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SPEECH BY MR CHAN SOO SEN, PARLIAMENTARY

SECRETARY (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE &

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT),

SINGAPORE INDIAN EDUCATION TRUST'S

SCHOLARSHIP PRESENTATION CEREMONY

ON SATURDAY, 9 JAN 1999, 3.30PM

AT DBS AUDITORIUM, SHENTON WAY

Good afternoon

Mr S Chandra Das

President

Singapore Indian Education Trust

Mr P Balachandran

Chairman

Mr K T Samuel

Vice-Chairman

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Boys and Girls

I am very happy to join you this afternoon at the scholarship presentation ceremony of the Singapore Indian Education Trust.

2 The best gift we can offer to our children is a good education. This is a belief all parents in the world share. I was listening to a recent BBC World Service programme about how parents around the world bring up their children. This was the consistent message coming from the hearts of all parents interviewed by the programme, from all continents, and across all social groups. Education is strongly emphasised by the traditional values of all communities in Singapore. In the early immigrant society, when the colonial authority was not committed to education for all, all our ethnic communities set up schools to provide education for their young. These schools were small, and the programmes rudimentary by today's standard. However, the spirit was strong. Parents saved up hard to ensure their children go to school. The communities raised funds to keep the schools going, and the fees affordable. They also set up scholarships and bursaries to sponsor the poor but good students. The principals and teachers showed strong commitment to the schools and students, sometimes worked on without pay when school finance went into crisis, and often engaged in minor works to maintain and improve school facilities. The students treasured their time in schools, and continued to help the schools as alumni members well after they left school.

3 After Independence, the government decided that education was the key to our future and started to invest heavily to achieve universal education. Although education is now heavily subsidised, we still have needy families who have difficulties financing the children's education, especially the higher levels of education. It is not easy for a poorer family with many children to pay for all the textbooks and stationery before the new academic year start. So community organisations continue to play important roles helping these families.

4 Singapore Indian Education Trust (SIET) is one of the organisations set up in July 1967 by a group of dedicated Indian community leaders to fulfill this role. Since your inception, many students have benefited from your scholarships and interest-free study loans. Your help allowed them to concentrate on their studies

and not be unduly distracted by worries about money. Many of the students succeeded in their studies because of your help. You have helped them realise their potentials. This made a real difference in their lives. Their success contributed to the well-being of our Nation. Over the years, you have also extended your grants to non-Indian students. I would like to commend and congratulate you for your good work.

5 Like all community service projects, success breeds success, and further success breeds further demands. Over the years, the number of applications for scholarships and loans, as well as the number of applicants and the total amount awarded, have all increased. The present economic slowdown would further step up demands. This year, SIET is awarding 264 scholarships, a big increase from the usual 70 to 100 per year in the past.

6 I would like to commend SIET for taking the tough but correct decision, and give the additional awards this year. Your benevolent act at this difficult time is like "Delivering coal in snow" (quoting a Chinese proverb). In the coming few years, economic condition will continue to be difficult. Demands for your assistance will continue to be high, probably become higher. As a not-for-profit organisation, you need to raise more funds to meet the demand. This will be more challenging as some of the traditional major donors may have less to give.

7 However, we must overcome this challenge. It is during difficult times that the work of organisations like SIET becomes more crucial. Fortunately, Singaporeans are willing to give to social service organisations if they identify with the cause and have confidence in the organisation. This is so even during this difficult time. We read many press reports in the last week of 1998 about people giving to charities. Our fellow Singaporeans understand that although we may be less well-off this year, there are others who are even worse-off and who need our help.

8 However, we must accept the fact that most people have less to give this year. So our challenge is to reach out to more. Many people each giving a small sum can add up to a big sum. Many people contributing reinforce our "many helping hands" approach in gotong-royong, and make more of the community feel good in doing good deeds. Social service organisations will have to work harder, as reaching out to the masses is not easy to achieve. However, all of us will also eventually feel happy that we are able to involve more people to help more people in need.

9 I am sure SIET can think of many ways to meet these challenges. Allow me to suggest a few just for reference. One is to place donation boxes in places your community members frequently visit, such as shops and temples. Another is to join forces with other community organisations, such as a flag day in which volunteers and students from various organisations can be mobilised. To achieve greater reach out, it would also be necessary to build up a big and strong base of volunteers. This is a good investment as the volunteers will be a perpetual source of strength for our society and organisations.

10 I congratulate the Singapore Indian Education Trust for a job well done, and wish you many success in your future endeavours. I wish all of you a pleasant afternoon.

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