



SPEECH

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Plenary by Mr Lim Siong Guan at the MINDEF PRIDE Day Awards Ceremony

04 Nov 2016

Minister Mr Ong Ye Kung,
Permanent Secretaries,
Chief of Defence Force,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I held several appointments in various places and many people ask me which was the appointment that I enjoyed most and my invariable answer always is MINDEF. MINDEF is a place where there was enormous opportunity to try new things to experiment and therefore it was a fun place to discover new stuff. This morning, hearing the speech by Minister (and) seeing the video - I am immensely proud of what MINDEF to have accomplished all this time. Discuss the spirit of people, we may have innovation, we have all the resources and high tech equipment and so forth. But at the end day it is the spirit of people, our spirit of enterprise, our spirit of reaching out. It is that which determine where we get to. So, I come this morning, as a point from the past, to share with you aspects of how PRIDE movement came today and share my thoughts on what we can do in the future. Of course it your privilege to accept or reject whatever I say.

The first thing is why PRIDE came to be? First thing, it is a reflection of the very thing that Minister mentioned. When Dr Goh Keng Swee was Minister of Defence, every day he issued the MINDEF general orders. I do not know whether it is still being done these days. But the MINDEF general orders was kind of the orders for the day issued by MINDEF. When certain things went on, when Dr Goh began to have a feeling that commanders either didn't bother to read the orders, ignored the orders or didn't understand the orders. Whatever it is, there were things in the orders that the commanders were not carrying out. One day, he called his military assistant and instead of the normal general orders, told him to go to Genesis Chapter 6 from the Bible and just reproduced the story of the Noah's Ark. And, nothing happened. Commanders might have read and wondered what it was all about and decided that Dr Goh had sent to share but whatever it is nothing happened. That's why he said I told you they don't read the stuff. Maybe they read and they don't understand and they dare not ask what is it about. And this is a problem of hierarchy.

When I became Permanent Secretary in 1981, at that time General Winston Choo was away at Duke University studying for his Masters and General Leong Peng Kiong was Acting CDF, we were discussing about how you bring about the situation in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) where you get everybody to be contributing towards an idea. And that is where we took inspiration from the ideas of the Israel Defence Force (IDF). The Israelis are very proud of the fact that if you can put a hundred Israelis in a room and you will end up with 101

ideas. But when the commander makes a decision, they (are) all married to that mission and say that is what we have to accomplish. But even having decided that is what they want to accomplish, what happens on the ground is something else again. They would react, change and adapt to whatever situation they find. It is this spirit of being able to gather ideas from all over the place, despite hierarchy, and yet in the end, be able to be united on the mission and when carrying out the mission, to still have the flexibility and innovative spirit to do what is most sensible for the ground. General Tan and I felt that this was an existential issue in the SAF, that there were no alternative to form an initiative at leadership (level) and somehow we can induce it at every level in the SAF. That's the whole idea of productivity movement and say let's go out and create an environment when we say everyone, we want every soldier to not just think about himself but to think of the mission and what is the best way to get ahead.

National Productivity Movement

When I went back to MINDEF in 1981, I had just finished three years under Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew. He was just starting the national productivity movement, so we saw this as part of a national cause. Why should we think about the future? There is something that I believe is existential for Singapore and I refer to an essay written by Sir John Grubb. I do not know whether any of you have come across him. This is a summary of what he did. John Grubb was a soldier in British Army. He actually started what was then known as the Jordan Arab legion which became the Jordanian Army. When he joined the British Army, he became an author of the story and he decided to study the history of the world - three thousand and one years of world history. The best thing (was that) his focus was on empires. There were 11 empires at that time and he was looking from the western atmosphere. Starting with Assyria empire, Persian empire, Greece empire, Roman Republic, Roman empire, Arab empire, Mameluke empire, Ottoman empire, Spanish empire, Romanov Russia, and ended with British empire. But the remarkable thing about the study of the eleven empires is that all of them lasted only 250 years. The questions in his mind were, "Why is that so?" Weapons of warfare become much better. We have now machine guns, we have cannons. How come it can't go on (the empire), how come it cannot go on for more than 250 years?" That was really something he found was quite remarkable. Despite advances in warfare, and yet you find it cannot surpass 250 years. So what he did was to study the rise and fall of the empires. And this is what he came to and that all the empires went through the same stages.

