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SPEECH BY MR ONG PANG BOON, MINISTER FOR LABOUR,
AT THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF SAF OFFICERS AT
THE ISTANA ON TUESDAY, 25 OCTOBER '77 AT 6.30 PM

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To-night, we have newly commissioned officers from 3 different fields of specialisation namely the infantry, airforce and the medical services. It is therefore appropriate that I talk on a subject that is common to officers of all the three services.

All these young men have spent months of arduous training in their respective fields, and have proven themselves competent in their own specialisations which are as varied as the environments in which they operate. However, there is one quality in common - they have all shown the potential for leadership.

The question all young officers should therefore ask themselves is: "How can I develop to be an effective leader?" An understanding of the phenomenon of leadership is necessary if one is to become a good officer.

Most importantly, effective leadership calls for contribution by the one in position of leadership. Leadership demands total responsibility towards the men whom you will command. Their lives will be in your hands and they have a right to expect the best leadership you can give.

The finest form of leadership is example. Give of your best in all endeavours and your men are likely to follow suit. To-day war is a sophisticated and specialised business and an officer must have the technical and professional knowledge related to his field if he is to lead. You must therefore continually update your expertise. Your men will expect you to take an effective course of action in any situation you may lead them into. The finest personal qualities will be called for as you work with your men. You must have physical fitness, self-discipline, adaptability, flexibility, initiative, sound judgement and decisiveness.

The effective officer must also realize that the accomplishment of the mission is achieved through his men. A thorough understanding of his men allows him to satisfy their needs while utilizing their talents in directing their effort towards the accomplishment of the mission. Thus a critical element of effective leadership in the army is the relationship between the officer and his men. To be effective, the officer must take a complete and honest appreciation of the capabilities and limitations of his men. A knowledge of their needs and problems, based on regular interviews and counselling, and close personal observation is essential in this respect. The objective measurement of the performance of your men in training situations, exercises and routine work is necessary. You will also need to train, encourage, reward and discipline if necessary, to ensure the highest levels possible are attained.

We are a small country. In defence, as in other areas, we must make up for our small size by the quality of our officers and soldiers and weaponry. The 150 officers who are to be commissioned to-day have shown that they deserve their appointment to positions of leadership in our armed forces. I trust that they will continue to strive to maintain the highest standard of leadership in our armed forces.

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