



SPEECH

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SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, DR NG ENG HEN, AT THE DEFENCE SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS CEREMONY ON 29 JULY 2022

Chairman PSC, Mr Lee Tzu Yang

PSC Members

Senior officials from MINDEF, SAF, DSTA, DSO National Laboratories

CDF, Service Chiefs and senior commanders

Parents and family members

Principals and teachers of polytechnics and colleges

Scholarship recipients

1. Let me just say how delighted we are, we meaning those of us in the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and the Public Service Commission (PSC) to be dining together. Resuming this ceremony at the Istana after three years, and I am told that, on record, this is the first time in a very, very long time, that we have all our recipients here. The Defence Scholarship Awards Ceremony is an important occasion both internally to our MINDEF/SAF tribe as well as to the general public and beyond. Because through this simple ceremony at the Istana, we signal that Singapore continues to pay the highest attention in selecting capable leaders that are responsible for our national defence. Whether it is through the SAF scholarships, which is now in its 51st year, or more recent ones for DSTA and DSO such as the PSC (Engineering) scholarships, recipients share that same responsibility – to protect the sovereignty and security of Singapore. Upon your shoulders is placed that onerous but sacred duty – to defend Singapore’s interests and way of life and to use whatever that is at our disposal to ensure that our people are kept safe and Singapore independent – because as Mr Lee Kuan Yew reminded us, “Without a strong defence, there will be no Singapore.”

2. This recognition that security and stability form the cornerstone of our nation, indeed of any nation, the hopes and plans of our people, I think is more profoundly felt this year. Partly due to the disruptions by COVID-19, but I think more so followed by the visual images of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. People everywhere, including Singaporeans at home, have realised that what we hold dear can be taken away in a fleeting moment. The images of hapless civilians, innocent women and children against the backdrop of schools and other civilian buildings reduced to rubble by bombs have cemented into many minds this simple but ugly truth – prolonged peace, stability and progress are not a given. War and devastation can come upon a nation precipitously.

3. We, as the post-World War II (WW2) generation, may have forgotten or lulled into complacency that peace is the default. Our Singaporeans forebears –parents or grandparents who lived life here as a British colony, who had to suffer through the Japanese invasion and occupation would tell us otherwise.

4. However, that innocence following the end of WW2 and Cold War is now lost. In Europe, more contestation is expected, with no clear end in sight for the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In Asia, the US-China rivalry will sharpen. With goodwill and cooperation on the decline, existing transnational challenges such as climate change, terrorism and supply disruptions of essential goods are unlikely to get the attention they need. The World at large, including our region, has become more dangerous.

5. As recipients of the various defence scholarships today, you therefore enter MINDEF, SAF, DSTA and DSO amid an uncertain future and mounting security challenges. This responsibility that you have taken in accepting your scholarship is not for the faint of heart nor those lacking in resolve or steel in their characters.

6. Over the next decade or two, you will be educated and trained to be defenders of our nation. The spectrum of threats that Singapore faces, and our inherent vulnerabilities as a small nation with limited resources make the physical defence of Singapore challenging. We can only surmount these vulnerabilities and challenges through exceptional commitment, resilience and innovation, whether as soldier, scientist, engineer, doctor or administrator. Our defence scholars will therefore need to pursue diverse fields to train their minds and aptitude, which are needed not only to make sure that our military platforms see further, shoot faster and more precise, but that

the SAF can deal with cyber threats and misinformation campaigns that sow disunity in our own ranks.

7. Singapore's defence can only be as strong as the heartbeats and resolve of our warriors in MINDEF, SAF, DSTA and DSO. Through this ceremony, we are proud and reassured that 93 of you will take up that challenge as future leaders of Singapore's defence. You come from diverse backgrounds – 22 Junior Colleges and Polytechnics – the highest number of institutions to date. You will pursue a wide range of multi-disciplinary subjects, from Economics to Engineering, Law, Medicine and the Arts, to Computer Science and Information Security. You go to traditional institutions, either locally or in the United States and the United Kingdom, but also interesting ones – we have a recipient who has chosen to study in the Netherlands. I applaud our recipients for undertaking these demanding and diverse fields. Diverse in experiences and backgrounds you may be, but you must now gel with that collective resolve to grow MINDEF, SAF, DSTA and DSO to the best of your capabilities. Only with strong organisations can we mount the best defence for Singapore.

8. I would like put on record our thanks to the Chairman of PSC and his members – I know that they have painstakingly selected you through these years, so that we can have capable leaders in place to help safeguard Singapore's interests. We have principals from MINDEF, SAF, DSTA and DSO who also screened through the applicants – you were responsible for inducting people who will replace you, so you have vested interest. Let me thank your parents, your principals and your teachers – I know they have been your strong supporters, and they have supported your development and your choice to join us and we are very grateful for their support.

9. So congratulations once again. We look forward to your return and future contributions. Thank you very much.

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