

PRESS RELEASE

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14-1/91/07/06**SPEECH BY MR S DHANABALAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT,
AT THE VICTORIA SCHOOL'S 57TH SPEECH AND PRIZE GIVING DAY
ON SATURDAY 6 JULY 1991 AT 4.30 PM**

The last time I attended a speech day as a student was as a pre-university student in Victoria School in 1956. I remember feeling happy, sad, excited, all at the same time. I was happy because almost all my friends and I had done well in the examinations. Sad because I was leaving Victoria for the university after spending 5½ wonderful years, and excited at the prospect of furthering my education.

Many among you probably share that same mix of emotions, at least for those of you in your last year at school. Others among you have already left Victoria to go to junior colleges or to work and are here to receive awards.

Regardless of which group you belong to, many of you must have at some time or other asked yourself certain anxious questions: "Have I taken the right subject combination?" "Are these the subjects that will be useful for me to further my studies or when I start work?" "Will I do well enough in my examination to get a good job or further my studies?" These are basically questions related to your academic performance.

Ours is a society that emphasises academic performance. From time to time, this over-emphasis is questioned and I am sure that there must have been occasions when you have been told that you ought also to participate in sports and extra-curricular activities (ECA) in order to get a well rounded education. It is difficult for you to take such advice seriously when you know

that in competing for scholarships or for a place in the university or a job, it is academic performance that counts and not your extra-curricular activities.

Thus your concern and questions about academic performance are valid. But, in my opinion, there is another important question that you must ask yourselves when you consider your career prospects. "Do I have what it takes to be a team player? How will I manage and motivate people?"

It is in this very practical area that ECA becomes important. When you finish your studies and start working, how well you perform in your job and how high you rise in your chosen field will, in the overwhelming majority of cases, depend on how well you work with other people. Unless you are a mad scientist working alone in a research laboratory, without having to depend upon superiors or subordinates, you will find that professional and technical brilliance alone is not sufficient to get on in life.

In today's world - be it in the government or a private sector - one cannot work in isolation regardless of whether one is a manager or a worker. The ability to work with people, be they your colleagues, or subordinates, or your superiors, is an important quality. This is a skill each and every one of you must develop if you intend to do well in life.

Unfortunately, this is one skill that cannot be learned from textbooks. It comes from practice, and daily interactions with others. As students, you have abundant opportunities of mastering this skill - if you participate in ECA activities. Uniform groups, sports and school clubs, are a few examples where you can pick up these skills. With each passing year, these skills are constantly refined. You learn to be sensitive to nuances in interpersonal relations without the need for clearly spelt out instructions.

Do not get me wrong. Professional competence is important. And if you want to excel in your chosen field you

must have the pre-requisite skill. However, if you do not have the people skills, you cannot work well with your colleagues, let alone lead an organisation or manage a company.

I have chosen to highlight this because many of our skilled, competent and capable people flounder when faced with the tasks of man management or working with others. They think that it is sufficient to be a good engineer, architect or other type of professional and that this should automatically ensure their success in any organisation. But this is not so. They have to learn to work with people. This is not a difficult skill to acquire. Spend some time in the various activities in your school. Participate in community and volunteer work. The skills you pick up along the way, will give your individual intelligence the added brilliance.

Employers, teachers and students need to recognise the importance of ECA in developing the skills to work with other people. If I have ignited and inspired in all of you the desire to acquire these skills, then I am glad.

I congratulate all who will be receiving awards this afternoon. The others, I hope, will aspire to do better. As your school's motto says: NIL SINE LABORE.

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