

Release No.: 25\JUL

02-1\92\07\18

SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER, MR GOH CHOK TONG,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF RAFFLES INSTITUTION (RI)
ON SATURDAY, 18 JULY 1992, AT 6.30 PM,
AT RAFFLES INSTITUTION LANE

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Today is like a homecoming for me. The home has shifted from Bras Basah Road, but there are still many familiar signs around. The smart white uniform, the distinctive school tie, the RI tradition, the old boys of my vintage who are here today, and of course, your Headmaster, Mr Wijesingha, who taught me General Paper and History - these are links to my school days.

2 My mind goes back to my last day of school, some 32 years ago. The school was almost deserted. Most of the students had gone home but I lingered behind. I did not know when I would see the school again. I was reluctant to leave. I was flooded with memories, so I took a slow walk around the school, bidding it farewell.

3 I have a deep and abiding attachment to RI. As an old boy, I would want RI to be the premier school in Singapore. But as the Prime Minister, it is my obligation to create the conditions for other schools to compete with RI, and in fact, to produce more RIs.

4 I have asked the Ministry of Education to consider three moves to achieve this. First, give students more choice of schools. Second, give schools more autonomy in school management and the organization of the curriculum, and third, enhance the quality of school leadership.

5 All parents want the best possible education for their children. They are very selective in their choice of schools. We must provide them with better information to make intelligent choices. This means making public the

performance of schools, their achievements, their traditions and what they have to offer. It means giving parents a greater variety of schools to choose from, and encouraging healthy competition amongst schools. This requires the education system to be decentralized further, and giving more autonomy to schools so that they can respond better to their pupil's learning needs.

6 At present, all schools already enjoy some degree of autonomy with the independent schools enjoying the most. The independent schools have autonomy in personnel and school management and the flexibility to develop innovative programs for their pupils. They also have the leeway to charge their own fees.

7 The first independent secondary schools were set up only in 1988. The results are encouraging. We can see a greater variety of programs in these schools. The first batch of pupils from the first three independent schools (Anglo - Chinese School, St Joseph's Institution and the Chinese High School) performed slightly better than their 1990 counterparts in the GCE 'O' level examination, but, of course, it is too early to draw any firm conclusions. MOE is carefully monitoring the independent schools to determine their effectiveness and how innovations and improvements introduced by them could be extended to other schools.

National Archives of Singapore

8 MOE is limiting the number of independent schools to 8 for the time being. The reason is not finance, although that is important. The limiting factor is the availability of outstanding principals and teachers who can guide and excite their pupils with passion to learn and achieve. However, I have directed MOE to explore the feasibility of extending more autonomy to secondary schools, and to identify a few which can be given more leeway to execute their mission of

providing quality education. These schools should preferably be well spread out geographically for the convenience of pupils living in different parts of the island. They could be given additional funds to enable them to compete with the independent schools. With more resources and greater flexibility to implement changes, the autonomous government schools will be better placed to compete with independent schools for pupil as their quality will be high while their fees will be lower. Over time, some schools could develop distinct identities and magnetic pulls, like RI. Parents will thus have a wider range of quality schools to choose from for their children.

9 I believe that where a school has capable leadership, giving it more autonomy has the potential of raising its quality. The school will have more flexibility to introduce innovations while complying with national standards regarding the core curriculum and bilingualism. It will be able to surge ahead

with good leadership. This leadership will have to be provided by principals who have a sense of mission, are knowledgeable, energetic and able to inspire teachers to work together towards shared goals.

10 To get good school leadership, it is necessary to enhance the attractiveness of the teaching profession, in particular, the position of school principals. The Education Service must not only be attractive and rewarding. It must be seen to

be prestigious and highly regarded so that the talented and able would join and dedicate themselves to nurturing our nation's children. MOE will take steps towards this objective.

11 To underline the importance of the Principals, the Ministry of Education has agreed with my suggestion to organize a Principal's Conference once every two years. This is to both raise the public status of Principals as well as to enable school leaders to learn from one another and pick up successful techniques or systems others have tried out. Principals from outstanding schools abroad can be invited to take part. Experience will then be shared and quality of education raised across the board.

12 Quality education does not mean academic excellence alone. While academic achievement will remain the central goal of education, pupil must have a more rounded education. Schools must toughen them, develop their skills to cope to change, and make them more resourceful and robust. I feel we should also give greater emphasis to civics, geography and history, so that pupils will retain core Asian values, understand Singapore's strength and vulnerabilities, and grow up knowing how the nation emerged and what they must contribute to sustain Singapore's well being.

13 Your Headmaster tells me that many current Rafflesians want to be part of the glory but not the endeavor. By this he means that they are not committing themselves to the success of their school on all fronts. Apparently, the school has to plead for support at games.

14 This was not so in my time. Top pupils were also top sportsmen. The popular games were rugby and swimming. There were good turnouts whenever exciting games or competitions were held. When RI played its arch rival St Andrew's in rugby, the whole school turned up to cheer.

15 I learnt from your Headmaster that parents are holding back their children from robust and demanding sports. This will impede the pupil's character development. I suppose the parents are concerned because they have small families. The pupils may be their only sons. But it is precisely because we have fewer children that we want everyone of them to be self confident and robust. I hope parents will encourage their children to participate actively in competitive games, as this is part of the Rafflesian culture.

16 RI will be building a boarding school, a swimming pool, gymnasium, visual arts and design and technology center. I support the idea that the pupils should be exposed to a boarding school stint. We now have small families also

have maids. It will do the pupils good to learn to do things for themselves, to live with others of different races and from different social backgrounds, and to forge life long friendship at an early age. The boarding school experience will add depth and dimension to a Rafflesian's development.

17 The new RI has facilities much superior to what the old RI had at Bras Basah Road or at Grange Road. But that did not handicap the old RI from producing top students, top sportsmen and a top reputation. So remember, the excellence of RI depends less on facilities than on people and how they organize themselves. These are members of the School Board, the Headmaster, teachers, Rafflesians past and present and friends of Raffles. They drive and sustain the spirit of RI.

18 I now have great pleasure in declaring RI's new premises open.

National Archives of Singapore