The first part is (the) age of pioneers. These are people who walk out of the fatherland or motherland, who go outside of the boundaries of the countries and say what can we do. Then comes the age of conquests. They go out and get all the colonies all over the world. With new technology, the colonies were no longer adjacent land that you go out to conquer. Colonies meant you can go out in a ship, just like the British Empire to get colonies all over the world. That's what technology allows you to do. But, the fact simply is that the empires don't last longer than 250 years.

Age of conquest is the time when young men felt the best thing to do was to be a soldier to fight for king and country and bring glory to them. The age of commerce is where merchants came along and they milked the colonies for all the natural resources of what one can do. That is how you build your big trading companies in the world. Then, came the age of affluence. Merchants became very rich, because what happens in the fatherland or motherland are mostly what they are able to extract out of the colonies. This is high noon.

This is where the colonies grew at the conquest of age of affluence. This is when there is a big change. When we come to the age of affluence, young men did not sought to fight for his country or king. Young men sought to get as much money as he can for themselves and their family. It was a change in orientation that took place.

After the high noon, is the age of intellect. The age of intellect is when all the people are very rich and there is peace around the world and there are no more colonies to conquer. So what do you do with your money? And that is the time where you engage in a lot of intellectual discourse. That is when the rich men give money to commission works of art, and works of music; give endowment to universities to help build up people with the capacity to think and capacity to discuss issues.

After age of intellect is called the age of decadence. The age of decadence is when you continue to have a lot of money. The age of decadence is categorised by several things. The first one is defensiveness. You will find countries now who are very defensive, in the sense of, if anybody who try to do anything or disagree with anything with the country or the empire, they say that is a bad idea. They become terribly defensive of what they are and what they believe in. Secondly, you find widespread pessimism. Part of the reason of pessimism is that you already conquered everything you can. Your idea of the world and the idea of the greatness of the country is to be able to conquer the world. There is nothing more to conquer. Everything can only go down, nothing else can go up. The third thing is materialism. Again, the reflection of the fact that the young men will no longer think of the nation and how to keep the nation strong. Instead young men are thinking just about themselves and their families. So materialistic pursuit became a big dominant feature in the age of decadence. The fourth thing is frivolity. It is where people spend money on something that does not yield any good lasting value. The fifth characteristic in age of decadence is the influx of foreigners. Why do foreigners come to the empire? They come because of higher civilisation, higher quality of life, giving people opportunity. Final characteristic of the age of decadence is the weakening of religion, imagine the weakening of moral benchmarks, a weakening of the idea of what is good, what is bad, what is right or wrong. That becomes a base where you can do anything you like. In fact there is a guy called David Brooks, who is a social commentator in New York Times, who wrote that in his view, the problem is practically an American society which faces a rise in culture of non-judgmentalism. Everybody can do and think anything as they wish and it not the job of anyone else to judge anybody else what is good behaviour for the society. And it was asked if the stages of empires apply to the small states. Yes, it applies to small states, inter-small states, states with affluence and power. I raise this to you to ponder whether some of this applies to Singapore or not. This is about rise and fall. Then, some of you might say Singapore is only 50 years old, while this is 250 years.

The SAF needs to see itself as an integral part of a national movement. And therefore an understanding that we don't just exist amongst ourselves, we don't exist just for defence and deterrence, we exist because we are part of a national movement. National service is the last organised opportunity to be able to reach out to Singaporeans from all walks of life and be able to say what does it means to be a Singaporean.

