SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT   MC:JAN/9/72(ISTANA)

SPEECH BY DR. YEOH GHIM SENG, ACTING PRESIDENT,
AT THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF INFANTRY OFFICERS,
SAFTI, AT THE ISTANA, ON THURSDAY, 13TH JANUARY, 1972
AT 6.00 P.M.

When National Service was first introduced in 1967, the
policy was to grant deferments and exemptions on a generous scale.
Those already working, those proceeding from school certificate to
higher school certificate, and those from H.S.C. to university were
readily deferred or exempted.

Because of this policy, we were not able to get enough national
servicemen of officer calibre. This shortage of officer material among
national service full-time intakes in those years made it necessary to
enlist university graduates and civil servants as well. However, as
enlistment was still on selective and not on general basis, other
problems began to crop up.

With the tightening of exemptions and the decision to enlist
students before they join the university, the shortage of officer
material no longer exists now. Each year, we may have between 2,500
to 3,000 among the national service full-time intakes with either good
school certificates, full H.S.C., polytechnic diplomas or university
degrees.

As from the January intake of last year, there has been a
very keen competition for limited places in the officer cadet training
courses at SAFTI.

The emphasis of the present system of selection is based on
merit. In addition to basic educational qualifications, the selection
board takes into account personal qualities as well as performance of
the soldier in his previous training courses and in his work in the
battalions. Only the best will be recommended for officer cadet training.

Meritocracy has many advantages, those with lower
qualifications but having the desire to improve themselves and showing
the qualities of an officer through zealous performance will stand a
chance of selection. On the other hand, those with higher academic
qualifications but showing a poor performance or lacking the qualities
of leadership, may find themselves being left out.

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