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**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT C V DEVAN NAIR
AT THE OFFICER CADETS SCHOOL COMMISSIONING PARADE
AT PASIR LABA CAMP ON FRIDAY, 23 DECEMBER 1983 AT 5.30 PM**

In the last nine months, the young men standing before us went through a tough and demanding training programme which stretched them physically and mentally. It was the making of what they are today - newly commissioned officers of the SAF. Out of the more than 20,000 national servicemen enlisted each year, the very best, less than five per cent, emerge as officers. Your being commissioned as officers today distinguishes you as the cream of our nation's young men.

But, this is only the beginning. What you have undergone is but a phase in your contribution to the nation's total defence. A more difficult task lies ahead. Having been trained, you will now assume the role of leader, trainer and motivator to other national servicemen in preparing them mentally and physically for the defence of our nation. This is a difficult task, but you are not expected to do it alone.

National security means precisely what it says. It is national, not merely the specialised and exclusive concern of the Ministry of Defence. For national security is indivisible. Every citizen has a stake in protecting and promoting the nation's security. Those who can do their part in the military, must do so with zeal and total commitment. Those who cannot, must equally play their part by supporting those who can. For example, parents, wives, sisters and girlfriends can make a major

contribution to national defence by providing encouragement, moral support and understanding to the young men doing their national service. Similarly, employers of our reservists should also show interest and genuine concern.

Modern conflicts are not old-fashioned duels between gentlemen, with others watching from the sidelines. No distinctions are made these days between combatants and non-combatants. We witness total conflicts which involve everybody in the country concerned. National security is therefore also total, and a nation's defences need to be seen, especially by other countries, to be firmly entrenched in the minds, hearts and spirits of all its citizens.

Singapore is a small island. The peace and political stability that we enjoy has enabled us to make progress and prosper. We will imperil this stability, and with it our security, if we slacken in our united commitment to defend ourselves. In fact, even friendly countries will hesitate to come to our aid in times of need if we are not ourselves committed.

Many of you young men do not know about the fall of Malaya and Singapore in 1941, but many of the parents and elder guests present here have vivid memories, as I do, of that calamitous event. We were then under the protection of the British forces who regarded Singapore as an impregnable fortress. But among other things, their guns faced the wrong direction. And in a matter of a few days, all was lost. The local population could not put up much of a fight because they were given no role to play in the defence of a colonial territory. This was left to others, who surrendered quickly. The local population were the ones who suffered most during the harsh occupation.

Another more recent example close to home is that of the fall of South Vietnam. Despite massive American intervention, South Vietnam fell to the Communists. The reason for South Vietnam's demise is not hard to find. Although South Vietnam was supplied with the best US military hardware, here people lacked commitment and cohesiveness in fighting the Communists. This was aggravated by the series of wolly-headed, unstable and corrupt governments which were not committed to the total defence of the country. The people of South Vietnam paid a very high price for this - the loss of an entire country and the subsequent mass exodus of tens of thousands of people to other parts of the world as homeless and stateless refugees.

Let us make no mistake. A total preparedness and commitment on the part of citizens is the only credible guarantee of national security. No entry signs will be breached by hostile powers, as in Lebanon, if they know that the nation's defensive barriers and capacities are unworkable, simply because the nation is as a house divided against itself. Singapore is our home. We must be prepared and determined to defend it at all costs. Defence demands total commitment from every citizen.

As newly commissioned officers, you will begin the initial steps of contributing to your nation's defence as leaders, trainers and motivators. On your shoulders will lie the responsibility of leading and training the men soon to come under your command. Your task will not be merely to teach military skills. More importantly, you will have to mould correct and positive attitudes, and engender loyalty and commitment in the defence of our nation. This is a life-long process. It does not end when you finish your full-time national service, but

carries through to your role as reservists while you are in civil employment. The task that lies ahead is a difficult one, but I trust you have been well trained and are mentally prepared for it. Give of your best in all that lies ahead.

I wish all of you success and satisfaction in this great endeavour. Indeed, it is a sacred endeavour. For it involves nothing less than the security, stability, peace and progress of the people of Singapore.

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