

To:
cc: (bcc: NHB NASReg/NHB/SINGOV)
Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by DPM Lee, 26 Feb 2000, 11 am

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, #36-00 PSA Building, 460 Alexandra Road, Singapore 119963. Tel: 3757794/5

EMBARGO INSTRUCTIONS

The attached press release/speech is **EMBARGOED UNTIL AFTER DELIVERY**.
Please check against delivery.
For assistance call 3757795

SPRInter 4.0, Singapore's Press Releases on the Internet, is located at:
<http://www.gov.sg/sprinter/>

To Be Embargoed Until After Delivery

SPEECH BY DPM LEE HSIEN LOONG AT THE OPENING OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH SEMINAR ON SATURDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2000 AT 11.00AM

1. I am very happy to be here today for the National Youth Seminar 2000. This Seminar has reached out to many youth participants from the public, private and people sectors. More than 200 of you have participated in a series of workshops, discussing and debating important issues faced by Singapore. I trust you have found these discussions fruitful, and hope that you will maintain your interest and initiatives in these causes even after the seminar.

2. Our society is evolving rapidly, in a rapidly changing world. Each generation is growing up in a different environment. It is not just that lives and lifestyles of Singaporeans have changed significantly since the 1960s, but that they have different formative impressions and experiences of the world around them. The independence and post-independence generations are different, just as those who lived through the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation are different from the post-war generation.

3. But the transition does not stop there. The pace of change world-wide is speeding up. New technologies and the Internet revolution are altering the way people

live, work, communicate, and entertain themselves. They have opened the doors for younger Singaporeans to the world, bringing them into closer contact with western culture and world-wide trends.

4. As a result, each successive generation is growing up different. Singaporeans in their 20s now have very different expectations and points of reference from those in their 30s. I believe those who are now reaching their 20s, who are either studying in tertiary institutions or just starting work, are different again. Within a few years, Generation X has been succeeded by Generation Y, which will soon be replaced in its turn by the next group.

5. Singapore society therefore cannot remain static. Singapore cannot continue thriving, if we just continue in our old ways, sticking to set formulas handed down from generation to generation. We have to adapt our style and approach to fit the aspirations of the new generation of Singaporeans.

6. At the most fundamental level, the strategic challenges facing Singapore have not changed – to make a living for ourselves, to ensure the security of our homes and families, to build ourselves a better future in an uncertain world. But the way Singaporeans mobilise themselves and respond creatively to these challenges has. We must draw in our youth, engage their idealism and harness their energies, and involve them in the affairs of the nation. Only then can we transform and remake Singapore over and over again, and keep the flame burning bright.

7. For Singapore as a nation, this is a time of enormous opportunity and also great challenge. Opportunity, because now the Asian crisis has passed. Not only have we weathered a major storm without mishap. But we have strengthened our competitive position, and are well placed to prosper with the region as it picks up. Furthermore, the worldwide trends of globalisation and technology are generating unprecedented prosperity and dynamism in the developed countries, and our economy is plugged into that grid too. We are efficient, wired-up, rationally organised, and flexible enough to adapt and change.

8. But we also face major economic challenges. The scale of economic activity is increasingly global, whereas we are a tiny economy of 3 million people. The world is in the midst of a massive wave of mega-mergers and acquisitions. It is almost a frenzy, engulfing many industries including banking, telecommunications, media, and airlines. Vodafone is taking over Mannesman, AOL is merging with Time Warner, Travelers has merged with Citigroup. On this scale, SIA's deal with Virgin Air, and Singapore Telecom's proposal to merge with C&W HK, are small deals. The unit of production and competition is now not a single company in one country, or even a whole national economy. It is a global scale MNC with a significant share of the world market. As Jack Welch of General Electric says, a company is either No 1

or 2 in the business, or it is dead.

9. This poses a grave challenge for an economy as small as Singa-pore. Where are our world-class champions? To survive and thrive, Singa-pore firms must become global players. But can they? How? And if they can, by merging with global MNCs, or by growing into global players, will they still be anchored in Singa-pore? Can we still maintain control of our economic destiny? I am not suggesting that there are no answers to these questions, but the answers will not be easy to find, or to implement.

10. For individual Singa-poreans too, this is a time of opportunity and challenge. You enjoy opportunities which your parents' generation never dreamt of. For the well educated, and particularly the young, the world is your oyster. Most of you speak English, and are well equipped with marketable skills. There are so many exciting chances in Singa-pore and abroad, be it in the professions, working in large corporations, serving in the government, or becoming entrepreneurs seeking that pot of gold.

