

Release No.: 15/Mar

02-1/94/03/13

SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER MR GOH CHOK TONG,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF SAFRA RESORT AT SAFRA
RESORT AND COUNTRY CLUB, 10 CHANGI WALK
ON SUNDAY, 13 MARCH 1994 AT 10.30 AM

When independence was suddenly thrust upon us in 1965, we practically had no defence capability. As Minister for the Interior and Defence, Dr Goh Keng Swee laid the foundation of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). His efforts were ably followed through by Mr Lim Kim San, Mr Howe Yoon Chong and Dr Yeo Ning Hong, each in turn adding to the capability of the SAF. I, too, had the privilege and honour of serving as Defence Minister. I am happy to see all the Defence Ministers, past and present, here today. Their presence symbolises continuity in our defence efforts and vigilance, and continued service to the nation.

What is special about Singapore's defence? I believe it is our "Total Defence" approach. We rally and involve the entire population in this national task. It is an endeavour where everyone plays a role and shares in its benefits.

National Service is a key component of Total Defence. It achieves several critical objectives:

- It provides the manpower numbers to have a big enough SAF without depriving the economy of its needs.
- It is an institution for nation-building and developing a sense of shared destiny.
- It directly involves every family in a national crisis.

Nothing gets across the message of urgency more strongly than when a father, a son, a husband or a brother is called upon to defend his country. Every NSman knows he is key to Singapore's continuing peace and prosperity. He serves so that his family may survive and do well.

As expected, National Service was initially not well received. As Asians, many Singaporeans believed that “good sons do not become soldiers”, just as you do not use good steel to make nails. But attitude has changed. Today, good sons strive to be good soldiers.

Singaporeans know that if the country has no security, they have no hope as individuals too. If the country does not succeed, they cannot expect to do well. If the country has no future, they will be in the dumps. National Service today is accepted without question. Indeed, many parents think it is good for their sons, not just for the country.

More than half a million Singaporeans have served National Service since it began in 1967. In being grateful to and proud of them, we are also grateful to and proud of their parents who support and encourage them. The first batch completed Full-time NS and became Operationally Ready NSmen in 1969. Now, 25 years later, over 250,000 Operationally Ready NSmen stand prepared everyday, to respond to any call to defend our homeland. They form over 80 per cent of the SAF. Now, sons of the earlier cohorts of NSmen are doing National Service themselves. We have completed one lap. But the next lap must be run. We cannot let down our guard without letting go of our freedom to live the lives we choose.

Many people have contributed towards Singapore's prosperity. Our NSmen, the people who safeguard our peace and stability, deserve special mention. We demand a lot from them. They must be physically fit at all times. They must be ready for combat at a moment's notice. They have to endure the inconvenience of disruption from work for annual in-camp training, which is no holiday. They have to tolerate the demands of employers or customers who expect the same level of work or service despite their periods of duty with the SAF. They have to miss the company of family and friends when they attend to military duties.

Singaporeans appreciate the contributions and critical role of these NSmen. Our lives depend on them, to fight for us should an enemy come; to make it possible for us to earn our livelihood in peace and harmony; to allow us to improve our quality of life year after year as Singapore progresses.

The Government deeply values and appreciates the contribution of NSmen. That is why SAFRA Clubs have been built, and 120 hectares of reclaimed land set aside for SAFRA to develop a beach resort for NSmen and their families.

The amenities here are first-class. The SAFRA Resort is a tangible symbol of the nation's gratitude to and regard for the NSmen. It is your resort , for you and your family to rest and relax, without paying the high fees of a private club.

We have enjoyed more than 28 years of peace, progress and high economic growth. We can and must sustain our prosperity. That requires us to pass on the fighting spirit that has brought us peace and prosperity. There must be the same spirit of enterprise, innovation, and tenacity in those who come after us. If we keep that spirit, we will never fail.

I am pleased to declare open the SAFRA Resort. It is a prize our NSmen have earned for keeping Singapore secure.

National Archives of Singapore