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**SPEECH BY BG (RES) GEORGE YONG-BOON YEO, MINISTER OF STATE
(FINANCE) AND (FOREIGN AFFAIRS) AND PRESIDENT OF SAFRA,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF SAFRA POLICY GAMING II
ON SATURDAY, 20 JANUARY 1990 AT 3.00 PM**

Emigration: Problems and Solutions

Immigration and emigration are two facets of the same phenomenon and must be discussed together. We cannot discuss emigration without also discussing immigration. If we shut the exit, no one will come in however wide the entrance is open. If we want good people to come in, we must allow them to leave when they want to. Therefore it is not the number who come or go which matters, but the net figure, the net increase or the net decrease.

If we want only numbers, there is no problem. In fact, many foreigners want to be let in into Singapore, which is why there is a problem of illegal immigrants and illegal workers. We want not just quantity but quality as well.

Quality is very important because a city survives by competition with other cities. A city becomes a city only by being of use to others. When it ceases to be of use, the city goes into decline. This is the story of the rise and decline of cities. The competitive pressure is relentless. In the early part of the last century, two cities competed furiously for business on the eastern seaboard of the new United States - New York and Philadelphia. New York won and Philadelphia took a poor second place. Success breeds success. New York exploited the advantages of its geography and sucked into Manhattan a huge

number of exceptionally able and hardworking people, from those then already in America and also directly from Europe. This absorption is not one-off but a continuous process of drawing in the best and the brightest from the hinterland, which in the case of New York today, consists of the entire North American continent and the whole world. Wall Street is nothing if only native New Yorkers are available.

As a city, Singapore is much the same except in one crucial aspect. We are a nation city. We have no hinterland within our national boundaries. This is good and bad. Good, because we avoid the problem of shantytowns so common in large cities. But also bad, because there is no natural process by which able men and women are brought in from the countryside. Instead, we have to engineer the flow by selective in-migration. What we want is to have the cake and to eat it too. We want a dynamic city, brimming with industry and enterprise, but without the slums. That is the simple objective.

We have to compete to achieve this objective. We have to compete with other cities for resources and for people. Tourists visit Singapore, MNCs set up their HQs in Singapore, oil companies refine their oil in Singapore, banks operate in Singapore, not to do us a favour, but to do themselves a favour. We are of use to them. This is the idea of city-competition and city-marketing.

In city-marketing, it is the total package which decides. Not just the infrastructure and the communications, but also the whole human environment, the climate, cultural values, politics, religion, food, theatres, book-shops and so on. The fact is we live in an integrated world, where the top layer of any society is becoming more and more mobile. If you are a top-rate hotel manager, for example, you can work in Acapulco this year, Bali next year and Ibiza the year after, without major re-adjustment, and quite comfortably too. It is the same with a whole range of

other professions. With the continuing revolution in technology, the world will become even smaller in the future.

Therefore, we must pay attention to the total city environment in Singapore, and always remember that we are competing. No advantage endures permanently. We must stay alert and keep ahead. The conditions needed to encourage foreigners to live and work in Singapore and, for some, to grow roots here, are very much the same conditions needed to discourage Singaporeans from emigrating. Let me emphasize again that these conditions are not all material, they are also cultural and spiritual. They are matters not only of the pocket but also of the mind, the heart and the soul.

National and reserve service is sometimes seen as a negative factor because of the additional obligation. In order not to raise too high the threshold to entry, we do not always require new citizens and PRs to do NS. Some feel that this puts Singapore-born citizens at a disadvantage, which is partly true. But the solution cannot be to make it more difficult for foreigners to come in, because we need them to maintain our competitive position. Neither is it a solution to abolish NS, because that will be suicidal. What we should do is to discriminate positively in favour of Singaporeans and PRs who do NS. We have done this to some extent but we can do a lot more. National servicemen and reservists are in a special class because they carry an extra burden. New citizens and PRs will not resent such positive discrimination because they themselves are free to volunteer. It is an important point to consider. Again I am not referring only to material rewards. That will demean the whole idea of National Service. It is the overall regard, the respect, which a society shows to those who are asked to bear arms for the common defence, which is important. The Government should continue to take the lead but our long-term objective should be to encourage private companies and civic organizations to recognize instinctively those who do NS, and show this

recognition not just by word but also by deed.

To summarize: our strategy is to develop and market Singapore as a total city. Capital is mobile, and human beings are becoming more mobile with each passing day. We have to compete. The problem of immigration and emigration must be solved together. By making the human environment in Singapore as conducive as possible, in the total sense, we encourage immigration and discourage emigration. We must also recognize in a special way those who do NS because this is only right and fair.

It is surely not by chance that reservists should concern themselves with the issue of immigration and emigration. Policy gaming is a useful way to gain insight into the problem. It is another contribution we make to the nation we love. I wish the participants every success.

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