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SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER OF DEFENCE,
AT THE GRADUATION PARADE OF PILOTS AT THE FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL,
CHANGI AIR BASE ON FRIDAY, 9 MARCH '79 AT 4.30 PM

To build a modern air force is a very difficult task even for a large and rich country. Singapore is small and not rich. Our air space is restricted, our training facilities are inadequate, our people do not have any aviation tradition, and even in terms of satisfying the physical standards, many of our young people cannot qualify due to poor eyesight. Added on to all these there is the constant change and improvement in modern aviation technology particularly in military aircraft. Even keeping pace with this development is not at all easy. Under all these difficult conditions the Republic has indeed done well in building up its air defence capability over the last few years.

The Ministry of Defence has spent much effort towards the buildup of our air force not only for the purpose of defence against air attacks but also for the support of our armed forces in any emergency.

We started in a very modest way with a few trainers to produce pilots who can handle sub-sonic aircraft. With the buildup of the Armed Forces it became necessary to expand our air defence capability and to provide support for our Armed Forces. With better training for our Armed Forces, the need for better air support increases. Soon it becomes inevitable that we should upgrade the training of our pilots to deal with more modern and better types of aircraft including supersonic aircraft. The rapid expansion of the RSAF will continue for some time. In the process we will need more young people to be trained as fighter pilots.

The standards of physical fitness for pilots are however stringent. Many of our young people will not be able to qualify for training as pilots. The few pilots that the Flying Training

is now producing /2.

is now producing each year are woefully inadequate for our present needs. In addition we require good experienced pilots at MINDEF to fill key staff appointments at HQ RSAF. Further there is the continuous demand from the private sector for pilots to be released to fly commercial aircraft. All these urgent demands for good pilots will continue for many years to come. For the moment these demands will place a strain on the resources of our Flying Training School (FTS) which will no doubt be forced to expand its training facilities.

The training of pilots is a very costly matter. Young men who wish to become pilots must have excellent eyesight, be physically fit and possess the proper aptitude and character to accept vigorous training and discipline. The training will be tough and exacting. But once they are trained their prospects for the future will be very good indeed.

The RSAF Recruitment Centre will continue to take in recruits for pilot training. The FTS has plans to increase its output of both fighter pilots and transport pilots.

The Ministry of Defence will be short of some 90 fighter pilots and 30 transport pilots. Unless FTS can increase its present intake of 48 recruits to 168, this shortage is not likely to be met. But due to staff problems and the shortage of trainer aircraft and instructors, the FTS is not likely to expand at this rate. A number of steps will have to be taken to augment and expand the training capabilities of the FTS. They include the recruitment of more experienced instructors locally to take on training duties, the production of more qualified flying instructors by FTS itself, and if necessary the recruitment of foreign instructors to help in the training of new pilots. FTS will also examine the training of helicopter and transport pilots as a separate programme in order that a bigger number of commercial pilots can be trained to fly transport aircraft. Up till now FTS has concentrated as a matter of priority on the training of fighter pilots. Previously all applicants for the training of transport or helicopter pilots had been turned away because many of them could not satisfy the stringent physical requirements to become fighter pilots.

The expansion of the RSAF will give more scope for the deployment of pilots within the Air Force. RSAF is in the process of acquiring super-sonic aircraft. There will be more opportunities for fighter pilots to improve their professional skills and competence. The training of fighter pilots is a very expensive matter. It costs more than half a million dollars to train a pilot up to the "wings" stage. It will require another half a million dollars each year to keep him flying. Hence every pilot who has been properly trained will have cost the taxpayer more than a million dollars. They are indeed our million-dollar men! However, RSAF pilots should know their place of importance in the defence set-up. They must realise the very heavy responsibilities that rest on their shoulders. They have to be prepared at all times to answer the call of duty to defend our Republic.

The Ministry of Defence will chart proper career development route for each pilot during his service with the RSAF. Every pilot can look forward to a satisfying and rewarding career either in the flying squadrons with good promotion prospects or for those with special aptitude to become instructors in the FTS. For those with proven leadership and administrative qualities there are senior positions as staff officers at HQ RSAF. There will be no shortage of important posts for pilots with suitable experience, specialised training, and proven ability in the command, discipline and leadership of men under their charge.

Outside to MINDEF there will continue to be an increasing demand for pilots to be released to fly commercial aircraft. Some of our pilots have already joined the Singapore Airlines and are launched on a new and rewarding career. The development of Singapore as an important transportation Centre will create the need for more commercial and helicopter pilots. All in all the career prospects of young men trained and qualified as pilots is most promising.

I must however remind young pilots that they cannot be complacent after they have received their training. Aircraft technology is improving all the time. Pilots must keep on improving their skills in order to keep pace with changes and advancements in science and technology. They must maintain their keenness and enthusiasm to learn new techniques if they are to avoid becoming

obsolete and outmoded as a result of scientific and technological changes.

Today seven young pilots are graduating from the FTS. These seven young men are to be congratulated for the success attained in their training course. They can be proud of the wings that they have earned. We should exhort them to strive for excellence, to maintain the very high standards required of them and to uphold the good name of the RSAF whose badges of rank they now wear with pride and confidence.

To these seven young pilots, may I say "Congratulations" and extend on your behalf every good wish of success in their chosen careers!

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