

25 AUG 1989

Singapore Government

# PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Communications & Information, 36th Storey, PSA Building, 460 Alexandra Road, Singapore 0511. Tel: 2799794/5.

89-488-13

Release No: 12/AUG  
08-2/89/08/05

SPEECH BY BG (RES) BG GEORGE YONG-BOON YEO, MINISTER OF STATE (FINANCE) AND (FOREIGN AFFAIRS), AT THE BEDOK TOWN SECONDARY SCHOOL 4TH SPEECH AND PRIZE PRESENTATION DAY ON 5 AUGUST 1989 AT 4.00 PM

At a spring festival on education in 1964, Chairman Mao Zedong recommended that examinations be abolished. He said that the method of conducting examinations was a method for dealing with the enemy, not a method for dealing with the people. He described it as a surprise attack on students. Chairman Mao said this was harmful and should be stopped. Whispering in other people's ears and taking examinations in other people's names used to be done secretly. Let it be done openly, he said.

Two years later in 1966, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, and examinations were abolished. It was a time of great disorder but many students had a good time becoming Red Guards, travelling all over China and taking part in political activities.

Before the students of Bedok Town Secondary School also recommend that we stop exams in Singapore, let me go on to explain what happened in China. The result was complete disaster and the loss of an entire generation who had no proper education. Till today, China is suffering from the effects of the Cultural Revolution.

Exams and competitions are stressful. Exams are unpleasant and competition makes us selfish. But without exams and competition there will be little progress. Because such is human nature. Exams keep us on our toes and competition forces us to work hard and improve. Hence the saying: no pain, no gain.

But although competition is important for us and for society, we must never lose our sense of co-operation and compassion. Yes, we have to compete. But we must also co-operate with each other, help each other and care for each other. It is not enough to do well in tests and pass exams. We must also be of good character. We must be good pupils of Bedok Town Secondary School. We must be good citizens of Singapore. We must be good human beings. Being good doesn't mean we stop being competitive. It means understanding the purposes and the limits of competition, and never losing our sense of community and togetherness.

My message to you today is this. Despite what Mao Zedong said about exams, we do need exams and competition. But, in competing, we must never forget that we are human beings with heart and soul, that we are after all brothers and sisters on this planet we call Earth.

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