

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR YEO CHEOW TONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, AT THE SAF DAY REDEDICATION CEREMONY FOR HOUGANG/PAYA LEBAR CENTRE ON 1 JULY 99 AT 1530 HOURS AT SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDINGS AUDITORIUM 82 GENTING LANE

We are gathered here today to mark the 12th SAF Day Rededication Ceremony. I am very happy to see the strong turnout of NS men and employers. To Singapore, it is a sign of your dedication and commitment towards national defence. To your families and friends, it is a sign of assurance, that you will always be ready to safeguard their security.

2 Last year, we spoke of regional uncertainties resulting from the economic crisis, a crisis which no one had foreseen.

3 We have weathered the crisis well, and are starting to see signs of economic recovery. However, the pace of recovery among countries in the region is uneven. In the past year, we have also witnessed significant political changes within the region, spurred by the economic crisis. Political uncertainty still remains in some countries. We therefore cannot afford to take the benign security environment for granted.

4 Under these uncertain circumstances, the SAF stands as a pillar of strength. It provides the necessary deterrence against aggression, and allows Singapore to pursue diplomacy in a calm and firm manner. The SAF is the fundamental cornerstone of our ability to secure peace.

5 The SAF has come a long way since its humble beginnings. It is now a well-established organisation, equipped with well-trained soldiers and superior equipment. It stands out as a modernised and forward-looking armed force in the region. Domestically, it is recognised for prompt and effective response during real-life contingencies. All these have come about from two main pillars of development: first, government commitment to defence, and secondly, NS men commitment to the task of national defence.

6 The Government remains committed to maintaining steady defence expenditure. Although the economy was slowing down last year, the defence budget remained unchanged. This allows Singapore to steadily build up cutting-edge capability, to have a credible deterrence in uncertain times. It is necessary investment for our national security well into the future.

7 But beyond military technology and hardware, the ultimate key to success is human "heartware".

8 You have heard from the Singapore 21 Vision that every Singaporean matters. This in essence has been the same philosophy behind National Service. Every member enlisted has contributed in his own way towards its cause. The present success of the SAF is due to your commitment and dedication to the task of national defence over the years. Your positive contribution has allowed the SAF to grow from strength to strength.

9 As Singapore develops as a nation, we need to nurture and continue to maintain these same values and attitudes. No amount of superior equipment will improve the SAF, if our people are not committed and dedicated to the defence of Singapore.

10 It is up to Singaporeans alone to defend our stake in Singapore. We only truly own what we are prepared to defend. There is no second chance if the SAF fails. We have the technological potential and operational capability. What remains is our enduring will to defend Singapore when the need arises, to determine our own future.

11 Our NS men have shown strong commitment in their training. They turn up for training and mobilisations. They are prepared to risk their lives to defend Singapore. They are confident in the SAF's capability to defend Singapore. These are vital attitudes that undergird our deterrence capability, and stands us in good stead even when the security situation is uncertain. We must continue to maintain and safeguard such attitudes.

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12 We recognise that National Service requires sacrifice from our NS men, their families and employers. MINDEF and the SAF are constantly exploring ways to improve National Service. Regular sessions with employers to promote understanding will also continue. These steps have facilitated our NS men to maintain their commitment to the defence of Singapore.

13 It is this combination of the commitment of our people, the vigorous training and technological capability that has led to the success of the SAF. I am confident that the SAF is ready, and will remain ready to defend Singapore at all times.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14 On behalf of the Government and people of Singapore, I thank all of you for your loyal support and valuable contribution towards national defence. Your firm commitment and will have provided the bedrock on which national security rests. Singapore stands free, because your sacrifice has made the critical difference.

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