

Embargoed until after delivery.
Please check against delivery.

OPENING ADDRESS BY RADM (NS) LUI TUCK YEW, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE WORLDSKILLS SINGAPORE COMPETITION 2008 HELD ON THURSDAY, 16 OCT 2008, AT 1500 HOURS, AT THE AUDITORIUM, ITE COLLEGE EAST

Mr Bruce Poh
Director & CEO/ITE

Principals of the Five Polytechnics

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

1. It gives me great pleasure to be here today to officiate in the Opening of the WorldSkills Singapore Competition, 2008. WorldSkills Singapore is an important national platform to showcase the skills and talents of our youths. It is an exciting opportunity for our young people taking part in the competition – whether they are in ITE, the Polytechnics or industry as the champions of this year's competition will represent Singapore at the international WorldSkills Competition in Calgary, Canada, in September next year.

Singapore's Performance at International WorldSkills Competitions

2. Singapore has done well at the biennial international WorldSkills Competitions since our debut thirteen years ago in 1995, where we garnered 13 Gold Medals. Last year, at Shizuoka, Japan, our Singapore team won three Golds, one Bronze and six Medallions of Excellence from our participation in 12 skills areas. This is a very commendable performance by Team Singapore.

3. The results show that we have our fundamentals right where vocational and technical education and training is concerned. But we must not rest on our laurels – whether we are preparing our students for the competition or equipping them with the requisite skills for the workplace. With an increase in the number of countries participating in the WorldSkills Competition, competition has, and will, become increasingly intense. The same is true in our globalised economies. Countries are increasingly realising that skills and skill talents are the backbone of any economy. Worldwide, we have seen an increase in emphasis in vocational and technical education, as countries strive to enhance their competitiveness in the global marketplace.

Benchmarking of World-Class Skills

4. The WorldSkills Competition reflects this global reality where skills standards become an important competitive advantage, and these standards need to rise in tandem with economic and technological advancements. Our youths in Singapore will certainly benefit from participating at such an international platform which is an

important avenue to learn, to exchange, to compare our competency standards in industrial trades and service and to benchmark how we measure up to our counterparts globally.

5. Today, there are 49 member countries or economies in the WorldSkills Competition. This gives us an excellent opportunity to benchmark our youths' technical skills and competency standards against the rest of the world. In addition, it helps us to keep abreast of industry trends worldwide. At the last competition, we saw the introduction of several **new** skills areas, such as Mobile Robotics and Telecommunications Distribution Technology. This year, for WorldSkills Singapore, two more new skills areas will be introduced. These are in the areas of Beauty Therapy and Caring – areas of growing importance which are in line with the development of both the Services Sector and demographic trends of Singapore.

6. Besides new skills areas, the scope and format of the competition in each skill area has also evolved with industry trends worldwide. For example, winners in the Mechatronics skills competition were previously selected for their speed in assembly and programming, but the scope of the competition has changed in recent years, to include open-ended design of solutions to a problem. This is an acknowledgement of the complexity of problems in today's work environment, where critical thinking is as highly valued as the mechanical solution.

WorldSkills – Developing a Winning Edge in our Skills Talents

7. Our participation in WorldSkills has also given individual competitors an edge in career and in life. Past participants attest that the competition has taught them valuable lessons and help strengthen their confidence and improve their agility in responding to dynamic situations. They also agree that the competition was a valuable experience in enriching their personal lives and boosting their careers.

8. Among those who had benefited is **Lo Min Ming**, a Nanyang Polytechnic graduate, and a Gold Medal Winner in Information Technology Software Application in WorldSkills Competition 2005, held in Helsinki, Finland. Min Ming not only won the Gold Medal, but was also ranked second out of 700 competitors from 37 countries in the Competition that year. Min Ming went on to graduate at the top of his class with a Gold Award from Nanyang Polytechnic. He was also awarded the Singapore IT Youth Award 2005 by the Singapore Computer Society.

9. Today, Min Ming is pursuing a degree in Computer Science at Stanford University, USA. An accomplished software developer and digital media designer, Min Ming credits his achievements to the training he received while preparing for and participating in the WorldSkills. In his words, WorldSkills had not only extended his knowledge and capability in IT, but also developed in him the mental strength and determination to succeed at the highest level against top competitors from around the world.

10. **Aaron Tan Wei Cheng** is another young person who has benefited from his participation in WorldSkills. Aaron is a Ngee Ann Polytechnic graduate and a Bronze Medallist in Web Design at the 2005 WorldSkills Competition. For Aaron, the experience of competing with top programmers and designers has enabled him to witness first-hand how designers in other countries work and what they could produce within the few days of competition. Coming up against the world's best has taught Aaron to apply the same high standards in his own career and studies.

11. Today, Aaron is the CEO of System Technologies¹, a one-stop solutions provider for online needs from web hosting to application development. Aaron, who graduated from the Singapore Management University (SMU), is now pursuing post-graduate studies in Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon University on a National Infocomm Scholarship. He was also awarded the Excellence Award in Community Leadership by SMU².

12. These success stories are signposts of what we hope will await those chosen to represent Singapore at WorldSkills. I hope the Competitors who are here today will be inspired to strive even harder, and that we would one day, hear your stories mentioned at a similar competition.

¹ For more details, please refer to website at <http://www.system.com/>

² http://www.sis.smu.edu.sg/students/award_winners/award_winners_0708.asp

Conclusion

13. In closing, I would like to commend ITE and the five Polytechnics, as well as the partners from industry for their efforts in promoting skills excellence among our youths. I congratulate, too, the competitors for coming this far, and wish all an exciting and enjoyable competition.

14. Thank you.