Just a thought about where Nations can be? The destiny for nations is first determined by geography, geography defines its physical limitations. Second, it is determined by demographics. Demographics represent your human relations. Third, is your technology, such as Smart Nation, Smart SAF and so forth. Technology can help overcome to some extent some limitations of geography, demographics and technology and can make you fundamentally different from others. But in the end, you come up with economic policy; economic policy of a country is that formulation to be together regardless of geography, demographics and technology to say this is what makes sense to the country. This is what makes most sense to the country for purposes of optimal possible outcomes. However, it depends on political culture. Will the people allow you to carry out that plan? Will more explanation and mitigation allow you to do it? Fundamentally, the big question is how to bring about a policy strategic framework, and how you bring about a situation where people will say that is a brave idea? That is a challenge.

Geography - this is the world map, I hope you can find Singapore in this map. Singapore lies within the letter 'O' of the name of the country. President Habibie of Indonesia understood it. Sometimes I wonder whether Singaporeans understand it. You are what you are and you can be found within the letter 'O' of the name Singapore.

Singapore is a testimony of new enterprise and imagination. There is no doubt sometimes I think back to 1965, how we built up the SAF and the institutions in Singapore. Like the Minister says, we must understand that things are changing, and therefore the ideas and the intentions are the same, the spirit is the same but the manifestation must be different.

We were ranked, in 2013, named by Brand Finance, an international brand consultancy based in London, as the top nation brand of the world. We are the top nation brand because we got to it with trustworthiness. It is a branding. We were also, in 2014, named as the most religiously diverse nation in the world by Pew Research. And the remarkable thing is how we managed to maintain racial harmony and religious harmony, despite being

the most religiously diverse nation in the world. I summarise it by saying that is why we are people who will honour our word because we will deliver our promises and therefore we are trustworthy. And second, we are people who honour each other, who give space to each other in a multi-racial (and) multi-religious environment. That's the way to maintain peace and harmony. The destiny for nation - I described that. Now to the goal for Singapore - where do we want to go. If we don't define where we want to go as a country, it simply means we will end up doing whatever seems convenient, whatever seems necessary for the moment. And we begin to end up chasing after, perhaps the agent, but not so important, as opposed to entail what important is, and therefore to set our priorities. But when you know where you are trying to get to, you will be able to check yourself and bring you back to the goal. Where do you want to go? A lot of Singaporeans will want the *kampung* spirit. Half the people who want *kampung* spirit don't know what *kampung* is. The fundamental idea about *kampung* spirit is to say "How is it that my neighbour relates (to me) as though I matter? How is it that my neighbour does not appear to care about me?" I can assure you that your neighbour asked the same question about you. The question of "Who is going to start on this?"

Now, in July 2015, this study was published. It was a survey done by a consultancy company - this small private company that did a survey of national values and national behaviours. The way this was done, was they chose two thousand Singaporean students for one-on-one interviews. They had a list of about a hundred values and behaviours. They asked them first to go through a list of hundred values and behaviours and pick the ten which you think best what reflects what you believe as most important for your life. Then they say go through the same list of a hundred - please pick the ten that reflects what you actually see as the way of life in Singapore. Then, they say from the same list of a hundred pick the ten which reflects the kind of Singapore you would like to see in Singapore in future.

