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SPEECH BY MR S ISWARAN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY AND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, AT THE ITE GRADUATION CEREMONY 2009 ON TUESDAY, 16 JUNE 2009, AT 1530 HOURS, UNIVERSITY CULTURAL CENTRE

Mr Bob Tan, Chairman, ITE Board of Governors

Mr Bruce Poh, Director & CEO of ITE

Distinguished Guests

ITE Graduands

Parents

Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

Good afternoon.

1 I am happy to be here today at this ceremony to celebrate the graduation and accomplishments of our ITE students. I congratulate all of you on having successfully completed your course of study. I'm sure that your parents, family members and ITE lecturers, who have supported you and have been instrumental in your journey, are all very proud of you. ITE has provided you with an excellent education that has prepared you well for the workforce, and to make a contribution to Singapore.

Global Leadership in Vocational and Technical Education

2 ITE has come a long way since its inception. It has transformed itself from an institution providing basic vocational training, to one that works with industry leaders and internationally-renowned global institutions to provide a quality market-relevant education. Awards such as the Singapore Quality Award and the Harvard-IBM Innovations Award for Transforming Government affirm that ITE is now recognised both locally and internationally for its strengths in vocational and technical education.

3 For example, in February this year, ITE signed a 5-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Singapore Technologies (ST) Aerospace, one of the world's leading aviation maintenance, repair and overhaul companies. This partnership will provide a platform for joint-certification development, technical support, student scholarships as well as industrial attachment opportunities for students and staff. In the same month, ITE also linked up with Autodesk Asia, a global leader in 2D & 3D design software. This collaboration is expected to benefit over 400 students in six courses offered by ITE's new School of Design & Media through the provision of software solutions, courseware curriculum and related instructional materials and training.

4 Internationally, ITE has also formed strategic partnerships with renowned global institutions to deepen and widen its linkages for learning, sharing and exchange for ITE staff and students. Currently, MOUs have been signed with 13

Institutions of Higher Learning in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Korea, Switzerland, UK and USA.

The Value of ITE Education

5 ITE's high quality education serves its graduates well in the workplace. I am heartened to note that, despite the weaker economy in the second half of 2008, ITE graduates who entered the job market in that year were nevertheless highly marketable, enjoying an overall employment rate of 90%. The average monthly salaries for post-National Service and fresh graduates in 2008 also saw an increase from the year before. While the present economic downturn is affecting everyone, I am confident that the high-quality training ITE offers its graduates will stand you in good stead to build successful careers in the years ahead.

6 Beyond employability and salaries, the quality of ITE education is also reflected in the experiences of its graduates who have entered the work force. Let me share with you the stories of two recent ITE graduates who have made their mark in their respective industries.

7 Muhammad Fadli graduated with a *Higher Nitec* in Mechanical Engineering in 2007, and is currently working as a Non-destructive Testing (NDT) Inspector for the oil and gas industry. Fadli started work as an inspector in the demanding and hazardous oil rig environment. His job was both physically and mentally taxing as he had to inspect many kinds of heavy and complicated metal equipment under the pressure of time. Fadli credits his education at ITE for imparting to him the technical

skills, maturity and perseverance that allowed him to master his area of expertise. Just two years after starting work, Fadli was promoted to the post of Senior Inspector. As a team coordinator he had the experience of leading a team of inspectors, including expatriates, all over the world. He has benefited much from the global exposure, which included a one-and-a-half month stint in West Africa to inspect oil rigs. Just recently, Fadli was headhunted by another company to be a Rig Inspector, and he now enjoys even better job prospects.

8 The second graduate, Tee Wen Shan, graduated in 2005 with a *Higher Nitec* in Logistics Management and is now working as a Senior International Freight Executive, tracking and ensuring the smooth shipment of cargo being transported by air, sea and land. While participating in an internship as an ITE student, she was talent-spotted by the company she was attached to, and has been employed there ever since. Wen Shan is valued highly by her employers for her strong work ethic and willingness to learn. This passion for her work was sparked by the encouragement and patient coaching of her ITE lecturer as well as the interesting curriculum she was exposed to at ITE. For example, Wen Shan found that the visits organised by ITE to major warehouses were relevant and useful for her current job as they provided her with an authentic learning experience.

