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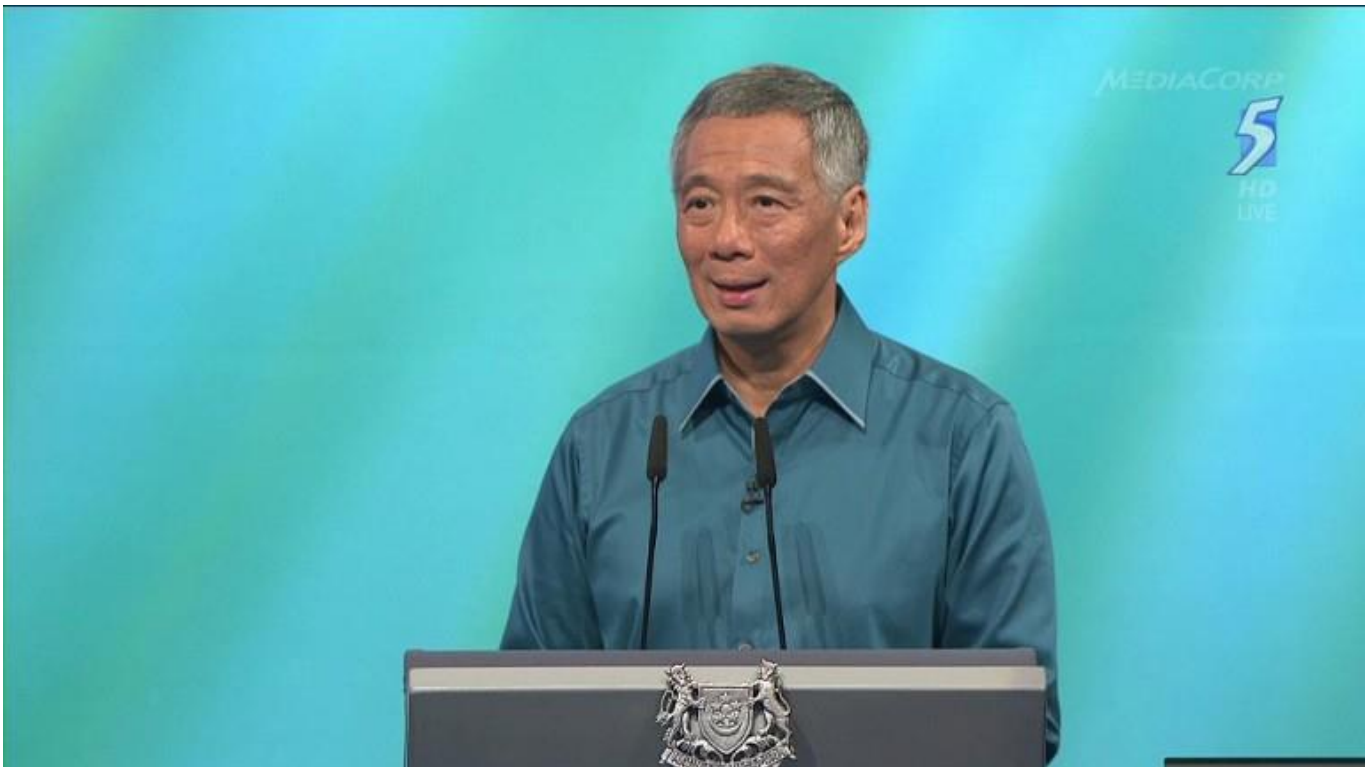
Headline: Singapore must build on pioneers' legacy: PM Lee

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Singapore's pioneers have shown that Singaporeans can do anything if they set their minds to it, and Singapore must build on their legacy, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in his National Day Rally Speech on Sunday (Aug 17).

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Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the 2014 National Day Rally

SINGAPORE: Singapore's pioneers have shown that Singaporeans can do anything if they set their minds to it. In his National Day Rally Speech on Sunday (Aug 17), Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said Singapore must build on the pioneers' legacy.

