

— Innovation is within the reach of everyone —

Gillian Lim, Manager, Corporate Communications, SPRING Singapore

Last year, Singapore celebrated 21 years of its productivity movement. The major commemorative event was the national productivity rally held on 3 December and graced by the Singapore Head of State, President S.R. Nathan. On that occasion, the Singapore workforce was challenged with the mandate of “co-creating a better tomorrow through productivity and innovation,” which was also the rally theme.

In the first 18 years of its productivity movement, Singapore had to deal with issues like skills upgrading, labor-management relations, and quality. These helped to sustain high productivity then. However, in order to continue to attain world-class productivity levels, Singapore has to make a paradigm shift from an industrial, input-driven economy to one that is knowledge based and innovation driven.

Delivering the welcome address at the rally was Lim Boon Heng, Minister, Prime Minister’s Office and Chairman, SPRING Singapore. Standing on a stage set as a playground with lively schoolchildren, he called on the people of Singapore to remake their country into a more innovative society, adding that Singapore has to become more than just a “brand” renowned for efficiency and discipline; it must become the byword for innovation and enterprise as well. “The new economy is one where there are tremendous opportunities waiting to be seized, if we are willing just to reach out and try. It is like a playground that beckons to curious little children who explore and experiment without constraints or preconceived notions. We need to have more child-like qualities so that we can be innovative, thinking new ideas, and trying new ways of doing things all the time. Innovation is fun. It is rewarding. And it is within the reach of everyone.”

President Nathan called on the Singapore workforce to step up to the next



President Nathan talking to award winners

level of competition and added, “Just as in 1981, a concerted effort is now needed from the workforce, government, industry, and unions to manage this transition to be an innovation-driven economy. We must strive to entrench innovation practices and habits and equip our workforce with innovation skills. We need to work at bringing about a mindset change to make our workforce as innovative as any in the developed countries.”

The president also called for “innovation management,” as innovation is not simply about a chaotic mass of ideas. Instead, ideas have to be culled and evaluated and the useful ones quickly implemented. He said that creativity, discipline, organization, and standardization can, and must, exist side-by-side. Organizations, he continued, must invest in building up their people’s innovative skills.

At the rally, President Nathan conferred the National Productivity Award on 21 outstanding individuals who have made significant contributions to productivity and innovation at their respective workplaces. In his address, he made reference to them and said, “They come from all walks of life and represent different levels of the workforce in different industries. These individuals demonstrate that innovation is within the reach of everyone and that every worker can make a disproportionate contribution to the workplace, if he or she is willing to go the extra mile.”

Among the award recipients were She Ah Hock, 38, who was born deaf, and Thiagarajan Gopal Pillay, 53, who was stricken with polio at the age of three. Ah Hock works as a logistics helper at a downtown department store. His employer has only high praise for him as he is full of innovative ideas to make his work more productive. Likewise, Thiagarajan is also a model worker who is constantly seeking ways to add value to his work. These two awardees are a vivid testimony that innovation is indeed within the reach of everyone. 🌀



Minister Lim Boon Heng delivering his welcome address