9 Wen Shan also credits ITE for teaching her the importance of constantly upgrading her knowledge and skills in order to stay competitive in the industry. Having recently completed a Diploma in Logistics Management, she aims to attain a degree in Material Management in the near future as she pursues a long-term career in her chosen field.

Enhanced Progression Opportunities for ITE Graduates

10 Like Wen Shan, many ITE graduates have a strong desire to continue upgrading their qualifications. I'm sure many of you present today have already set your sights on such goals.

11 In fact, more ITE graduates are progressing to our local Polytechnics. The proportion of ITE students pursuing full-time polytechnic diploma programmes upon graduation has been increasing steadily over the years, from 14% just five years ago, to 20% currently.

12 ITE graduates who have furthered their studies at the Polytechnics have also performed well. One good example is Richard Kong, an ITE graduate who went on to pursue a Diploma in Electronics and Computer Engineering in Ngee Ann Polytechnic. When I met Richard at the Ngee Ann Polytechnic graduation recently, he shared with me how, coming from the Normal (Technical) Stream in secondary school, he had been very motivated and worked hard to achieve his goals. Richard graduated this year with 32 'A's or Distinctions out of 35 subjects. He received both the Lee Kuan Yew Award, which is given to the top graduate from a technology course at the polytechnic, and the Tay Eng Soon Gold Medal for being the top graduate formerly from ITE. In addition, Richard has also been awarded the Nanyang Scholarship to pursue an undergraduate program in Electrical & Electronic Engineering at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

13 The Ministry of Education recognises the aspirations and potential of ITE graduates like Richard. As announced in February this year, we are reviewing how more polytechnic places can be provided for ITE graduates in the years to come.

14 Aside from progression to the polytechnics, there are now more opportunities for ITE students to upgrade their qualifications. In recent years, the Government has provided more diverse education pathways to cater to students with different needs, aspirations and talents. In line with this, ITE has developed partnerships with prestigious international institutions to offer diploma programmes in niche areas that provide another pathway for ITE graduates to attain a diploma.

15 ITE launched its first diploma programme in 2008 – the Technical Engineer Diploma in Machine Technology, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of Baden-Württemberg, Germany.

16 I am pleased to announce that ITE has built on its successful relationship with its German partners to offer its second niche diploma programme, the Technical Engineer Diploma in Automotive Engineering, starting in 2010. This programme will train automotive technologists who will be able to master automotive technology that is becoming increasingly complex and sophisticated. Such automotive technologists would be well positioned to serve key growth areas such as sustainable mobility involving electric, hybrid and fuel cell vehicles. They would also be prepared to support motorsport engineering including high performance components design and race car chassis assembly.

17 This new programme will provide an attractive progression path for ITE graduates from the *Nitec* in Automotive Technology course, as well as upgrading opportunities for technical executives, service advisors and workshop managers in the automotive industry. I commend ITE for offering such innovative diploma programmes that will meet the needs of industry and the aspirations of ITE graduates.

Conclusion

18 As ITE graduates, you have benefited from an education that has prepared you well to excel in your careers, and to succeed in life. I would like to encourage you to use what you have learned not only for personal benefit and advancement, but also to contribute to those less fortunate than yourselves. Many of you have participated in Community Involvement Projects (CIP) locally and even overseas. I have been told that this year, around 500 students from ITE College West volunteered to be energy auditors, to assess the energy consumption of 1,000 low income households and give these families advice on how to reduce their electricity bills. This is an excellent example of how you can use your skills to help those around you. I hope that all of you will find joy and meaning in your work as you contribute to society in your future careers.

19 Once again, I extend my heartiest congratulations to all graduands in the Class of 2009, and I wish all of you the best in your future endeavours. Thank you.