YOU must be asleep to miss it when you take the MRT from open house," principal Tan b of this line of work. Similarly, you may remain unhaves according to the medicine administered. Cam-Bank: "ITE has achieved a significant breakthrough by establishing itself as an established post-second-
tary-based courses and jobs.

The high-tech humanoid blinks, breathes and be-
hind a glass panel.

Two floors down are two centres set up with Microsoft and Sun

"ITE is a powerless entity but very much in the right track," says Mr Tharman.

"Most countries decided to convert their polytech-
nics to universities and now ITE is a force because it is going through a dilated form of university educa-
tion that the rest don't want," he says.

Singapore stuck with a "pragmatic" approach that suited the range of individual talents in the pop-
ulation, he adds.

ITE is given skilled occupations a new social and economic importance, creating viable careers for degree holders, a World Bank report said.

As Mr Tan takes insight on a tour of his sprawling campus, the first step in the top floor, where student nurses practise on a dummy patient.

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With fewer doubts now about the place of poly-
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Good, dedicated leadership key to success

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

suit Singapore’s unique needs.”

In the end, they built their own model: more ap-
plied modules run by polytechnics in secondary
school; more applied subjects that can replace ex-
isting O-level subjects; direct admission to polytech-
nics from secondary schools.

Good governance is key
PRIVATE SECTOR

industry captain Eric Gwee, 68,
has seen up close public servants’ commitment to
educating the less academically inclined. The
former ExxonMobil senior executive chaired the
ITE Board from 1994 until last month.

“In all my 13 years, every minister, minister of
state, permanent secretary and deputy secretary
has been supportive of ITE,” he says.

One of the early advocates was the late Dr Tay.
Mr Er Kwong Wah, 60, permanent secretary for edu-
cation then, recalled the day Dr Tay called him
from his home to discuss some aspects of technical
education before he was warded.

A few days later, Dr Tay died of heart failure.

“I thought we had an unfinished conversation,”
says Mr Er.

Not long after the funeral, he received a call
from Mrs Rosalyn Tay. She had found a note in her
husband’s briefcase addressed to him. It contained
a few points that Dr Tay had jotted down after their
last discussion.

This personal factor, say policymakers, is hard
to institute and reproduce.

Says Mr Gan: “So many other countries have
looked at our ITE, looked at our polytechnic and
said, ‘Wow, this is a good system. We would like to
duplicate it in our countries.’

“We always share with them that the system, we
can replicate, we can help you, but it’s the people
that will make the difference.”

Finding the right leaders for the educational insti-
tutions is critical, he notes: “Without the right per-
son, we cannot have autonomy, and we cannot run
the Singapore system without autonomy because
the education sector is so diverse.”

Also unique to Singapore, Mr Gan believes, is
that the ministry, the ITE and the five polytechnics
work closely as a team and in collaboration with in-
dustry players. At least once every quarter, he
chairs a coordinating meeting followed by tea with
eight to 10 industrialists, to hear first-hand how the
ITE and polytechnics are meeting the needs of em-
ployers.

Mr Tharman says Malaysian Education Minister
Hishammuddin Hussein is among those following
developments in Singapore. “The Malaysians, Indo-
nesians, Thais, Vietnamese take great interest in
our system,” he says. “They read what we are do-
ing, come here to study our system, and my counter-
part in KL, Hishammuddin, tells me squarely, ‘We
are following what you are doing.’

‘Why are we able to do it? Because we have this
whole team that works seamlessly together – listen-
ing to the ground, coming up with ideas, and imple-
menting them where they make sense.’

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