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SPEECH BY PROFESSOR YEOH GHIM SENG, ACTING PRESIDENT,
AT THE PASSING-OUT PARADE OF OFFICER CADETS AT THE
PADANG, ON SUNDAY, 9TH JANUARY, 1972

National Service is now accepted as part of the life of the Singapore citizen. Nobody, save some cranks, questions the need for National Service. But the acceptance of National Service by the general population in so short a time since its first introduction requires some explanation.

After all, Singapore has no military tradition. Further, there is the Chinese saying: 好男不学兵, 好铁不打钉 or "Good iron is not used to make nails and good men do not become soldiers". It was only a short while ago when such prejudice against soldiering was widespread.

The reasons why National Service has come to be accepted are many. Perhaps the most important reason is that liability to full-time National Service has been administered impartially and without fear or favour to anybody. Whether you are the son of the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice or the richest millionaire in Singapore, or whether you are the son of a taxi-driver or a building labourer does not in any way alter your National Service liability. If you are fit and have the requisite education, you will be enlisted.

Deferments have been granted in a diminishing scale to those going for higher studies. Soon only those who have exceptional merit and have been awarded prestigious scholarships abroad will obtain deferment. The only justification for this is that places in overseas universities would otherwise be lost. Even so, on their return, they will have to do their National Service before they can practise the professions for which they have been trained. There can be no departure from this rigid principle.

Many people think that those who obtained deferment to do higher studies were lucky. It remains to be seen whether in three or four years' time, the same belief will persist.

A subsidiary reason for the acceptance of National Service is that, by and large, the National Service soldier is adequately cared for in the battalion camps. He is clothed, housed and fed to acceptable standards.

While the training is unavoidably rigorous, great care is taken to ensure that the soldier keeps in good health. And while stern discipline is enforced, no ill-treatment of the soldier is tolerated in the SAF.

Because soldiery is now an inescapable part of the life of the young, there is an advantage in holding the Officer Cadet Passing-out Parade in the Padang instead of holding the passing-out parade of the officer cadets in the far-away SAFTI camp at Pasir Laba. More people can witness this ceremony. The parents and relatives of the officer cadets who are present here will know that the pride in their sons on parade today will be shared by many of our citizens who are gathered here this morning.

To the officer cadets themselves, may I extend them my congratulations. May they prove worthy of the trust which our citizens place on them.

DATED: JANUARY 8, 1972.

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