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**SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION, AT THE TEMASEK POLYTECHNIC'S FIRST GRADUATION CEREMONY AT THE SLF AUDITORIUM ON TUESDAY, 30 JULY 1991, AT 10.00 AM**

I am very pleased to be present at Temasek Polytechnic's first graduation ceremony. This will be the first of many more graduation ceremonies to come. Starting with 89 graduands this year, the number graduating from Temasek will increase each year until the polytechnic reaches its planned intake of 3,800. This will take some time, not until Temasek Polytechnic's new campus at Bedok Reservoir is completed in 4 years' time in 1995.

Meanwhile, a great deal is being achieved. First, the polytechnic has established 3 Schools - the Schools of Business, Design and Technology. This year, the intake into the 3 Schools is 820, making the total enrolment 1,450. Temasek Polytechnic now offers 9 diploma courses in Business Studies, Tourism Management, Operations Management, Graphic Design, Interior Architecture, Product Design, Electronics, Mechatronics and Computer Studies.

The Board of Governors of the polytechnic recently approved the master plan for the new campus. The architectural consultants are working on the detailed schematic design and the architectural model. The details will be made public in November this year. Having seen the master plan, I can say that the new campus will be aesthetically and functionally outstanding. As it will be the only tertiary institution on the eastern side of Singapore, it will be a landmark which we can all be proud of.

Polytechnic education has gained popularity in Singapore in recent years among our school leavers. In 1987, the number of applicants for polytechnic places by first choice was 9,200. Of this number, the 2 polytechnics (Singapore and Ngee Ann Polytechnics) were able to offer 7,100 places to the applicants. The number of applicants by first choice has grown rapidly. Last year, there were 16,100 first-choice applicants. This year, the corresponding number was the same. In the last 2 years, the polytechnics expanded their intake in response to the demand to 8,800 per year. (See Annex.) Temasek Polytechnic was started precisely in order to meet the growing demand for a polytechnic education.

Why is there such a strong demand for polytechnic education? I believe that there are 2 major reasons. First, more and more school leavers can see that polytechnic education leads to a professional diploma which has good market value. They know that employers are keen to hire polytechnic diploma holders and are offering good starting salaries which today are reaching \$1,000 per month.

The second reason is that the polytechnic diploma is not a dead end but can lead on to admission to university courses either locally or overseas. With the expansion of intake by the 2 universities to 600 places this year, the opportunity for going to the university has widened. This opportunity will grow in future as the 2 universities further expand their intake of poly diploma holders and as the proposed Open University begins to take in working polytechnic graduates for its modular courses.

Our economy will continue to need more polytechnic graduates especially those in technology disciplines as it upgrades and expands. The practice-oriented poly diploma holder is well received by many firms. The question is: will we have enough polytechnic places to meet the demand?

As I have just mentioned, we have had 16,000 first-choice applicants for the 8,800 places provided by the

polytechnics in the past 2 years. Even after Temasek Polytechnic is fully established, the total number of places available in the 3 polytechnics will only be about 11,500.

Will the demand continue at the level of 16,000 first-choice applicants in future? I believe so. First, with the improved 10-year school system for all, there will be more secondary school leavers. Secondly, with the phasing out of the Pre-U Centres and Centralised Institutes, there will be more students seeking polytechnic education. The polys are also committed to taking in more suitably qualified graduates from the VITB.

Thus, it is quite clear that we must further expand polytechnic education to cater for at least 16,000 students each year. The Ministry of Education is studying 2 options to meet this need. The first option is to expand the present 3 polytechnics further, to expand their intakes to beyond 5,000 each. One problem with this approach is that each polytechnic will then be very large with an enrolment of over 15,000. This may affect the quality of teaching and campus life.

The second option is to start a fourth polytechnic of equal size to the present three. If we do so, we will then have 4 polytechnics with an intake of about 4,000 students each. Together with the EDB diploma training centres, they will cater for an intake of over 16,000 students each year. One advantage of this approach is that each of the polytechnics can offer a variety of courses giving students more choice of courses. The government will come to a decision on this very soon.

Recently, Dr Tony Tan announced that MOE is studying how to expand further our 2 universities. He also said that the opportunities for more distance learning degree courses and an open university to cater for working adults are being looked into. With the expansion of polytechnic education and the upgrading of VITB into a post-secondary institution which I announced in March this year, we will thus have provided

more places at degree level, at diploma level and at the vocational/technical level. This will complete our plans to provide our students with post-secondary and tertiary education opportunities. When these plans are fully implemented, we will have a truly comprehensive education and training system. With such a system, we should then be able to maintain and improve our position as having one of the best work forces in the world. This should secure the economic future of all Singaporeans in the years ahead.

Let me conclude by commending Dr Varaprasad and his team of academic and administrative staff for what they have achieved for Temasek Polytechnic up to now. Through good planning and organisation, they have laid a firm foundation for Temasek Polytechnic despite the very tight time constraints under which they have had to work. The decision to start a third polytechnic was taken in mid 1989. Within 12 months, the first intake of new students was achieved in mid 1990. This must be a record for any tertiary institution. Despite the fast start, I am satisfied that the facilities, equipment and learning environment are more than adequate, having visited both campuses of Temasek Polytechnic.

Today, we are witnessing the first graduation ceremony of the first batch of Temasek's students. This batch of 89 is special. They are all from the School of Design. In particular, among them are the very first Product Design graduates - a group of 15. They are our first locally-trained product designers to join the market. Temasek Polytechnic did a survey among the 89 graduates. Apart from those going on to National Service and a few who are going overseas for studies, practically all the others are employed. Their starting salaries are between \$900 and \$1,100 which is a strong indicator of demand for designers by the private sector.

You, the graduates, are the pioneers. Like other batches of graduates who will come after you, employers and the rest of Singapore will judge Temasek Polytechnic from how you will perform in your careers. The staff of the

polytechnic has given you their best in teaching and mentoring. It is now up to you. Please remember that the name of every tertiary institution depends on the graduates it produces and how they perform in their jobs.

May I close by wishing you the graduands as well as the Board of Governors, the Principal and all the staff of Temasek Polytechnic all the best as you move ahead to build this new tertiary institution for the people of Singapore.

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AnnexFirst Choice Applications at our Polytechnics

Year	'O' level Candidature in previous year	No. who applied to polytechnics as 1st choice	No. admitted by polytechnics
1987	38800	9200	7100
1988	37200	10400	6800
1989	37600	12300	7900
1990	38400	16100	8600
1991	37100	16100	8800