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Subject: [EMBARGOED] Speech by RAdm Teo Chee Hean, 11 Jan 00, 10am

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY RADM (NS) TEO CHEE HEAN, MINISTER FOR
EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE AT THE NIE
TEACHERS INVESTITURE CEREMONY ON TUESDAY, 11 JANUARY
2000 AT 10 AM AT THE KALLANG THEATRE**

**CONTINUING EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
FOR TEACHERS**

Good morning, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My warmest congratulations to all of you. You have successfully completed the teacher training programme at the National Institute of Education. Today's ceremony is more than just a graduation ceremony where

you are recognised as having completed the course requirements successfully. The significance of today's ceremony lies in your formal entry, the formal entry of each one of you, into the teaching profession. We have called this an investiture ceremony as the Ministry of Education is entrusting upon each of you the authority and responsibility to mould our nation's future.

The 21st Century Challenge

2 We have just ushered in the 21st Century. On the last day of 1999, the Straits Times published a millennium special section on the key events recorded in history over the past 1000 years. It is interesting to note that the pace of change in our world has accelerated tremendously over the last century. Within a short span of the past 50-60 years, we have put a man on the moon, built a machine intelligent enough to beat the top human chess player, replaced a human heart and cloned a sheep. We have also developed weapons terrible enough to destroy all of human civilisation.

3 These are only some of the key milestones. There will be no slowing down in the new century. With the rising tide of globalisation, more walls will come down and more boundaries will dissolve. The forces of globalisation will make our world in the 21st Century even smaller and faster. We will see many changes within our own lifetimes, things and events that we cannot imagine today.

Continual Education for Teachers

4 In such a rapidly changing world, knowledge and skills become outdated very quickly. Teachers today are increasingly faced with situations where they may not have all the answers to questions raised by their students. In some cases, students may even know more than the teacher. As parents become better educated, the notion that teachers somehow have a monopoly of knowledge on how to educate students is also being challenged. How can the teacher continue to command respect from students and parents given these trends? This is a key challenge facing the teaching profession.

5 To respond to this challenge you, as teachers, must constantly upgrade yourselves. There must be continual updating, refreshing and strengthening of the domain knowledge expected of the Teaching Profession - both in the content that you are teaching, and the pedagogy that you will use to deliver the content. Only then, can teachers, as individuals and as a profession, establish and anchor that unique standing in society as educators and as professionals.

A Framework for Continuing Professional Development

6 Over the past year, the National Institute of Education and the Ministry of Education have been studying how to meet these needs for continuing education and professional development for our teachers. NIE has developed a framework for continual education to facilitate and encourage professional upgrading at all levels within the teaching profession. This framework rests on four key principles.

7 First, a modular approach to teacher training. Training of teachers will be viewed as a continuum. This begins with foundation training, induction, followed by continual training, milestone programmes and postgraduate training. NIE will structure programmes and courses for our teachers in modules which can be taken throughout their careers. This will allow teachers to upgrade themselves in specific topics, at a depth that matches their current level in the profession, and at a pace that suits their need and desire for professional development.

8 By providing appropriate training opportunities for teachers at each level of professional development, we hope to send a powerful message that we expect our teachers to seek to update and upgrade their knowledge throughout their careers.

9 Second, the system should adopt a building block approach which allows for modules to be taken at varying levels of difficulty depending on the

background of individual teachers. For example, modules could be offered at basic, intermediate or advanced level, with the lower level modules being pre-requisites for the next higher level one. Appropriate waiver of lower modules will be given depending on the teacher's previous relevant training and teaching experience.

10 Third, the introduction of different learning modes, including on-line learning to make such courses more convenient and accessible for teachers. This is not just about more on-line distance learning modes. NIE will need to explore how lecturers should interact with, monitor and assess their students, so that more innovative ways of delivering continual training courses can be introduced. Teachers already spend long hours in school, and often after school, on their work. If they decide to make a commitment to spend some time on continual training, we would want as much of that time as possible to be spent on the actual training rather than in commuting or administration for that training.

11 Fourth, providing formal recognition and accreditation of courses taken. For example, teachers who have 'A' level or Polytechnic qualifications and some teachers who may have bachelor's degrees, but in subjects or at levels that are not directly suited to the teaching service, are appointed at appropriate levels as General Education Officers 2 (GEO 2). The new professional development framework will provide these teachers with the opportunity to take appropriate courses and modules to advance themselves to a level commensurate with the requirements for emplacement as GEO 1. NIE is now developing such programmes.

12 Similarly, teachers can take modules pegged at a higher standard both in depth and specialisation for accreditation towards an advanced diploma or Masters degree. As an example, NIE is now working out the specific details so that key modules of the Diploma in Educational Administration programme can be awarded credits towards a Master of Arts in Educational Management.

Values – what it means to be a teacher

13 The purpose of continuing education is twofold. To open avenues for professional development for teachers, and to continually upgrade the professional level of the education service as a whole so that we can continue to strive for greater heights in education.

14 As we strive to increase the level of knowledge and professionalism of our teachers through continuing education, we must not lose sight of one very important aspect of professionalism. Every profession has a set of values, and standards of professional conduct that exemplify that profession. These values and standards are often drawn up by the members themselves, or demanded of them by the public that they serve.

15 To be respected as a profession, and to be respected as a professional you must have the knowledge required for that profession as well as live by the values and standards of that profession.

16 Herein lies the significance of today's ceremony. The successful completion of your course signifies that you possess the knowledge. But that in itself is not sufficient. As you come up today to receive your scrolls, you are

being received into a profession – the noble profession of teacher. As you take the teachers’ pledge at the end of the ceremony today, reflect upon the meaning of the words, and the responsibility that you are undertaking. As you leave this hall today at the conclusion of this ceremony, you will be expected to live up to the standards of your profession and to uphold its values - values such as belief in lifelong learning, commitment to your students, an irrepressible spirit of inquiry, and passion in what you do.

17 Students come with a diversity of abilities, backgrounds and Interests. Teachers will have to be well-informed, versatile and stretch their strategies to ensure effective learning and communication and that you reach out to all of them.

18 Students are inspired by teachers who can make their subjects come alive, who have a good grasp of their content knowledge and are passionate about their subject area; by teachers who are caring and personal.

19 More than the content knowledge or the skills that you will impart to your students, during the course of your career you will meet, touch and inspire many students. What you do will make a difference to each one of them. They will look to you not just for guidance in their studies, but as role models for life. The values that you uphold and the standards that you maintain will be their inspiration and their model.

Conclusion

20 The responsibilities are heavy and the tasks many. But the rewards go beyond the ordinary. As teachers you can mould the future of each of your students and the future of our nation.

21 Teachers, I wish you a meaningful and fulfilling career ahead.

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