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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR WONG KAN SENG, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS AT THE ISD'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY GALA DINNER ON SAT, 22 AUG 98 AT 7.45 PM AT ORCHID COUNTRY CLUB, GRAND BALLROOM

ISD is 50 years old.

I am sure before tonight, not many people knew this. What is probably even less known to the public, are the quiet sacrifices and good work that generations of ISD officers have given behind the scene towards preserving our security and stability. It is the nature of security work such as that undertaken by ISD which makes this lack of public visibility perhaps inevitable.

2 However, the Government has always been fully aware of and

appreciative of the contributions made by the Department and its officers over the years. The history of ISD is obviously inextricably linked to our history of national survival - of our overcoming the violent threats of communism, communalism and Confrontasi. Out of this tumultuous history of our early nationhood, the people and the Government forged a bond of trust and a shared commitment to the values of communal peace and social and political stability. ISD officers should take pride in having been a part of this history.

3 One of the major challenges for us today is to ensure that the lessons we have learnt painfully from adversity are effectively transmitted to a younger generation of Singaporeans. The National Education programme seeks to inform this generation of the critical constraints and realities in which Singapore as a small, multi-racial nation is embedded in. If need be, it must also renew in our young, the patriotism and the instincts and reflexes necessary for Singapore's survival in the context of these particular constraints and realities. Those of you who attended or saw the National Day Parade on 9 Aug from your TV sets at home, must have seen the unabashed patriotism of Singaporeans, especially among our young, in the celebration of our nationhood. This gives us cause to be optimistic in the belief that the younger generation of Singaporeans is intrinsically not short of the necessary reflexes and instincts.

4 I am pleased that ISD in its outreach programme has been a significant contributor to the National Education Programme. I am aware that ISD officers have since Oct 1996 spoken to more than 6000 educationists, grassroots leaders, civil servants and even journalists. Those of us who attended the National Education Exhibition would remember seeing the many ISD artefacts, photographs and documents which helped make up the static display complementing the multi-media presentation. More than 600 000 Singaporeans, attended the National Education Exhibition. What was particularly gratifying was the fact that the Exhibition had to be extended by a week because of popular demand. I commend ISD for taking the strategic step of developing an outreach programme to sensitise key Singaporean constituencies on fundamental security issues so that they will not only understand them better but also come to realise that the safe and secure Singapore they enjoy is something they all have a share in achieving and a responsibility in sustaining.

5 As our society matures, the terrain of operations for governance becomes more complex. Technology for instance brings with it opportunities and potential that can be good and bad. ISD must be ready to meet such challenges.

One challenge that ISD will face is the need to address the question - what is the right balance between the public's desire for transparency, and the real needs of confidentiality that the work of a professional security service inherently requires. This balance will eventually determine the operational scope and effectiveness of ISD in the future. There is no simple answer.

6 However, the awareness that ISD is addressing this issue and grappling with its implications is in my view, a healthy sign. It tells me that ISD is proactively anticipating the future and its challenges. ISD must always proceed in a measured way without compromising its operational integrity and the effectiveness of its professional capabilities. While ISD can seek to be nimble, it must never go soft. It must always have the courage and tenacity to pursue its tasks professionally and not be distracted by the potential unpopularity of its actions. The outreach programme that ISD has embarked on is not to seek popularity but should instead be an attempt to develop new competencies, especially the ability to articulate its position on security issues cogently and to inspire acceptance and co-operation.

7 It has been said that "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty". What that actually means will depend on the relationship between a people and its Government. Where there is widespread suspicion, cynicism and mistrust of the Government, then it means that the individual citizen feels he must be vigilant against the corrupt abuses of the State encroaching upon his interests and freedom. This is indeed the situation in some countries. In Singapore where a foundation of trust has been forged between the people and the Government, the vigilance exercised is one which the people and the Government exercise together against the threats which undermine communal peace and the independence and sovereignty of Singapore. ISD is a significant component of the Government in the exercise of this "watchfulness". If the last 50 years of its history is anything to go by, I am confident that ISD and its officers will continue to be always alert and vigilant, and be well-positioned to meet the threats that will surely come along with the exciting challenges of the future.

8 My very best wishes go to the Department and its officers, both past and present, on the celebration of its 50th anniversary. Thank you all for your dedication.

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Embargoed till 7.45 pm, 22 Aug 98

Fact Sheet

ISD 50th ANNIVERSARY DINNER

The Internal Security Department has its genesis in the Singapore Special Branch which was established on 23 Aug 48. In 1966, Special Branch was renamed the Internal Security Department under the Ministry of Interior and Defence. ISD came under the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1971.

2 The dinner on 22 Aug 98 at the Orchid Country Club is held to commemorate ISD's 50th Anniversary. At the dinner, the Department is honoring several distinguished officers for their contributions to ISD. These include:

Mr Lim Chye Heng

Retired

[Director ISD: 1975-1982]

Mr Eddie Teo

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence &
Permanent Secretary, Prime Minister's Office

[Director ISD: 1982-1986]

Mr Tjong Yik Min

Executive Director, Singapore Press Holdings
Former Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Communications

[Director ISD: 1986-1993]

Mr Chiang Chie Foo

2nd Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education

[Director ISD: 1993-1997]

Mr Sim Poh Heng
Director, Central Narcotics Bureau
[Director (Operations), ISD: 1981-1991]

21 Aug 98