

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY DR OW CHIN HOCK, MAYOR, TANJONG PAGAR CDC, AND MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT THE OPENING OF THE SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC CPB OPEN HOUSE ON 11 MARCH 1999 AT 9.00AM

I am very pleased to officiate at the opening of the Chemical Process and Biotechnology Open House. The Singapore Polytechnic staff and students may be interested to know that your Director of CPB department, Dr Ng Cheng Siong and I stayed at Raffles Hall during our university days, and your late Deputy Director, Mr Paul Yap had served in my constituency for many years. Indeed, I have heard much about your Department, and I am happy to note its progress through the years.

2 The theme of your Department's open house this year is "Technology for Lifelong Learning". This theme is appropriate and timely. We are living in a rapidly changing world, where knowledge and information become obsolete very fast. In schools, Junior Colleges, and the institutions of higher learning, not only the teachers need to teach you the basic knowledge of certain subjects, but also the skills to continue to study and learn on your own, after leaving the educational institutions.

3 As in the past year, today your CPB Open House has put the projects done by your final year students on show. Projects are an important education tool: the methodology and rigour with which projects are executed will give your students the ability to pursue independent lifelong learning. When the 'O' level results were announced recently, the newspapers featured some Chinese High School students,

who had gone through project-based learning. The students had all A's, and claimed they learned more through project work. At the Polytechnic, all final year students are required to work on projects, and the relevant industries recognise this fact. Your Poly students are perhaps assessed on the projects by potential employers for their employability.

4 Among your many exhibits today is a Special Exhibit on Adhesives. I was told that this Special Exhibit was a result of your students reading the Memoirs of our Senior Minister, the Singapore Story. In his memoir, Mr Lee gave a vivid description of the circumstances and the way he went about to make the gum (pp.66-68). To recap: an opportunity presented itself when Basrai Brothers, Indian stationers at Chulia Street asked Mr Lee to get them stationery gum. Mr Lee looked for the method in gum making and financed Mr Yong Nyuk Lin's experiment. Basically, the gum was made by taking a big cylindrical pot, filling it with tapioca flour, and placing the pot in a big wok of boiling palm oil. The oil was kept at a constant high temperature to heat the tapioca flour, which needed to be stirred all the while until it became a deep golden brown dextrine. It looked and smelled like beautiful caramel. Water was added to the "caramel", which dissolved it into mucilage or gum, and finally carbolic acid as a preservative to prevent mould from setting in. The gum was then poured into re-cycled Scotts Emulsion bottles. Mr Lee marketed the gum under the name STIKFAS with an artist-designed label. The gum turned a decent profit, and it was subsequently manufactured in two centres.

5 This gum-making episode in SM's memoir inspired your CPB students to replicate the gum in the Scotts Emulsion bottles, with label and all. Some have suggested that this should be a case study for our teachers who are looking for success stories to illustrate to their students when they want to explain entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity. Mr Lee Kuan Yew is a name all Singaporeans know. Students will be well motivated and curious to learn this venture of Mr Lee, and thereby understand entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity better.

6 I congratulate your CPB students for putting up this exhibit to draw the attention of our school children to this achievement of the young Mr Lee in the difficult time. I understand that the same group of students has ventured forth to improve upon STIKFAS. They have conducted further research and development to prolong the shelf life of the product and to give it a fragrant smell. They have also coined a new name "STIKPLUS" for their concoction. This spirit of constant improvement must be with us. We cannot stop learning, wanting to improve, and searching for excellence.

7 Two recent important developments have re-shaped the world economy. First, globalisation and economic liberalization that allow borderless operations across geographical boundaries have created immense opportunities for business, industry and investment. Second, the research and development (R&D) and rapid technological changes that accentuate the importance of intellectual capital, embodied in the highly skilled and trained manpower, have shifted the competitive advantages in a new, knowledge-based economy.

8 To stay relevant and competitive, we need to make the necessary preparations and changes to our socio-economic system, and our mental frame and outlook. One such change requires our education system to move from an Efficiency-Driven Education to an Ability-Driven Education. In the former,

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Singapore looked at the goals it wanted to achieve and determined the best way to achieve the goals with optimal use of resources. In the latter – the new Ability-Driven Education – Singapore aims to maximise the potential, talent and ability of each student while emphasising the inculcation of sound moral values. The new Ability-driven Education system will require a major shift in curriculum design, and teaching and learning strategies, thereby building a culture of quality teaching and management. Ultimately, we want to develop the potential of every student and every Singaporean to the fullest based on the long-term foundation skills required for a Learning Nation.

9 I am happy to see that at the Singapore Polytechnic, the elements for achieving these are in place, and some are already being practised. Our journey towards a Learning Nation will be that much smoother if all of us – government, industries, parents, staff and students – collaborate in our pursuit with maximum efforts in the same and right direction.

10 It now gives me great pleasure to declare open your 1999 CPB Open House.

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