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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY MR PETER CHEN,
SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION
AT THE TEMASEK POLYTECHNIC
PART-TIME GRADUATION CEREMONY
ON SATURDAY 18 MARCH 2000 AT 10.00 am
IN THE AUDITORIUM 2, TEMASEK POLYTECHNIC**

National Archives of Singapore

Dr N Varaprasad, Principal of Temasek Polytechnic,
Staff, Graduands,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good Morning to all of you

Introduction

1 I am delighted to be at this morning's graduation ceremony and be part of this very special occasion in your lives. This graduation ceremony is the culmination of many months of hard work and perseverance. Let me extend my warmest congratulations on your success in achieving this significant milestone of your learning journey.

Beyond The Information Age: The Knowledge Age

2 The world has witnessed a rapid transformation with the arrival of the information age. Throughout the world, organisations are getting wired up to gain quick access to information and be connected to the cyber world. Today, we are moving beyond the world of information. The challenge facing us is how to transit quickly into a knowledge-based economy (KBE), where workers are not just capable of gathering useful information but also of harnessing information to create value. The KBE will have a radical impact on our work processes and means of communications. It will fundamentally change the way we do things and manage our resources.

3 Studies have shown that by the year 2020, most workers will be required to analyse and process information to be transformed into knowledge in order to perform their jobs. According to a study by EDB, the number of knowledge-intensive jobs increased significantly over the six years between 1993 and 1999. The growth in jobs for administrators and managers was 8%. For professional occupations, the increase was as high as 12%. In contrast, the number of jobs for production craftsmen and related workers declined. The decrease was 6% for plant and machine operators, and 2% for assemblers.

4 This phenomenon is not peculiar to Singapore. All over the world, employers are placing a premium on workers who are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and skills, and are more willing to employ those who show an interest in keeping abreast of the rapid developments in technologies. The reason is that such workers are more prepared to adapt quickly to job requirements by learning new skills quickly whenever necessary, instead of sticking to old ways of doing things.

5 Manufacturing firms now need higher-skilled workers to manage high-tech equipment on the production floor. Even the building and construction industries, which traditionally have employed unskilled workers, are now exploring new labour-saving techniques that are more complex to operate and require a higher level of skills.

Profile of Our Workforce

6 With the emphasis in the job market shifting more and more to the ability to add value to the production chain, Singapore workers must be equipped with the types of knowledge and skill sets that are relevant to employers' needs and can attract foreign investments. The effective management of human capital is necessary for maintaining Singapore's competitiveness and helping it to create a niche in the global marketplace.

7 At present, one-third of our workforce is skilled, another one-third is semi-skilled, and the remaining one-third is unskilled. Such a profile will not be able to sustain our future manpower needs. We need higher-educated and more highly skilled workers who are competent at handling sophisticated equipment and capable of keeping up with technological advancements. Workers who continue to depend on only one particular skill will very quickly find themselves redundant in the workplace.

Manpower 21 Plan and CET

8 In August 1999, the Manpower 21 Plan was launched to chart the strategic blueprint to support Singapore's transition into a KBE with the objective of transforming the workforce to meet future manpower needs, to enhance Singapore's competitiveness and to minimise structural unemployment. The centre-piece of the Manpower 21 Plan is the idea of a "School of Lifelong Learning". One of its key strategies recommends establishing a comprehensive framework for in-employment continuing education and training (CET), which will support the continual education and training needs of the workforce, and promote lifelong employability of our workforce. It constitutes a partnership involving industry, employers, workers and the government. The polytechnics and ITE, as training providers, will play a key role in this mass upgrading.

Temasek's Role in CET

9 For some years, Temasek Polytechnic has been a major provider for CET in Singapore. The theme for this morning's graduation ceremony, Lifelong Learning for Lifelong Rewards has been chosen to reiterate the importance of CET. We encourage our workers to actively embrace lifelong learning because it means continued "marketability" in the workplace and hence lifelong rewards. The polytechnics have specially tailored their curriculum to incorporate part-time courses to make it possible for those who wish to upgrade to diplomas while continuing in their jobs.

10 In view of the fast pace at which knowledge becomes obsolete, the polytechnic has focussed attention on teaching students undergoing CET the process of learning how to learn. For example, it introduced Problem Based Learning (or PBL) in certain part-time programmes, such as the Certificate in Para Legal Studies and Certificate in Police and Management Studies. The PBL is a non-traditional method of teaching which requires students to meet, interact, research, clarify, decide and brainstorm in groups. As a result, students generally show more enthusiasm in and take greater ownership of their learning.

11 I understand that 50 police officers, who enrolled in the part-time Diploma in Police and Management Studies, took the subject on Communication Skills, which was conducted using the PBL process. I hope that the innovative way in which the subject was taught will help boost their confidence in managing uncertainty and enable them to perform their jobs better.

12 I am also pleased to note that there are altogether 192 students graduating from a total of 10 different programmes today. I congratulate every one of you for having successfully completed your course of study. The desire to upgrade yourselves and the commitment to completing your courses, despite your responsibilities at work and in your families, is a model for all Singaporeans to follow. As you begin to enjoy the fruits of your labour, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that your journey for learning should not stop here. I urge you to aim for greater heights in your pursuit for knowledge and to regard learning as a rewarding lifelong experience.

Concluding Remarks

13 In closing, I wish all of you continued success in your future endeavours.

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