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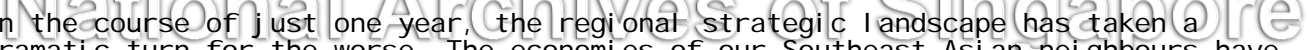
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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT ONG TENG CHEONG AT THE
TRI-SERVICE COMMISSIONING PARADE AND DINNER
ON SATURDAY, 23 JAN 99, 6.00 PM AT SAFTI-MI

Graduands, parents, ladies and gentlemen,


In the course of just one year, the regional strategic landscape has taken a dramatic turn for the worse. The economies of our Southeast Asian neighbours have gone into serious recession. The prospects for economic growth in the foreseeable future are dim. Singapore too has not been spared. Our economy is now in a recession. Our unemployment figures have doubled. Fortunately, our fundamentals are strong, and our people are united. We are meeting this challenge head-on, by taking cost-cutting measures to make our economy more competitive. At the same time, we continue to maintain our investment in vital sectors such as education and defence.

Singapore's commitment to defence is one of the factors that contributed to our stability and success over the last thirty years. One of the most visible symbols of our emphasis on defence is National Service. National Service means that young citizens, regardless of race, language or religion, are brought together for a common cause. It is through National Service that our citizens from all levels of society are bonded together, and united through the challenges endured and strengthened by the challenges overcome. Through these shared experiences, National Service has enhanced our cohesion and contributed to our security and defence.

Every officer who passes through the portals of OCS is expected to influence the lives of the men under him; to train them to win in real battles, and to adopt the right mental attitudes to overcome the toughest situations. In short, your duty as officers is to prepare your men to become Operationally Ready soldiers.

To do this job, we choose the best and ablest to provide the leadership in the SAF. You are amongst this select group. OCS has provided you with tough and realistic training; and often testing you to the limits of your physical capability. You were expected to display the highest standards of discipline at all times. In the field, your leadership and tactical skills were honed and your instincts heightened. Your instructors continually pressured you to perform. It was in those trying moments of fatigue and stress, that your mental resilience and resourcefulness were developed.

Through this process of tough training, you are now ready for military command and leadership. As an officer of the SAF, you must always be willing to go that extra mile. You must be prepared to fight against all odds no matter how overwhelming, and to achieve the seemingly unachievable. In peacetime as well as in war, the responsibility of leadership will rest squarely on your shoulders. Your leadership will have a great influence on the lives of your soldiers. It will affect their attitudes even after they leave active service. It is, therefore, imperative that you instill in them a sense of pride and belonging in the armed forces. This will, in turn, foster a conviction for the honourable cause that they serve.

You must at all times be prepared to give of your best, to show your mettle and to persevere in the face of adversity. HONOUR, COURAGE, COMMITMENT and SACRIFICE. These are qualities that must be engendered in the hearts of every officer. And today, as you receive your commission, you pledge to live by these values throughout the course of your National Service.

I am confident that OCS has equipped you with the professional knowledge and skills required of a commissioned officer of the SAF. The nation now charges you to keep up your dedication towards its defence.

The officer epaulettes which you will wear on your shoulders shortly are affirmations of the trust the nation places in each and every one of you. Go forth and serve diligently. Maintain the high standards of discipline, pride and professionalism set by your predecessors. I trust that you will discharge your duties with honour and integrity.

You have done well to be here today. However, this is only the first step of a long journey. National Service is a life-long commitment. Indeed, many of you will continue to serve together in NS formations and units long after you leave active service. And in the years ahead, I am sure you will come to treasure the memories that you share with each other, and the bond and comradeship forged here in SAFTI. I take this opportunity to wish you the very best in your future endeavours.

To the parents, relatives and friends of the graduands, we thank you for your presence today. Your encouragement and support have helped these fine, young men through a crucial phase of their lives. I am confident that you will continue to support them as they embark upon new challenges in the course of their service to the nation. As citizens of Singapore, all of us have a part to play in the continuing success of this national institution.

Thank you.