First list, you see is very good, right? I mean 'family' - the most important. 'Responsibility', 'friendship', 'happiness', 'health', 'caring', 'honesty', 'compassion', 'positive attitude' and 'respect'. All (are) very good actually. Among the top ten, maybe 'health' is the only one that the government does 50 percent and the individual has to look after his health 50 percent. The other nine are for the individual to decide on how he is going to run his life, but it is extremely good. Second list, is what he actually sees. Remember the second list then comes from the same list of values and attitudes. Now look at what he says. The top is what he sees Singapore society as '*kiasu*' is not surprising. 'Competitive', 'materialistic', 'self-centred', '*kiasu*', 'blame', 'security', 'education opportunities', 'effective healthcare' and 'peace'. I think the last four - security and peace has a lot to do with the SAF; educational opportunities and effective healthcare. The first six is a lot of personal behaviour and how is (that) the first six so different from the first list. One theory is that the first list is based on one-on-one interview, so people (want to) look nice and honourable. And that's why the first list came out like that. But there is second explanation which is interesting. Actually the second list is a reflection of the first list. They actually seriously believe in the first list and that's why the second list comes out like that. "My family very important and so, I will cut queue. I will argue with my daughter's teacher. I will go argue with other people. My family is the most important. Everybody sees my behaviour as *kiasu*. I. My family. First." So he leaves the first list and comes up with the second list. That's the challenge of *kampung* spirit. But if you want *kampung* spirit, what you need to do in terms of changing attitudes, mind-set and changing the way people would keep each other alive. That's a challenge and the question therefore, is whether we define that as where we want to go. Now, the third list is just as interesting. They say this is what they want, desire. 'Affordable housing', 'caring for elderly', 'effective healthcare', 'compassion', 'quality of life', 'caring for the disadvantage', 'peace', 'employment opportunities', 'caring for the environment' and 'concern for future generations'. 'Peace' (is) still there, so the SAF don't worry - your employment is secure. But this is remarkable right? The last list says "government (should) do everything". I am only posing questions, issues and challenges to you. So the future Singapore, I believe, that we have an opportunity to define the first - world society be born - whether *kampung* spirit is part of first-world society and what other things about the first world society. It's interesting and Singapore in 50 years - what shall it be? SG100. Whether we talk about sustainable and how we have sustainable economy, social harmony and synergy, gracious society, children proud of parents, citizens proud of country- whatever we want to choose. But we shouldn't choose more than five. It is too difficult. You can't focus if it is more than five, I think.

But, (it would be useful for) an exercise which says what kind of Singapore we are trying to build over the next 50 years and how National Service (NS) and everything that the SAF is doing is an integral part of the national movement to get us there. I think this is a critical thesis to think about and everything about innovation and being willing to try new things out and be different from other people and being number one in the world. These are very important qualities which we take with ourselves in order to be the kind of people which we all can be proud of. And produce and deliver the kind of Singapore which we can all be proud of. Singapore, in 50 years, is not your generation, is not even your children's generation. It is your grand-children's generation. And that is wonderful that we are here facing a challenge which is about our grandchildren. So here we are, the path of Singapore, how we go there. This is my own sense of it. We need to build a culture of knowledge and excellence. It is driving for a culture. It is built into the spirit of the place. That's where, I think we need to go. And in order to get there we need to build courage, build self-confidence and a sense of self-adventure. Learning from what we must do, what can do, and many of these things that Minister had mentioned.

[Referring to the map] Absolutely critical for the future of Singapore and the SAF amongst all these people and in particular the NSmen, becomes our last institutional opportunity to inject this in a place. The way we deliver has to be different. I just want to say one more specific thing about - there's a lot about technology which is remarkable. And with the SAF, it is already one down because in many ways, with the freedom to try and the people that we have. But maybe the one additional area where we can have a breakthrough on, would be the whole business of challenge.

I think demographics is - we have limitation. But the question is how much as a country are we prepared to drive ourselves to say you must get the most out of every single Singaporean? What can you do to develop every single Singaporean to be the best that (they) can be? And what can we do to create an environment so that every Singaporean Singaporean is able to contribute their most?

The remarkable about Israel Defence Force (IDF) or the preferences in Israel, for example, is that there is so much that has taken place in Israel. That even their policies and practices for NS becomes totally flexible in the way they develop and practice. They change and move their policies around the talent that is available. They are probably the most tested population in the world and will change their policies in order for the IDF to get the maximum benefit out of what the people are capable of. And how do you do it while maintaining the spirit of high condition about looking after the country. So we go back to this quotation from Dr Goh Keng Swee "The only way to avoid making mistakes is not to do anything. And that in the final analysis, will be the ultimate mistake."

Thank you.

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News Release:

- Second Minister for Defence Commemorates 35 Years of Innovation and Officially Opens of SGDefence Exhibition (MINDEF_20161104001.pdf)