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Subject: [EMBARGOED] Speech by HE Mr S R Nathan, 22 Jan 00, 6pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR S R NATHAN, PRESIDENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE AT THE 35/99 OCC
COMMISSIONING PARADE ON SATURDAY 22 JANUARY 2000 6:00
PM AT SAFTI-MI**

Graduands, parents, ladies and gentlemen

National Archives of Singapore

1 For the young men and women who are being commissioned today, this parade marks the end of their preparations to be officers of the SAF, and a new beginning. The path towards being an officer in the SAF is long and demanding. They have gone through conditions of extreme stress as well as fatigue in the course they have just completed. They have persevered and succeeded in earning their commission as Officers. This is a proud moment for you, the graduating class. I congratulate each and every one of you and I also commend your parents and family members for the support they gave during your training.

2 We stand now at the dawn of a new millennium. In the space of 35 years as a nation, Singapore has made dramatic progress. Today, we enjoy economic prosperity, stable political leadership and a climate of peace. Today, each and every Singaporean can stand up and say with pride - “this, is my home.”

3 Through hard work and commitment of our people, we have defended our sovereignty and secured the freedom to determine our own future. However, we must never take sovereignty and peace for granted. Recent history has reminded us that instability can develop overnight, even in countries with longer histories than ours. This explains why we need a strong and vigilant SAF. It is the SAF that must play the vital role of safeguarding our independence and preserving a peaceful environment for our people. This the SAF has to do by being prepared to meet any threat to our sovereignty and provide a deterrence in peacetime. The SAF has succeeded in doing this, through the build up of its capability and maintaining its high state of operational readiness. That would not have been possible without the diligent efforts of our soldiers, sailors and airmen.

4 Rapid technological progress being a constant reality in our times, the SAF has continued to invest heavily in acquiring up-to-date equipment and weapon systems. In collaboration with our local defence industries and defence technologists, the Armed Forces have also continued to undertake research into cutting-edge technology. Through this, the SAF makes available the best weapon systems that help improve the capabilities of our soldiers.

5 For example, the new locally produced SAR 21 Rifle provides our infantrymen an advanced weapon well suited to our local needs. The BIONIX Infantry Fighting Vehicle demonstrates how leading-edge technology is customised for local conditions. The acquisition and induction of submarines will give our Navy an added dimension to its operational capability. The recent deployment of KC-135 airborne refueling tankers equips the Airforce with better long range capability. These are just a few examples of how the SAF has developed qualitatively and grown over the last few years.

6 However, to be prepared to meet threats, the true strength of an armed force lies not just in the sophistication of its weapon systems. Dollars spent on advanced weapons system do not automatically produce military strength. The key factor for the SAF to be credible and effective will be the quality of its people. Our soldiers need to be well trained, technically competent, and committed to the defence of Singapore. Towards that end, we strive to provide our training troops with the best facilities and the best methods of instruction. We teach them the latest tactics. But equally important will be their respect and cultivation of traditional military virtues like physical courage and daring, loyalty and patriotism. These will be paramount in determining the quality of our troops, and their will to fight. Therefore, such time-honoured values and high standards of personal integrity need to be constantly inculcated in our soldiers, and especially among the Officer Corps, to which today's graduands are about to enter.

7 As officers of the SAF, you are entering a profession, where you will have to steel yourself to be a hard taskmaster. Only then can you make the SAF a strong, modern and ready defence force for Singapore. As you will have a direct and lasting influence on the men under your command, I urge you to take the lead in exemplifying the SAF Core Values. Through your personal conduct, I expect you to inspire and motivate your men to give off their very best to the nation.

8 In the coming days and years, your leadership will be truly tested and, I hope, further honed. Your men will come from diverse backgrounds. They will be young and unschooled in military skills. They will have different attitudes towards National Service and the SAF. You will have to apply yourself diligently to the task of improving the capabilities of each of them, as they come under your command. It will be your duty to train, motivate and inspire them. Their discipline and welfare will be your responsibility. Through your leadership, you will have to inculcate in them a sense of professional pride. You must succeed in this, if the SAF is to continue to be a credible and effective defence force.

9 Today's Commissioning Parade therefore marks the deep trust and heavy responsibility that the nation has placed on your shoulders. I have every

confidence that each and every one of you will measure up to our expectations and succeed, just as your predecessors have done. My message to you is to hold fast to your motto, “To Lead, to Excel, to Overcome.”

Thank You.

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