11. But the challenge for Singa-poreans is that to do well, you need not only individual the skills, knowledge and drive to further your own separate careers, but also the collective instincts and commitment to the nation and society. The successful must feel a responsibility to build and contribute to Singapore, including helping the less fortunate and less successful. There must be enough people among you with the sense of mission, the instincts and skills to come forward to be leaders, and look after your collective needs. Your duty is to bring out the best that Singa-poreans are capable of, to safeguard our common interests as a nation, and to create the conditions which allow people to pursue their individual careers.

12. We have done well in equipping people with the knowledge and skills for their careers. As a nation we have invested heavily on education. All of you here have received an education that will stand you in good stead as you pursue your careers. But we must also inculcate in Singa-poreans the basic values which ensure our survival as a nation.

13. This is the aim of national education. In schools, we teach the history of Singa-pore and the countries around us. We have programmes to bring our students to Parliament House, the SAFTI Military Institute, the PUB water treatment works, or PSA, to explain to them the signifi-cance of these sites and how they fit into the whole picture called Singapore.

14. This youth seminar is also part of national education. The purpose is not indoctrination or propaganda. Neither is it simply a chit-chat session, an exercise in coffee-shop talk. We want to make you think about some of the issues Singa-pore faces, and how you can actually be involved in making a difference to our society. We

hope to stimulate in you a response that goes beyond passive knowledge, to active commitment and creative action.

15. Judging from your working group reports, you have covered a good range of issues. It is important to go beyond discussing how youths can contribute towards society, and how we can involve people more through S21 and other avenues. We must also grapple with the actual issues facing Singapore – domestic issues like our economy or the ageing population, and external issues like managing relations with our neighbours in South East Asia.

16. The external component is important because the region is critical to our fortunes. Singaporeans need to be aware of our region, understand our neighbours, know how to get along with them, while protecting and furthering our interests through win-win relationships.

17. Singaporeans tend to be much more aware of domestic than external issues. This was especially so up to say five years ago. The region was prospering, our relations with them were unruffled, and we were doing well too. COE prices were a much more exciting topic than regional politics.

18. But events since then have focussed people's minds. Over the last few years, we have had a series of minor frictions with Malaysia – the re-merger issue, the storm over the Senior Minister's comments on muggings, shootings and car-jackings in Johor, the dispute over railway land and CIQ, and most recently, CLOB. More important, the regional crisis, and particularly events in Indonesia, have brought home vividly how quickly a storm can blow up, and how important the stability and well-being of our neighbours is to us.

19. We will continue to encourage Singaporeans to pay attention to regional developments, and to understand our neighbours. It is useful to get people to participate in seminars and discussions, and to follow the news coverage in the newspapers and on TV. But nothing beats personal acquaintances and friendships, and direct first-hand experience of the reality on the ground. Even visiting a country on a study trip, staying in hotels and riding around in tour coaches, is quite different from living there, struggling to make a living day after day.

20. To give more of our youth such direct experience of the region, the National Youth Council is introducing a Youth Expedition Project (YEP). The idea is to give our youths opportunities to go overseas on community service and cultural exchange missions, in ASEAN and Asian countries. Each expedition will last 3 to 4 weeks, and will focus on providing help to remote communities within these countries. The projects will include basic construction work, teaching of IT and English, as well as community service.

21. These expeditions will provide unique experiences for our youths to spend time to see and experience first hand, the vastly different situations in other countries. They will allow the participants to discover important values to anchor their sense of purpose in an adventurous and out-of-the-box environment.

22. Each expedition will be led and guided by trained facilitators. Participants will spend up to six months to plan and prepare for their expedition, to build up teamwork and share learning goals. There will also be post-expedition projects to further engage their energy and inspire others around them. The participants will spend time to discuss and reflect on issues and concerns that we faced as a society and nation.

23. The YEP will bring together peer leaders from ITEs, Polytechnics, Universities as well as working youths. It will be co-ordinated by the Singapore International Foundation (SIF), and run in close collaboration with youth organisations, tertiary institutions and the private sector.

24. In the first two years, the YEP will reach out to 1,000 youths. If the programme is successful, we hope in the medium term to expand it to 1 in 10 youths, i.e. 4,000 - 5,000 people a year. We hope that these experiences will form a unique milestone in the lives of young Singaporeans. In time, this can be another bonding experience that Singaporeans from all walks of life will share with one another, just like national service is today.

25. Finally, may I congratulate you on a successful seminar. I hope it has given you a better appreciation of the issues facing us, and strengthened your determination to do well for yourself and for Singapore. To thrive, you will need to strike a balance between idealism and realism, between realising the dangers ahead and having confidence in our ability to overcome. If you can achieve that, then Singapore's future is in good hands for another generation.

=====