He said that education is an important part in ensuring that Singaporeans have the opportunities to achieve their potential. He cited the examples of two students who showed resolve, strength and character in overcoming challenges.

One is polytechnic graduate Divesh Singaraju who was diagnosed with lymphoma when he was 10 years old. He recovered, but suffered a relapse while studying at Singapore Polytechnic.

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Mr Lee said Divesh eventually overcame his illness and graduated at the top of his class. He will be heading to Imperial College London on an SIA-SINDA scholarship.

Another student Mr Lee mentioned is ITE graduate William Tay. Mr Lee said Tay's hearing loss did not stop him from excelling in life. He graduated with a perfect score last year and is also part of a dragon boat team of hearing impaired people.



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Tay hopes to give back to the society - he is working with his lecturers to start a Sign Language CCA Club in ITE. He is now pursuing a Diploma in Infocomm Security Management at the Singapore Polytechnic.

Prime Minister Lee said: "We have done well by our students; but our students, having done well, naturally hope to climb even higher. They are right to aim high. We want to help them create a brighter future for themselves, by many routes - not just the academic route, but also alternatively by getting good jobs, mastering deep skills, performing well and then getting relevant qualifications along the way, as they work, as they advance in their careers.

Mr Lee said there are different ways to deepen one's skills and knowledge - by learning on the job or attaining higher qualifications, or both. At the same time, he said employers must value their staff and develop them to take on higher responsibilities. He cited the example of two companies whose workers found success even though they did not have university degrees.

Roy Lim left school after Secondary 2 and started work as a shipyard apprentice at Keppel FELS. With support from Keppel, he completed NTC 3 and NTC 2. He is now one of two shipyard managers who together manage 12,000 workers.

During a meeting with the prime minister, Lim said there was once he wanted to give up when he was stumped by a problem while working abroad. He said: "So I called my wife, I said I want to give up. Then my wife told me, 'Don't give up. Finish the job. Even though you want to quit, finish the job and come back with your head high, so that at least you fulfil your obligations'."

Mr Lee said there are many other Roy Lims in Singapore - who may not have degrees but are working hard to improve themselves. He said those who work hard can always hope for a brighter future.

Another employee, Dorothy Han, joined Keppel FELS as a draftsman 25 years ago after graduating from the Institute of Technical Education. Today, she is leading the pipe design section of the engineering department at the company. She is currently studying part-time for a diploma at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

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Mr Lee also cited the story of Abu Bakar, who joined Keppel Shipyard as an assistant safety officer after graduating from the Singapore Polytechnic. He is now the CEO of the company's joint-venture shipyard based in Qatar.

Abu Bakar said he has been given many training opportunities throughout his career. Last year, he completed an Executive MBA at the Singapore Management University, even though he was not a university graduate.

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In an interview with Mr Lee, Abu Bakar said the course was quite easy because it's quite relevant to his job. "In fact, to me it was very timely because you have a new company to run, because it's totally a new startup yard," he said. Mr Lee added that on the day he interviewed Abu Bakar, he learnt that the NSman had been promoted to Colonel, commanding an infantry brigade.

Mr Lee said Keppel is one of many companies that show it is possible for an employee to progress by acquiring skills and knowledge on the job.

In his Mandarin speech, he said SME bosses have told him some knowledge can only be learnt on the job and not in school. For them, when it comes to promotion, the main consideration is practical experience and ability, rather than whether the staff has a university degree.

Precision engineering company Makino Asia is another company that values practical experience and ability. In April, it promoted an employee, Ang Kian Hua, to a craftsman after he completed a Master Craftsman certification.

Prime Minister Lee said: "There are different ways to deepen one's skills and knowledge - by learning on the job, or going for higher qualifications, or both. Look for the best ways to learn. Learn what is relevant and apply that. Don't go on a paper chase for qualifications or degrees.

"Pathways and opportunities to upgrade and to get better qualifications remain open throughout your career. At the same time, employers must value your staff and develop them to take on higher responsibilities." With the right support at work, Mr Lee said Singaporeans can advance in their careers - whether or not they are graduates.