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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by RAdm Teo Chee Hean, 12 Jan 00, 8 PM

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 DIPLOMA IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION (DEA) GRADUATION DINNER ON WEDNESDAY 12 JANUARY 2000, AT 8PM AT THE BELVEDERE, MANDARIN HOTEL, SINGAPORE

DYNAMIC SCHOOL LEADERS AND SCHOOLS – MAKING THE BEST USE OF AUTONOMY

Senior Minister of State, Dr Aline Wong, NIE Council Members, distinguished guests, principals, graduands, ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

1 Let me start by conveying my warmest congratulations to the graduands for successfully completing the Diploma in Educational Administration.

2 This is the first time that the National Institute of Education (NIE) is holding a separate and distinct graduation ceremony for DEA graduands. I fully

endorse and support this move. This occasion recognises the critical role that the DEA programme plays.

3 For each of the graduands, today is significant because it marks a major milestone in your professional development as educators. For the Education system, the DEA is significant for forging our future education leaders. From the graduands of the DEA will come our future principals, our future cluster superintendents, educational administrators and policy makers. We will only succeed in Education if we have good Principals providing strong leadership in our schools; and education leaders who can conceive of the future, marry it with appropriate teaching theories and develop the best educational strategies for our schools.

Role Of Principals

4 Many of you here today have just begun your journey as a Principal or may do so in the near future. The challenge that you will face in leading Thinking Schools in the 21st century will be an exciting and fulfilling one.

5 Your vision for the school will have to be seen against the backdrop of an increasingly globalised and competitive world. Your passion should pulsate through each of your students and enthuse them about life and learning. Your actions should help others - your teachers, parents, the community - to work together to realise the common aim of doing their best to nurture your students.

6 You will not only be expected to provide professional guidance to your teachers, but also to optimise personnel and financial resources to best cater to the needs of your students. You will need to be people-oriented as you lead and work through your staff to achieve your goals, and as you reach out to enlist the help of parents and the community.

7 But this is only the beginning in terms of the professional skills and knowledge that you will need as leaders. The DEA provides a platform from which you can go further. Much depends on your own motivation to keep on learning and adding to your experience and skills. You will need to keep a finger on the pulse of the community and the nation and keep up with developments in the region and the world. You will also need to upgrade yourself professionally, to be in step with the changes.

Greater Autonomy to Schools

8 The Ministry of Education is moving steadily to give more autonomy to our schools. We see the Ministry Headquarters' role as setting the broad directions and guidelines, not detailed rules and procedures. Schools are in the best position to decide how to run their school programmes based on the students they have and the competencies of their staff.

9 In such an environment we will need dynamic principals to lead our schools so that they can make the best use of this autonomy. We want Thinking Schools led by capable leaders to emerge. We expect to see greater innovation and variety in the programmes offered in our schools, especially our secondary schools: schools with strengths and emphases in different fields, schools trying out new ideas in different areas, all adding to the richness of our Education system.

Autonomous Schools

10 The Ministry took a bold step towards autonomy in secondary schools in 1988 when we set up the first Independent Schools. We have 8 of these today. The objective was to allow these schools to innovate and try out new ideas which could then be applied across all our schools.

11 Then, we took the next step of giving some of our better government and government-aided schools more autonomy. We started with 6 Autonomous Schools in Jan 1994. Today we have 18 autonomous schools.

12 All 18 autonomous schools are well-established schools and popular with pupils and parents. These schools have a good geographical spread to serve pupils residing in different areas. The selected schools represent a variety of school types, and cater to a spread of pupil ability from all streams.

13 The Autonomous School model has worked well. The 18 schools have been able to use their resources well, for the maximal benefit of their students. Together with the independent schools, they have been at the forefront of the pursuit of educational excellence and have maintained high standards, providing a wider selection of good schools for our students. Equally importantly, these schools have made use of their autonomy to provide new ideas to spearhead improvements in our education system as a whole. The school cluster system, where schools, including autonomous schools, are grouped together in clusters, has institutionalised and enhanced the sharing of the experiences of the autonomous schools across the whole school system.

