

**SPEECH BY MINISTER MENTOR LEE KUAN YEW  
AT TANJONG PAGAR GRC FAMILY DAY 2011 ON  
SATURDAY, 23 APRIL 2011**

Singapore's geographic position is fortunate.

Our position at the crossroads between the Indian and Pacific oceans has been our strength. We are not ravaged by typhoons, tsunamis, earthquakes and other natural calamities.

Our disadvantage is lack of natural resources.

This we have overcome by our people becoming well educated and always striving hard to achieve excellence. Most Singaporeans below 40 have

achieved tertiary education in polytechnics and/or universities.

Our universities, National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU), are of world standard. The new Singapore University of Technology & Design (SUTD) and a Yale-NUS College (YNC) will increase the diversity of our tertiary institutions. Imperial College London will set up a

second School of Medicine at NTU. Plus the Duke-

NUS Medical School, Singapore is becoming an education hub, the only one in the region teaching in English.

Having caught up with the standards of Europe and Britain, we must aim to reach the standards of the best universities in the US: the Ivy League colleges on the East Coast, Stanford and Berkeley universities on the West Coast.

English Language as our working language has enabled us to make this rapid progress. We have been able to invite professors and teachers from the world over to teach in Singapore. They have helped our progress in education.

English is the first language or the second language of virtually all countries. Had we used Chinese or Malay as our working language, we would

be way behind the developed countries. Also, we would not be able to attract talents from the English-speaking world to teach and work here. The English Language has given us a common platform and also linked us to the wider world. Keeping our mother tongues, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, has been a plus. We are now effectively bilingual.

This backdrop has given us a safe and secure Singapore, a Singapore with clean water, fresh

air, safe roads, good transportation with fast and clean

MRT trains and buses. However, drivers should show more courtesy and consideration for pedestrians and cyclists.

We have good relations between our communities of different races, religions, cultures and languages. Had they been quarrelling with one another, we would have gone down the drain.

Government policies have ensured a mix of our races in all high-rises. Singaporeans have neighbours of different nationalities and religions. They use the same lifts, their children attend the same schools, and they go to the same shopping malls.

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We have not only cared for the higher educated but have also done so for those who are not academically inclined. We can be proud of our ITEs. ITEs train Singaporeans to perform well in the

services required in our society and earn a good living: training technicians, nurses, chefs, bakers, hair dressers, beauticians, as well as other skilled workers for a range of industries in manufacturing, retail, hospitality, information technology and business. From ITE, a student who has done well can go on to poly and from poly to university. This is how we maintain a dynamic and vibrant society.

One ITE campus has many purpose-built facilities, including a 22-room training hotel, Western and Asian training kitchens, and a state-of-the-art multimedia design centre. It includes a retail laboratory that stimulates an environment mirroring

that of a high-end commercial retail store, a coffee barista training centre, restaurants, and a number of commercial outlets. One campus has 7,500 students. Those less academically inclined can be successful in skill-based work. ITE educates students with “thinking hands” and gives them a solid foundation and relevant skills for future deployment and employability.

Some Singaporeans are discomfited by seeing so many strangers around them in the MRT and buses. Please remember, we need the 900,000

foreign workers on 2-year work permits. They do the construction and other heavy work, jobs Singaporeans are not willing to do. Their 2-year work permits can be

extended several times. But they will not stay here permanently.

Also, we must attract talent to Singapore.

The PRs are all the better educated. Our total fertility rate fell to 1.16 in 2010, far below the replacement level of 2.1. Chinese Singaporean rate is the lowest at 1.02, next Indians at 1.13 and Malays at 1.65. Our PRs will eventually become citizens and help raise our performance.

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We must attract the talented from abroad.

The US does better than Europe and Britain because it is able to attract talents from all over the world.

Americans use English, the first or second language



of nearly all countries, and are an embracing society, welcoming newcomers. That is one reason for the success of Silicon Valley where new ideas sprout up, are tested and implemented. The talented from the world over have been drawn to the US and increased their dynamism. We must increase the talented in Singapore to join us in the world-wide competition for growth and progress.

Your MP, Ms Indranee Rajah, has devoted herself to increasing and improving the facilities to meet your needs. As our population ages, she will get more barrier-free access to buildings and facilities

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around the estate, more fitness corners for the elderly to exercise, instead of just chatting in the void decks.

Although I am 87 years old, I stay fit because I exercise every day, walking, cycling and swimming. If you do likewise, you will also keep trim and fit like me.

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