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SPEECH BY MR. FRANCIS THOMAS, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS
AND WORKS, AT THE ROYAL SINGAPORE FLYING CLUB, PAYA LEBAR,
AT 6.30 P.M. ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 3, 1957.

The first thing is for me to express my cordial congratulations to the young men who are taking part in this scholarship training scheme and at the same time to repeat, yet again, the warm and sincere thanks of Singapore to the Indian Government through whose generosity we have with us Captain Bhargava here to give training, and the H.T.-2 trainer for our use, and I must also thank the Royal Singapore Flying Club for their co-operation in this training scheme.

I have no doubt, however, that at least our six scholarship holders will be less interested in congratulations than in some forecast of what further training may be open to them.

Now I should like to say very definitely that when this Government, or any Government in the world, offers free training facilities or schemes to young men and women, it does not and cannot, by doing so, accept responsibility for producing additional schemes or additional scholarships to carry trainees further. The provision of training and, particularly, of technological training, is most important in Singapore and the Government gives it the highest priority; but there are two levels of education and training.

There is the basic level which it is desirable to give to as many people as possible in order that Singapore should be well supplied with a variety of skills. In education for example our aim is to give free primary education to every child; to give secondary education to as many as possible; to carry the best of the secondary educated onwards through higher studies at the University or the Polytechnic; and beyond that, a further selection again such as Queens' scholars or Government trainees of other kinds who go overseas for special courses.

In this particular aviation training scheme we have had in mind two main objectives. The first is that Singapore should have as many people as possible who know something about flying and who can, on that basis, find themselves suitable types of employment where, for example, a private pilot's licence might be an additional qualification even though they were not in fact called upon to fly as pilots.

That is a general objective and with it we have a second and much more specific one. We look forward to the day when our own local civil aviation services will be manned and operated by our own young Malaysians and this small training scheme was brought into being with the idea that it would provide basic training for young cadres who could hope to go on to commercial pilots' level and to serve in our local civil aviation industry.

When this training scheme was established it looked as though we should have settled the future of Malayan Airways within the first two or three months of 1957. Unfortunately, that final settlement has not yet been achieved. Everyone knows, and I have informed our Legislative Assembly, that certain new factors and proposals have had to be studied and that we have had very high-level consultations not only between the five Governments which are concerned with the future operations of Malayan Airways, but also with the very important B.O.A.C. and Qantas civil aviation interests whose participation in a reconstructed Malayan Airways has been envisaged.

If all goes well in the discussions which we shall be resuming quite soon, we can look forward to an economically strong and operationally efficient local airline which should offer expanding employment opportunities both for local pilots and for local engineers. It is, however, impossible to make any statement about possibilities until we have reached a final settlement as to the future of Malayan Airways. And, of course, this final settlement does not depend solely on myself or on the Government of Singapore but on achieving full agreement between five Governments and the airline operators. I had very much hoped that before this we should have been able to lay out a further plan for civil aviation training not only for the six young men who had scholarships under the scheme but also, perhaps, on a wider basis for new trainees. My hopes have so far not been fulfilled but I shall continue to pursue them and if I achieve what I want I shall take an early opportunity of discussing possibilities with our six trainees.

I must mention one other possibility, and that is the selection of one or two of you to go to India for training up to commercial pilot's licence. The Indian Government has made a most generous offer to provide this further training under the Colombo Plan and that offer is still open, although it may not be possible to make use of it, at least until a new training session is started. The present training session is already under way. It would, in any case, be a mistake to take a final decision about sending any of you for training in India until we know definitely what the future structure of Malayan Airways will be. There is in the world today a great deal of what is called "economic nationalism" and in many countries there is unwillingness to employ anyone who is not a national of the country. If it should turn out that young Malaysians holding a qualification obtained in India were unable to get jobs they might reasonably complain that their time had been wasted on a fruitless training course and it is desirable that we should know what employment possibilities there are in our own country before we go on to train to commercial pilot level. There is one significant factor to add to this very brief account of employment possibilities. As you all know, Great Britain is reducing her Armed Forces and, in particular, her Air Force and consequently there will inevitably be a number of highly trained ex-R.A.F. pilots coming on to the civil aviation market and these will make getting a pilot's job more competitive during the next few years than it has been in the past.

In short, I cannot at present make any announcement about further training up to commercial pilot's licence for our six trainees. As soon as I can make some announcement I shall do so. Meanwhile, our six trainees will continue with their flying training under Captain Bhargava and for lectures and class-room instruction and should reach private pilot's licence level by the end of August.

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(Time issued 1500 hours)