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**SPEECH BY MR HENG SWEE KEAT, MINISTER FOR  
EDUCATION, AT THE SINDA EXCELLENCE AWARDS  
PRESENTATION CEREMONY 2011 ON SATURDAY, 3  
SEPTEMBER 2011, AT NANYANG POLYTECHNIC AT 3.15PM**

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam  
Deputy Prime Minister,  
Minister for Finance and Minister for Manpower,  
Chairman, SINDA Board of Trustees,

Ms Indranee Rajah,  
MP for Tanjong Pagar GRC,  
President, SINDA Executive Committee

Mr Raja Segar,

CEO of SINDA,

National Archives of Singapore

Members of the SINDA Board of Trustees and Executive Committee,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Award Recipients, Parents, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon.

## **Introduction**

1. It is my pleasure to be here today at the 20<sup>th</sup> SINDA Excellence Awards ceremony.
2. Today, we recognise and celebrate the achievements of outstanding Indian students in the academic and non-academic arenas. My heartiest congratulations to all award recipients.

## **Dare to aspire higher!**

3. At its inception in 1992, the SINDA Academic Excellence Awards recognise the academic achievements of top Indian students at the various levels.
4. Over the years, our education system has evolved to provide for a more holistic education as well as to create multiple pathways for success for students with different inclinations and abilities. The School of the Arts, the Singapore Sports School and other similar institutes of learning help groom talents in specific domains. In tandem with these changes, SINDA has developed new categories of awards. I commend and thank SINDA for your initiative. Today, we celebrate excellence in the various fields – in academic pursuits, in sports and in the arts.
5. It is gratifying to see that each year more and more students are selected to receive the excellence awards. In 1992, only 46

students received SINDA's awards for academic excellence. Today, over 450 students have distinguished themselves in the academic sphere and in sports and the arts, an almost tenfold increase. It is laudable that more Indian students are achieving excellence even as the criterion for selection has been tightened.

6. Each of our award recipients has an interesting story to tell about your journey towards excellence, and of the people who made an impact on you. Let me highlight a few examples.

7. R R Pravin is receiving the SINDA Excellence Award this year for his achievement at the International Baccalaureate. He is also a second time recipient of this award, having received one two years ago for his achievement in the Integrated Programme. Pravin went through some trying times growing up in a single-parent home, but while it would have been very easy for him to have given up, he was determined to excel. His consistent hard work and perseverance have proven fruitful. Coupled with support from his mother and his aunt, he always believed that he could achieve anything and everything, as long as he had faith in himself. True to that statement, Pravin will pursue his dreams studying at the National University of Singapore. Pravin is also a gifted writer, having written the award-winning novel "The African Girl", at the tender age of fifteen. It won international acclaim and clinched an award at the United States of America Best Books Awards in 2008.

8. Another student I would like to highlight is R Jeyavani. Jeyavani obtained three 'A stars' and one 'A' at the PSLE examination last year. Jeyavani believes that being an all-rounder goes beyond academic excellence. She believes strength of character comes from being involved in co-curricular activities.

This belief is what made her sign up at the Singapore Soccer Academy where she is learning to play soccer after being inspired by her cousin's sleek football moves. When Jeyavani expressed her interest to her father, he was more than willing to support his daughter's interest, allowing her to make her own choices.

The family has always firmly believed in the value of a holistic educational experience. Their confidence and trust in her, Jeyavani says, is what has driven her to achieve success in whatever she does.

9. I would also like to highlight Dhukhilan Jeevamani, a Secondary 4 student in Punggol Secondary School. Dhukhilan is a talented soccer player who was the vice-captain of our National football squad during the 2010 Youth Olympics Games where we clinched the Bronze medal. Dhukhilan was named Man-of-the-Match for his brilliant performance on the field when he was asked to lead the team at the last minute. Dhukhilan was made captain of the National Under-16 Football squad this year where he led his team to clinch a silver medal in Lion City Cup 2011. For his outstanding contributions to national football, Dhukhilan has been a Gold Award recipient for the National and Zone Colours Award in 2009 and Singapore School Sports Council Colours Award. Dhukhilan, who aims to be a pilot one

day, will be receiving the Singapore Sports Council Special Colours Award and the National Colours Award today.

### **Be Inspiring Role Models**

10. I trust that for our award recipients, the award is just the start, to spur you on towards greater achievements. Aim high, and keep challenging yourself.

11. I trust too that as you have a sense of pride in your achievements, you also have a deep sense of gratitude towards the people who have made a difference in your lives – your parents, teachers, coaches, friends and mentors, whose support and encouragement enabled you to get this far.

12. It is also my hope that you can serve as role models or mentors to other students who wish to be achievers like you.

13. While Indian students have made progress over the past few decades, there is still room for improvement especially in subjects like Mathematics and Science. Successful students like you can come forward and volunteer to teach and mentor other students and youths who are weaker academically. You can read to young children at SINDA's reading programmes, or provide home-based tuition for children who cannot attend the tuition classes. Or help coach students in particular areas of sports or arts. I hope all of you will come forward to volunteer at SINDA.

14. I hope too that you can contribute back to the community in creative ways. Let me share a story on Team BrighTEN, four teenage girls from Nanyang Girls' High who recently raised over \$18,000 within 6 weeks for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. The funds raised will help fulfill the wishes of its beneficiaries who are children aged 3 to 18 with life-threatening medical conditions. Team BrighTEN raised funds by organising the sale of badges, pens, T-shirts and novelty items such as Make-A-Wish magic wand pens along Orchard Road. In addition, the girls helped to create greater awareness about the Make-A-Wish Foundation®'s cause by organising Wish exhibitions in nine partnering schools. The exhibits included post-it notes with the wishes of beneficiaries posted up on boards. These girls sacrificed the June holidays to work tirelessly for their cause and hoped that they could make a difference, however small, in the lives of their beneficiaries by making their wishes come true.

15. We need more Team BrighTENs, young people with big hearts and the boldness to help those in need. There is no age limit in championing a worthy cause. Do what you can to help. You will find fulfillment.

### **Inclusion of the New Awards Categories**

16. As our education system continues to evolve and recognises a range of talent, I am pleased that SINDA has introduced three new categories of awards.

17. These new categories are

- the ITE Diploma Award which recognises students who have excelled in the study of culinary arts, automotive engineering and machine technology in our ITEs,
- the Singapore School Sports Council Special Colours Awards for talented sportsmen and sportswomen who have represented Singapore in international competitions as well as
- the Returning Graduates Award for students who studied abroad at prestigious overseas institutions and scored a First Class Honours.

### **SINDA's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

18. I would also to extend my heartiest wishes and congratulations to SINDA as it turns 20 this year.

19. SINDA has done much good work in the past 19 years in your efforts to improve the education standards and support the endeavours of Indian students. I understand that a review of SINDA's efforts at better supporting the Indian community is at its concluding stage and a review report will be released in October 2011. The coming years will certainly be an exciting time for SINDA. I hope the Indian community will continue working together with SINDA, in tune with its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary tagline 'A Brighter Future, Together'.

## **Conclusion**

20. Finally, let me once again congratulate all our recipients of the SINDA awards today, as well as your parents, teachers and loved ones. I hope you will choose from the many options those that you enjoy, continue to challenge yourself to excel, and to contribute to the community.

21. Thank you.

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