04-2/83/01/03

SPEECH BY MAJOR FONG SIP CHEE, MINISTER OF STATE (CULTURE), AT THE
PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATES TO THE SUCCESSFUL TRAINEES OF THE
COMPUTER PROGRAMMING COURSE (COBOL) AND THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
CHAI CHEE CC COMPUTER CLUB AT CHAI CHEE COMMUNITY CENTRE ON
3 JANUARY 1983 AT 7.30 PM

May I, first of all, extend my heartiest congratulations to the successful trainees of the first two computer programming courses. Of a total of 60 trainees, 40 of them passed the course-end examinations and will be awarded certificates of proficiency this evening. A third course is now underway.

These courses are conducted in collaboration with the Department of Extramural Studies of the NUS. The syllabus has been set at a high standard and the marking of the papers, by qualified examiners, has been strict.

The insistence on a high standard of training and in the examinations was deliberate. This is because the course is designed to be vocation-based. The graduands should have acquired a fair command of the requisite knowledge and 'marketable' skill, so to speak.

Trainees have been trained to operate the mini computer, or mini main-frame, which has been made available by courtesy of Messrs Business Computers (Pte) Ltd and to whom I must place on record my thanks and appreciation. The mini main-frame, the type of computer most commonly used by commercial houses, is the most sophisticated one so far installed at any community centre.

As I have said, the training, which is in COBOL, is employment-orientated. This is quite unlike the hobby-based training provided by computer clubs which operate on micro-computers. With the opening of the Chai Chee CC Computer Club this evening, we will also be able to

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cater for the many enthusiasts who, having had a **basic** understanding
of the computer's functions and capabilities, **may** want to go beyond the
enrichment or hobby level to find new and greener pastures in the computer
industry.

Computer technology is not a craze **which** has of late become
fashionable in Singapore. It has come to stay. Those who are in the
industry and the profession have already seen the passing of a few
generations of computers. **Without** doubt, the computer will soon, if it
has not already, become **part** of our daily life and will feature more in
our daily routine.

It is not a passing craze. It is a new technology which we must
quickly grasp, and fully exploit. Singapore must prepare itself for the
ready acquisition of new technology. The choice is simple and obvious:
either we keep ourselves abreast with the world or we shall be found
lagging behind our competitors who are more competent and more serious-
minded.

We have come thus far because we have not allowed ourselves to be
overwhelmed by problems. **But** we have not gotten over our obstacles, nor
will we ever do completely. What is crucial to us is the need to
thoroughly rid ourselves of that potentially **disastrous** handicap - the
negative attitude in the willingness to learn, to upgrade and to achieve.
As a people, we must have that sense of achievement. This is a satisfaction
which is more than what the pay-packet would bring. If we persist in this
mental impasse, we will lose out by default. Singaporeans had better
understand this.

Of **course**, technology alone cannot ensure the quality of life of
a people. In the final analysis, it is the quality of the people and the
leadership in government **that** will decide. This is the critical essence..
Countries which possess great technological capabilities, whatever their
political systems, are now finding themselves in social and economic
distress.

True, the world economy is interdependent. There are many
imponderables which are beyond the control of governments. But there are
other things which are within the control of the people. One of these is

the choice of the right type of leadership in government.

It must be a hard-headed choice, and I think Singaporeans have that good sense of judgement. If, however, we fall prey to the histronics of political charlatans as we see them in the guise of opposition parties, their hair-splitting trivialities, then no computer can be programmed to save us, much less the opposition's oratorical pleasantries.

To what avail if the HDB were to build more and better flats when the people lose their jobs and therefore no longer afford to own them? Or of what use is a better education system producing educated people who are unable to find meaningful employment?

Let me share this experience and a haunting thought with you. While enroute to an international conference recently, I stopped over at one of our missions. I had the comfort of being driven around in the mission's car. I found the chauffeur a pleasant and good-mannered young man. He spoke good English (never mind his accent). I asked him his educational background. He told me he was a 'Beecom' graduate - a Bachelor of Commerce! There is nothing degrading about being a driver. That driver was earning an honest living. But he could have had a better deal.

It will be a sad day if our professional people end up as drivers or doing other menial jobs totally irrelevant to their training. I hope we will never come to that. But if our people become political gullibles, and if we find pleasure in political nitty gritty and lose sight of our national objectives, we may very well end up that way, or worse, we may become work permit holders in other countries. I am told that some of the guest workers in Jurong are trained in certain professional disciplines. They have found it a better deal to work here as factory operators than having no chance at all to practise their professions back home.

Therein lies the hard facts of life and therein too gives us a classic lesson on the survival of any people. Recipients of the certificates this evening are 'A' level graduates. I am sure you will not just stop there in your pursuit of knowledge. I hope you will sooner grasp the facts of life and make the best of it.

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