More Autonomous Schools

14 With the success of the autonomous schools and school clustering, and with the emergence of more schools and school leaders who can make good use of autonomy, I am pleased to announce that the Ministry of Education has decided to expand the number of Autonomous Schools from the current number of 18, up to 30 to 40 Autonomous Schools in the coming years. This will make up approximately 25% of our secondary schools. This move will give more school leaders the flexibility over programmes and control over resources to develop their schools into schools of distinction. Students will have a wider range of such schools to choose from. And the number of schools that have greater freedom to innovate will increase, helping to spark off even more ideas and greater improvements across our entire school system.

15 The Ministry of Education will therefore allow secondary schools to apply to become Autonomous Schools. Schools seeking autonomy will have to meet certain criteria. Allowing schools that meet these criteria to become autonomous, will also give our schools an added incentive to strive for constant improvement.

16 Schools seeking to become Autonomous Schools must have in place a system that has demonstrated the ability to achieve sustained good academic results. Beyond academic results, the schools must also have a well-rounded education programme that provides opportunities for students to fully develop themselves. These schools must also have built up strong bonds with the school's community – parents, alumni and the local community.

17 There is no cap on the number of schools which can become autonomous each year, but we will apply stringent selection criteria so that Autonomous Schools will continue to be held in high regard as distinctive schools and leaders in educational innovation.

Niche-related areas

18 Now that the Autonomous Schools are anchored firmly in our system, they are in a good position to experiment with further new ideas and innovations in education. Indeed, they should build up niche areas and target to excel in these. Such a niche could be in the area of sports, culture and the arts, or a subject area in the curriculum.

19 The Ministry has therefore decided to allow each of the Autonomous

Schools to identify niche areas which they want to develop. The Ministry will give an Autonomous School flexibility to admit students with talent in the niche area that the school has selected. Up to 5% of the planned Secondary 1 intake of the autonomous school will be set aside for this purpose. The admission decision for these 5% of places will be exercised by the principal.

20 Two broad criteria for admission into niche areas would however have to be adhered to.

21 First, the aggregate PSLE T-score of the pupil admitted should not be more than 10 points below the school's aggregate cut-off score. This will ensure that students admitted to the niche programme will have a reasonable ability to cope with the academic work in the school.

22 Second, the school will have to specify the criteria on which pupils will be evaluated for admission into the niche programme for these 5% of school places. Students to be admitted must have attained or demonstrated the potential to excel in the niche area. Examples of criteria that the school could use are performance at national primary school or national age-group competitions in the area of sports, certified portfolios of works for the visual arts, and records of participation in major public performances for the performing arts.

23 By allowing each autonomous school to select a niche and to have a wider and more flexible admission policy for students with special talent or ability in the school's chosen niche, the school will be able to draw together a critical mass of students and develop the necessary staff and programmes that can fully develop the interest and ability of these students in this special area. Students with the same interests or talents will have classmates and school-mates, and well qualified staff and facilities, to stimulate and spur them on to higher levels of achievement.

24 The intention is to start the scheme in January next year. The Autonomous Schools which have decided on a niche can work out their plans and programmes this year and enrol students for the year 2001. When this niche area scheme is fully implemented, it will provide variety and distinctiveness in our school system, and give students the opportunity to excel in areas where they have special talents or abilities. It will be another key milestone in the Ministry of Education's move to put into practice the Ability-driven Education paradigm.

Conclusion

25 In closing, let me reiterate the importance of the DEA in developing the dynamic and innovative school leaders we need for the future to realise this vision for education in Singapore.

26 I congratulate you once again upon your graduation from the Diploma in Educational Administration course. You represent the future dynamic school leaders of Singapore. You will help to devise and implement innovative ideas so that we realise our vision of “Thinking Schools, Learning Nation”, and our students attain the Desired Outcomes of Education. As you proceed to your various new responsibilities, I urge each one of you to give of your best as you work actively with your colleagues in schools, and the Ministry in our task of moulding the future of our nation.

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