

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR MAH BOW TAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE 32ND ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATION DINNER & DANCE OF THE HDB STAFF UNION ON SATURDAY, 20 NOV 99 AT 9.40 PM
AT THE NEPTUNE THEATRE RESTAURANT

Mr Michael Koh; President, HDB Staff Union;

Mr Tan Chuan Juan, General Secretary;

Members of the HDB Staff Union;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am happy to join you for the 32nd anniversary of the HDB Staff Union.

2 Singapore has gained international repute for our public housing programme, which emphasizes the promotion of home ownership. HDB, in carrying out its mission of building quality and affordable homes for Singaporeans, is fortunate to have found a supportive partner in the HDB Staff Union.

3 In the new millennium, Singapore will increasingly be transformed into a knowledge-based economy. What does this mean for HDB and its staff? The value of a knowledge company or knowledge organisation lies not so much in its wealth or fixed assets, such as buildings or machinery. Rather, its real worth lies in its human resource, that is, in the brainpower, ideas, skills and drive of its management and workforce. With globalisation and technological advances, companies will have to restructure their operations and change both their management and business approaches. Consequently, our workers will have to be better educated, better trained and better attuned to the new work environment than ever before.

4 The Manpower 21 blueprint, released recently by the Ministry of Manpower, aims to develop Singapore as a "Talent Capital" where manpower will provide the competitive edge. The Manpower 21 Committee estimates that in the next 10 to 15 years, for economic growth to be sustained, two-thirds of Singapore's total workforce will need to be skilled. This is double our present proportion of skilled workers. The task ahead is not an easy one, but we must succeed nonetheless.

5 The Government will continue to place emphasis on the education of our young, equipping them with the skills required in a knowledge-based economy. At the same time, the Government is actively promoting worker training and upgrading. On their part, our workers and unions must take training and retraining seriously. Only when your skills and knowledge continue to be relevant to industry's needs can you be assured of lifelong employability. In other words, lifelong learning is the key to ensuring lifelong employability.

6 With a small population and a limited talent pool, Singaporeans must also be prepared to welcome foreign talent to supplement our manpower needs. Tapping foreign talent is not new to Singapore. HDB, for example, has found it useful to employ foreign professionals and technical staff to help cope with the demands of a vigorous building programme.

Currently, more than 400 of HDB's professional and technical staff are foreigners, excluding Malaysians. They account for about 12% of HDB's total construction-related workforce. Indeed, at its peak early last year, the proportion of such foreign talent in HDB's construction-related workforce was over 15%. Without them, HDB's building and upgrading programme would have been badly affected.

7 As we move into the 21st century, we will continue to face new challenges. The development of Singapore into a "Talent Capital" requires the combined efforts of the Government, employers and employees. I have no doubt that the close collaboration between HDB's management and the HDB Staff Union, which has grown from strength to strength over the years, will continue to be an important factor in the future success of HDB and public housing in Singapore.

8 I extend my heartiest congratulations to the HDB Staff Union on its 32nd anniversary and wish all of you an enjoyable evening.

9 Thank you.

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