

SPEECH BY MR ONG SOO CHUAN, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY,
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MP FOR NEE SOON AT
THE SENDING OFF OF NATIONAL SERVICEMEN AT NEE SOON
COMMUNITY CENTRE ON WEDNESDAY 21 APRIL, 1976 AT 9.00 AM.

I could sense that instead of anxiety, you have exhibited excitement on being called up for national service. This is a clear indication of the fact that not only national service has come to be accepted but also that there is a growing realisation of its purpose. This indeed is a positive and significant development in the promotion of national consciousness in Singapore.

2 Recent international developments, particularly those in the region, have served to reinforce the relevance and purpose of national service in Singapore.

3 It is clear that the threat to ASEAN countries is internal subversion. Each ASEAN country needs to overcome its internal problems as any domestic discontent or disunity would only invite outside intervention and fuel internal threats. Subversion can only survive and grow on the fertile soil of poverty, frustration and discontent among any people. To this end, ASEAN countries need to tackle their own economic and social problems and raise the standards of living of their people to discourage internal unrest.

4 This point has been clearly illustrated in the case of Singapore. In the 1950's, Singapore was confronted by serious communist subversion. The communists were able to effectively utilise the discontent and frustration of the population by their influence on the trade unions and other disgruntled factions. Exploiting discontent of the labour groups, they were able to organise strikes and unrest.

5 The situation was totally different in the 1960's. The Government had by then, through its far-sighted actions, been able to develop economic prosperity and higher standard of living for the population. In such an environment, the attempts to stir up discontent were unsuccessful.

6 However, economic prosperity and higher standard of living are not the only tools against communist or other forms of subversion. There must be other elements to promote national cohesion. One of these is the development of a commitment to the national and the democratic system of government. Therefore, in addition to providing a situation of political stability and economic prosperity, the Singapore Government has implemented other measures to ensure development of such national commitment and identification of the citizens' state in the future of Singapore under the present system. These measures include the implementation of national service, creation of more job opportunities, and the HDB home ownership scheme which has enabled more Singaporeans to own homes.

7 Nations can only prosper if their citizens commit themselves to the national welfare. However, I wish to emphasize that national welfare is not an abstract matter to the individual citizen. Just as a national disaster will cause miseries directly to the individual citizens, national prosperity will bring about comfort and security to them. Patriotism is never an empty or abstract slogan. It finds concrete expression in the life of a private citizen. We are enjoying the growing prosperity that is so evident in Singapore. All of us have a stake in not only protecting what we are enjoying today, but also what more in the future.

8 We have made Singapore not only a prosperous but also free nation where every citizen is enjoying his fruits of toil. There is no need to emphasize that Singapore is a country worthy and deserving of the best service from every of her citizens.