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SPEECH BY DR OW CHIN HOCK, MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MAYOR OF TANJONG PAGAR CDC DISTRICT AND MP FOR TANJONG PAGAR GRC AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING AND 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF HENDERSON SECONDARY SCHOOL ON 17 APRIL 1999 AT 5.00 PM

I would like to thank the Principal, Mrs Ho Woon Ho, of Henderson Secondary School for inviting me to officially open the school. It is indeed a great honour. From what I have watched so far, the pupils and teachers of the school must have put in a great deal of effort to commemorate the occasion. Your whole school works together and this demonstrates the spirit of "Together, we can do it."

2 Henderson Secondary School is celebrating her Official Opening as well as her 25th Anniversary. In the past 25 years, we have seen many changes to the world, for instance, the crumbling of the former Soviet Union and East European Communist governments, the reunification of Germany, the end of the Cold War, the open-door and economic reform of China, and beginning late March, the NATO strikes against Yugoslavia over the Kosovo crisis. Closer home, the Asian regional economic crisis has turned the euphoria of an Asian miracle into one of pessimism of an Asian mirage. The economic crisis has led to changes of several governments in the region. History is being made and shaped every day. This century has been a time of turmoils and rapid changes. Singapore has had its share of ups and downs and yet has been able to adapt and thrive despite these turbulent years. How has Singapore managed to do so? What will become of Singapore and Singaporeans? I am here to share with you my thoughts and observations, not to preach and lecture. The recipe of our success contains three basic ingredients: (a) the government; (b) the people;

and (c) the system: First, we have a clean, efficient and effective government. It is also pragmatic and far-sighted, anticipating problems and identifying opportunities arising from the observation of global trends, and handling crises effectively and efficiently. A good example is the way the government has managed the impact of the regional economic crisis by cutting costs, by providing specific tax incentives, and by giving rebates to HDB residents. Yet, at the same time, the government has not lost sight of Singapore's long-term economic competitiveness. It has prepared Singapore and Singaporeans for the transformation into a knowledge-based economy.

3 Second, the wealth of our nation lies in its people. Human resource development is crucial to Singapore's future. It is not the sheer size of a population that counts; indeed, a small population works against us in the conventional economies, e.g. shortage of labour, and a small domestic market. What matters more are the qualities of our people. The high saving rate, the emphasis on education, and the willingness to work hard, strive and excel are not accidental. They are values inherited from our forefathers, augmented and enhanced by government policies. These are intangible assets that have propelled us all along, and these will continue to provide us with the cutting edge in an increasingly keen competitive environment.

4 Third, we have adopted a system of meritocracy, multi-racialism, and the rule of law. We reward people based on their merits and performance, not on their background and connections, and regardless of race, language and religion. The legal system, independence of the judiciary and law enforcement not only give our people a safe place to live, and protect their rights and properties, but also attract investors and businessmen to Singapore as business deals and contracts are enforceable under our legal framework. These in turn create jobs, and contribute to economic prosperity.

5 It is symbolic that your school's Official Opening is taking place at the end of the 20th century. The coming millennium will be characterised with uncertainties, but some trends are certain – technology changes and globalization. Singapore must ride the tides of these changes, otherwise, we can be swept away by the swift currents and become irrelevant and obsolete. More importantly, we must have constancy in the midst of changes, to anchor ourselves and our country. In August 1997, PM emphasized the need to strengthen Singapore's "heartware" – social cohesion, political will, a sense of mutual enterprise and shared responsibility for the future of our country. The Singapore 21 Committee was subsequently set up under the chairmanship of the Minister for Education, Rear-Admiral Teo Chee Hean. The Committee had discussed and consulted many Singaporeans, and has developed a set of overarching ideas to guide Singapore into the next century. The Committee will release its report soon. I hope the Principal and teachers will lead the students to discuss the ideas in the Committee's report when it is published.

6 Earlier, in the specific area of education, the Ministry of Education has launched three new initiatives in schools – Information Technology, Thinking Skills and National Education. The aim of education is to nurture a whole child. Apart from skills and knowledge, the young will be imbued with sound morals, strength of character, healthy habits, team spirit and an aesthetic appreciation for the world around them.

7 As the foundation of a person is in his values, the home, the school and the community will work, hand in hand, to nurture children to be morally upright, culturally rooted, and to appreciate the qualities and principles of the government, our people, and the system. These qualities and principles must be passed on to the future generations, and further improved upon in specific areas. For example, we should also inculcate a lifelong habit of learning; this is indeed your school's motto "Education for Life". From young, Singaporeans should understand the new reality that in the midst of rapid changes, there is long-term employability, but there is no life long employment. Another quality that needs to be added on is 'cosmopolitan outlook'. While welcoming foreign talents, Singaporeans must at the same time use the knowledge, information, skills and expertise acquired through life long learning to seek opportunities in the region and in the world, while remaining rooted to Singapore. In other words, I am urging Singaporeans, particularly young people like you – the pupils of Henderson – to think "global but remain local".

8 The sub-theme of the 1999 Productivity Campaign is "You Make the Difference". It is this belief that I can make a difference that I contributed 22 years of my life in serving this country. The poem of Li Bai says: [.....], (tian sheng wo cai bi you yong) meaning "heaven has made us talents, we are not made in vain". You have the talent, you too can make a difference in whatever profession you may choose in the future. May I wish the pupils of Henderson success in all your future endeavours, and to the principal and teachers, let us do our best together to give our youngsters the best education they deserve for their families, and for the betterment of our society and our nation.

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