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SPEECH BY SENIOR MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF WORLDSKILLS SINGAPORE ON THURSDAY, 20 JANUARY 2011, AT 1000 HOURS, AT THE ITE COLLEGE WEST

Mr Ang Mong Seng, Member of Parliament for Hong Kah GRC

Mr Bob Tan, Chairman, ITE Board of Governors

Mr Bruce Poh, CEO of ITE

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

Introduction

1. I am especially happy to be here to witness the opening of this year's WorldSkills Singapore Competition because the Institute of Education or ITE has reaffirmed my faith in it. Some of you may recall that in 1992, at the inauguration dinner of ITE, I had said that I was convinced of ITE's ability to help develop a world-class skilled workforce. And it has. As one piece of evidence, over the years, ITE has done well in WorldSkills competitions.

2. WorldSkills Singapore is an important national platform to showcase the skills and talents of our youths in 18 skill areas, such as automotive technology and visual merchandising. The winners of WorldSkills Singapore will represent our country at the WorldSkills London 2011 Competition in October.

Importance of Good Skills Training

3. Skilled workers such as mechanics, plumbers, cooks and hairdressers are essential to our economy. There will always be a demand for them. For example, during the recession in 2009, more than 80% of the ITE graduates who entered the job market found a job within six months after graduation. Many other countries around the world also have similar experiences. The New York Times reported that during the recession in the United States, the demand for skilled labour such as welders and electrical linemen remained high. In UK and Australia as well, there is an acute shortage of skilled labour such as laboratory and automotive technicians.

4. This is not surprising. In a knowledge-based economy, there is a heavy emphasis on knowledge generation, usually by highly educated graduates. However, knowledge flies across national borders, and in the Internet age, knowledge-based jobs can be outsourced. Many countries now outsource even professional work such as legal and accounting services to other emerging countries like India and China.

5. On the other hand, many skilled technical jobs cannot be outsourced. When a car breaks down, you need a local mechanic to fix it. When you want to cut or colour your hair, you need a local hairdresser. As our population ages, we will need more care-givers and nurses to take care of our parents and grand-parents. These and other skills will be tested in today's WorldSkills competition.

6. What the competition does not test is your attitude after graduation and whether you will continue to hone your skills on the job. Here, I want to highlight an important point. Regardless of your chosen field of study, take pride in your skills and work, continue to learn and be the best that you can be.

7. Also remember that the world does not stand still, and you need to keep pace with the changing needs of the economy. This is particularly so in fast moving fields such as electronics, Information Technology and robotics. I urge NITEC students to find opportunities to move on to Higher NITEC courses, full-time or part-time diploma programmes in our polytechnics, and Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) courses under the Continuing Education and Training framework.

ITE's Contribution to Skills Training

8. ITE has played an important role in training local skilled labour and enhancing our workforce's ability. Since its inception, ITE has produced some 300,000 graduates. ITE has also remained relevant to its students and industry by making timely revisions to its curriculum or offering new training courses across a wide range of skills-related industries.

9. ITE's "*Hands-on, Minds-on, Hearts-on*" education philosophy also plays an important part in its success in skills training. "*Hands-on*" equips its students with skills; "*Minds-on*" expands their mental capacity; and "*Hearts-on*" brings out their passion and commitment to their work.

10. ITE has been globally recognised for its achievement and innovation in technical education. In 2007, ITE beat 30 countries, including Canada and the USA, to win the inaugural global **Harvard-IBM Innovations Award in Transforming Government**, conferred by the Ash Institute for

Democratic Governance and Innovation of Harvard University. Last year, ITE received the **Innovation of the Year** award conferred by the League for Innovation in the Community College, USA, for its Aircraft Fuel System Simulator.

11. ITE has continued to win awards at international skills competitions. Seven ITE students won medals at the recent 8th ASEAN Skills Competition held in Thailand in November last year, including 2 Golds. These results show that we have the right fundamentals, programmes and teachers for vocational and technical education and training.

12. These competitions not only help ITE benchmark itself against other technical institutions in the world but also teach student participants valuable lessons, strengthen their confidence and improve their ability to respond to dynamic environments.

13. Among those who had benefited is ITE student Noel Ng. Noel won the gold medal for hairdressing at the recent 8th ASEAN Skills Competition. Despite his friends and family's initial reservations about his hairdressing course, Noel persisted and trained for 8 months prior to the competition, and finally achieved glory for both ITE and himself.

ITE's Teachers

14. These achievements would not have been possible without the team of passionate and committed staff and teachers in ITE. Good teachers do more than just transfer knowledge and skills. They take the effort to understand their students, help them with their problems and motivate them to do well. Put simply, they care. Over the years, ITE's teachers have transformed lives by constantly encouraging and believing in the potential of their students. Mr Elson Koh is a good example. Mr Koh failed to qualify for secondary school as a student under the now-defunct monolingual stream. He then enrolled in ITE, persevered and graduated not only with a diploma and a mechanical engineering degree, but eventually a Master's in Industrial Systems Engineering from the National University of Singapore.

15. This is what Mr Koh felt about his ITE education - *"I noticed a great difference in the teachers' attitude towards the students. They were extremely encouraging and gave me the confidence and hope which I had lost in my primary school days. My ITE teachers told me I could go to the polytechnic and university; nobody in my life had ever told me this, nor had it crossed my mind."* Inspired by his teachers, Mr Elson Koh achieved his dreams, and wanted to help other ITE students. Today, Mr Koh is the Section Head of the Mechatronics Engineering Department at ITE College West.

Continued Commitment to Skills Training in Singapore

16. ITE's success should not be taken for granted. Our technical educational institutions must continue to stay relevant and responsive in an increasingly competitive global environment. The Government will continue to invest in this sector and in our students to help meet this objective. The Government has committed to the consolidation of ITE's smaller campuses into 3 regional colleges by 2013, with state-of-the-art facilities. Many people, including foreign leaders, have been impressed by the facilities in the new ITEs. The Government has also announced plans to expand the polytechnic capacity, which would allow more ITE graduates to upgrade themselves and receive a polytechnic education.

17. Just last month, Minister for Education, Dr Ng Eng Hen, officiated at the Ground Breaking Ceremony for ITE's new headquarters and College Central at Ang Mo Kio. When completed in 2013, ITE College Central will host more than 10,000 students and offer niche courses in fields such as Marine Technology and Creative Design. This new campus will allow ITE to train students in the best learning environment.

Concluding Remarks

18. In closing, I would like to commend ITE and its industry partners for their efforts in promoting skills excellence. I congratulate, too, the competitors for coming this far in the competition. I wish all the competitors and organisers a successful competition.

Thank you.
