine is in, if you did not know of it. And yet, despite the fact that this industry is so badly affected and impacted because of oil prices coming down, because of consolidation oversupply, Sembcorp Marine continues to remain committed to this scheme and continues this year to provide the SchoolBAG grants to so many students.

4 And as you heard just now, altogether, over the 16 years, Sembcorp Marine has provided more than \$3.8 million worth of grants, benefitting more than 18,600

students. It is a major and sizeable commitment, which I am sure is appreciated by the many families who have benefitted from this scheme. I think we should all give a big round of applause to thank Sembcorp Marine for their generous contributions.

5 What we have in Singapore is an education system which strives to provide maximum opportunities for all our students, regardless of race, language, religion or social background. We want to provide maximum opportunities for every child to shine, to pursue their aspirations and to excel. No one in Singapore should be denied these opportunities. Regardless of your background, we strive to provide maximum opportunities to everyone.

6 All of us can play a part in providing this conducive environment for our students to develop their fullest potential. All of us, not just our schools and our teachers, but also our parents, many of you here as partners in education, the community groups, the charity groups, voluntary welfare groups and also civic-minded companies.

7 For children from the less well-off families, we particularly pay attention to them because we want to provide as much support to them as possible, and give them maximum chances of excelling later in life.

8 Help can come in many forms. We have government schemes like Comcare and the Financial Assistance Scheme that is disbursed through the schools. We provide support from our grassroots and community organisations. And of course, we have companies like Sembcorp Marine also contributing to the support that we provide to our children and to families who are in need.

9 Help that is provided, in fact, does not have to come in the form of big grand schemes. Very often, it is not even about financial help. Help can be in the form of mentoring. For companies, it can be in the form of providing work attachment opportunities. It can be in the form of community groups providing opportunities for our children to volunteer and give back to society. There are many different kinds of help.

10 But every gift and every gesture makes a difference, because everything we do represents our collective effort to want to help our children do better and climb

higher. Every gift and every gesture is important in its value. That is why we make an effort to recognise all the different contributions, be it from the community or from our companies.

11 This is really part of the Singaporean way of doing things. It is something that we have already in Singapore. It is an ethos we already have and we should entrench this even further in our value system. It is a part of our way of making sure we help the disadvantaged and the more vulnerable members of our society, and then we can maintain social mobility and progress together as a nation, all of us together. It is a Singaporean way of doing things, of making sure we look after one another and help one another. That instinct for mutual support must be part of our Singaporean DNA. It is already in our Singaporean ethos but we have to continuously strengthen this value system so that future generations continue to have this instinct to want to help one another.

12 To our children who are receiving the grants today, I will emphasise and reiterate the point that with determination and hard work, all of you can develop your talents in life. The sky is the limit. You should not regard how far you can go in life as being determined by your current social circumstance. The opportunities are there. The support will be provided to you. Regardless of where you are today, all of you can go as far as you want, depending on how much effort and determination you put in into your endeavours going forward.

13 We can already see this courage and this fighting spirit in many of our students who are here.

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14 And I will just highlight two examples:

15 One of them is S. Poojasri. She is studying in Primary 3 at Huamin Primary School. Poojasri's mother is currently the family's sole breadwinner, because her father was unable to work after an accident. Despite her family's difficulties, she continues to maintain a very positive attitude about her and about going to school. She is a prefect. She performs her duties with pride and responsibility, embodying her school's values which include care, perseverance and diligence. She also gets along very well with her peers in school and is always ready to lend a helping hand to others.

16 Another student is Toh Xin Ni. She is in JC 1 at Innova Junior College. Xin Ni's father, who is the family's main breadwinner, had to go for surgery and so he was unable to work. The family now relies on her elder sister's income for their household expenses. They are going through some challenging times but Xin Ni herself also continues to maintain a very positive attitude. She hopes that this grant that she is getting will help to pay for the school materials that she needs, and so helps to reduce her family's household expenses and financial burden.

17 These are just two stories, but I am sure all the students have their own stories to tell, inspiring stories of how despite difficult challenges in life, all of them are continuing on, maintaining a positive attitude, determined to overcome whatever adversities they face.

18 I will encourage all our students here to continue to work hard to develop your talents and chase your rainbows. There will be challenges ahead for sure. That is bound to happen. But in facing and addressing the challenges, draw inspiration from one another, encourage one another and you can also draw inspiration from the stories of how many Singaporeans before you have overcome difficulties. Our pioneers, when they were in Singapore 50 years ago, for example, had great difficulties. It was a very different Singapore. We had many many challenges. But the Pioneer Generation, many of your grandparents, would have gone through those challenges, overcome them with fortitude, made sacrifices, worked hard for a better life for the next generation. I am sure many of your parents have done the same thing. For many of you, I would like to encourage you that with the same spirit of courage and fighting spirit, all of you can overcome the challenges you face and you can reach your goals and achieve your dreams.

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19 I also hope that in the course of your journey, you will not forget the help that you have received today and along the course of your life. And you will remember to give back to society at some point in your life. Maybe some of you are too young now, but some of you may be older. For certainly the younger ones, as you progress on in life, there will be many opportunities for you to volunteer and do something meaningful to help other people, just as today you are getting help. In this way, by doing this, we can remain a nation of people, of Singaporeans, who support one another and look out for one another. We can strengthen this Singaporean value of mutual support and mutual help.

20 Finally, thank you again to Sembcorp Marine for making a difference in our students' lives. Thank you to Yishun Primary School and MOE for organising today's

ceremony. I know the holidays are coming. The students would have finished your exams already, most of you I think. If not, it is just the last few exams. So I am sure it will be done in a few days' time. Look forward to the school break. Have a good time. Don't study too much during holidays. Holidays is for holidays. The holidays is for you to have fun, relax, enjoy, recharge yourself. You come back again next year and you can begin the new school term. Enjoy yourselves. Have a good weekend ahead and thank you very much.

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