

# Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR WAN SOON BEE, MINISTER OF STATE, AT THE  
SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS PRESENTATION CEREMONY OF THE HOUSING  
AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD DAILY-RATED EMPLOYEES UNION AT THE  
DBS AUDITORIUM ON SATURDAY 29 DECEMBER 1984 AT 10.30 AM

When we gained out independence in 1965, most people believed Singapore was not viable and we could not survive. The reasons given then were that we were small, we had no natural resources and we had no hinterland to support us. But after 19 years of hard work we have not only survived, we have thrived. Now many people are saying that we are successful because we are small, we are a compact society and it is easy to govern. From the two conflicting statements it is quite clear that the conditions we are in, the size of our country and population, the fact that we have no natural resosurces can be both advantageous and disadvantageous. What makes the difference is the quality of the leaders and the people.

Today, our people are enjoying a very high standard of living and Singaporeans are now proud of their country especially those who have travelled overseas and have seen the conditions in other countries.

Why are we so successful? I believe the most important factor was because the people and especially the trade union movement have faith in our leaders. They have co-operated with the government. They have responded positively to the government's calls to improve themselves and work hard.

In the process of nation-building the trade union movement has played a very crucial role. At times the policies introduced by the government did appear to be unfavourable to the workers. But the union leaders realised that these policies were necessary and they were in the long-term interest of the workers and the nation. They accepted these unpopular policies and took upon themselves to explain them to their members. They managed to carry the workforce with them and worked closely with the government. It is because of this close co-operation between the government and the unions that we were able to maintain industrial peace and created a conducive environment for investors to invest in Singapore. Our success in attracting many foreign investors to set up factories in Singapore have created many jobs for our people. In the 1970s our employment problem was eventually solved.

We have now moved from labour intensive to high technology and high value-added industries. These industries have provided many better and higher paid jobs for our people. But in order to continue to be successful our people need to be better educated and better trained. To understand and operate the modern and sophisticated machinery our people must be able to read the operational instructions, calculate and interpret technical data. The government knows that to succeed in upgrading our industries to higher technology industries our people must be better educated. Everyone must be given opportunities to develop themselves to their maximum potentials according to their abilities and aptitudes. The education policies have been geared towards this aim.

The importance of education has been well accepted by all sectors of our society. In addition to government's role in education, efforts from the community at large are also significant. It is heartening to note that

in recent years more and more unions have instituted various schemes to assist their members or children of the members to pursue better and higher education. The number of awards granted yearly must be running into the hundreds and the efforts have benefitted many who just need such additional help to see them through their education.

Members of Housing and Development Board Daily-Rated Employees Union do not earn high salaries, but because of their foresight and their commitment to help their children through education, the union launched the scholarship scheme way back in 1977. Since 1978, some three hundred secondary and PSLE students have benefitted under the scheme. Awards for university students were also introduced in 1982. To date, the union has disbursed some \$180,000 under the scheme and this amount, by any standard is an impressive record.

May I now take this opportunity to congratulate all the recipients of the awards today. I know you have worked hard and you deserve the awards. You are more fortunate than your parents. You are given the opportunities to better yourselves. You must make the best use of the opportunities you have. And for the time being the best way you can reward your parents and the society is to be successful in your studies and they will be proud of you.

On this note, I would like to wish all of you a Happy New Year.

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