

# Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE, MR HOWE YOON CHONG,  
AT THE INVESTITURE CEREMONY AT THE TOA PAYOH SAFRA  
CLUBHOUSE ON SATURDAY, MAY 31, 1980, AT 7.30 P.M.

Today's investiture is to confer reservist medals to a representative cross-section of officers and men holding various ranks in the SAF who have completed 10 years in the reserves. One hundred such representatives have been selected to receive their medals this evening. They consist of three lieutenants, three staff sergeants, 36 sergeants, and 58 corporals. It is fitting that such a ceremony is held in this SAFRA Clubhouse.

SAFRA was first established in 1972 with its offices occupying some old buildings in Prince Edward Road. The Toa Payoh Clubhouse was completed in 1975. It has been well patronised by reservists ever since. We have now more than 150,000 reservists. Each year 20,000 more will be added to this number. There is thus a big pool of people for SAFRA to serve. SAFRA should try to get every reservist to be its member. Every reservist should also make it a point to join SAFRA. After all this is your association. As your membership increases there will be need for more clubhouses. One is already under construction in Bukit Merah and another will soon be built in Bedok. Plans are in hand for two more to be developed possibly in Ang Mo Kio and Woodlands. Those who are in charge of SAFRA must work hard to make certain that SAFRA provides the widest possible range of activities and recreational facilities for its members.

Over the last 14 years the Ministry of Defence has devoted much effort to build up a defence force for the safety and security of our country. This has been an uphill task given the past inheritance of our population. Many of our older people have unpleasant memories of colonial discrimination enforced by military power and of being refugees running away from their own countries to escape the atrocities, poverty and starvation caused by brigandage and corrupt armies. They cannot, therefore, be enthusiastic about military service.

Initially the unimaginative training methods in the SAF did not help matters. Slowly, however, conditions improved and the people can now look upon national service as being necessary for our defence and beneficial for their sons. Everyone agrees that Singapore cannot exist without a credible defence force. Everyone accepts that he must personally participate in the defence of Singapore. Today very few parents will try to give excuses or to obtain deferment for their sons. They know that their request will be refused and that even if granted their sons will be looked upon with disdain by classmates and friends.

Ours is an acquisitive society, our people will work hard to get what they want. Sociologists will probably describe our people as achievement-oriented. They strive to excel in their chosen field. They want their efforts to produce results and be well rewarded. The motivation to work hard is found in the substantial rewards paid for excellence and achievement. Can the SAF offer such rewards? Military pay, rank, prospects of advancement, privileges and perks do not amount to much when the private sector can offer similar or better compensation.

Military training and national service offer very little in the way of tangible rewards. Our young men are compelled to do national service and to be in the reserves, they accept that they have the obligation. But they are not motivated or induced to put in maximum effort. Many do the minimum to get their training obligations over and done with. They do not attach much importance, neither do they take pride in the fact that they are training to defend themselves, their families, their homes, and their country. The government spends vast sums of money in defence and military training. The SAF puts in much time and effort in instructions, exhortations, education, and advice. All these do not succeed in effectively persuading many of our national servicemen and reservists that military training is a very serious matter or that in crisis this training can make the difference between life and death.

The problem at hand is to get our people to accept that military service has a place in our society and that the military profession is an honourable and respectable one. We can then persuade our national servicemen and reservists to be more enthusiastic and to take their military training more seriously. The SAF must in fact go one step further. It must motivate the national servicemen and reservists to put in maximum effort to achieve the highest standards of military proficiency and professionalism.

How to provide this motivation is the main problem. Fortunately we are not alone in this predicament. Many small countries before us have experienced similar difficulties. We can learn from them. We can probably adopt the Swiss model with advantage. In Switzerland every able-bodied male adult must undergo proper military training and remain in the reserves until normal retirement. They take their military training very seriously. Their keanness and diligence in military training ensure that they become highly skilled and proficient soldiers. Yet the Swiss are not a militaristic nation and there is little conflict between their military service and civilian activities.

The Singaporean can be motivated when he knows that his efforts will produce results and will be rewarded. The SAF can make his national service and in-camp training such that it can enhance his earning power and improve his prospects of advancement in civilian life. This is, however, not likely to be easy. There is little direct relationship between military training and civilian employment. But notwithstanding the difficulties the SAF must make every effort to motivate the national servicemen and the reservists to put in maximum effort and to excel in military training.

Two factors probably stand in the favour of the SAF. One is that it can improve its training programmes so that not only the military skills are inculcated but additional skills that can be adapted for civilian use are also taught. This will enhance the usefulness of military training. With improved military training the SAF not only trains better soldiers, sailors, and airmen, ....4/-

and airmen, but will also produce better disciplined, physically fit, alert, highly skilled workers whose attitude towards work, diligence, and productivity will contribute to the economic development of the country. Every such well trained member of the SAF will be a valuable asset to any large organization. Private sector employers may find it advantageous to take such trained persons. For the benefit of our national servicemen and our reservists the SAF will put more effort in this direction to adjust military training in such a way that in addition to all the necessary military skills they will also be trained for employment in the civilian sector.

The other is that the rapid increase in the number of reservists will mean that eventually practically every applicant for employment is a reservist. Already more than 150,000 reservists are in civilian employment. This number will be increased by about 20,000 each year. Even accepting that in the course of time many will retire, in the case of other ranks at the age of 40, and for officers at 50, the total number of reservists in the work force will eventually reach 500,000. Thus of the total work force of one million or so, 50 per cent will be reservists. Taking only male workers, probably four out of five will be reservists. They will form the vast majority of the male work force. Since the SAF can furnish employers with proper testimonials setting out the personal record and performance of the reservist, the service will be of much benefit to both the employer and the reservist alike. It may induce the national serviceman or the reservist to ensure that his record is a good one.

In time more and more reservists will occupy senior responsible posts in the civilian sector. Their ability to get things done will be facilitated by their having reservist colleagues also holding important appointments in other organizations and government departments with which they have business dealings. Even within one large organization, the work of the executive will be easier and less formal. Much time and effort can be saved when those executives already know each other through being reservists. Large organizations will recognise the

value of better working relationships among its own executives. The SAF military training will attain higher levels through the efforts of more and more officers and other ranks who are motivated by rewards for hard work and recognition. Nothing succeeds like success. When more SAF reservists acknowledge their success as being due to their military training, they will provide the necessary motivation for national servicemen and reservists who follow them to work hard in their military training. National service will be looked upon with greater interest and enthusiasm. Military service will be widely accepted, the military profession will be treated with deference and respect. National service and reservist military training will have come to its own.

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