

# *Singapore Government*

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### **SPEECH BY DR OW CHIN HOCK, MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MAYOR OF TANJONG PAGAR CDC DISTRICT AT ANGLO-CHINESE SCHOOL (INDEPENDENT) NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION ON 8 AUGUST 2000 AT 8.30AM AT 121, DOVER ROAD**

We celebrate our nation's 35th birthday, the first in this new millennium, with pride in our past achievements and excitement in our future challenges. The 1997-99 economic crisis had demonstrated the strength of our government and system of governance. With strong political, economic and social institutions, capable leadership and effective macro-management and a strong unspoken social contract between government and people, we have emerged from the crisis relatively unscathed. Even in the midst of the crisis, we have looked beyond short-term economic recovery and started re-positioning ourselves for longer-term growth. We are promoting IT and life sciences and encouraging our people to be knowledge players in the new economy. Changes in our approach to education and our school curriculum will take place to prepare our young for the new challenges.

#### **Challenge of Choice**

2 To keep pace with the times, it is important that our young adopt a new mindset, acquire new knowledge and learn new skills. However, that is not the key challenge. The key challenge facing our youths today is the challenge of choice. As Singapore becomes more developed, affluent and open, younger Singaporeans

naturally have more and better options, compared to their parents' generation. More significantly, external forces of globalisation, rapid technological change and the Internet revolution will usher in an increasingly borderless world where opportunities abound and options available to individuals multiply manifold.

3 Our young will find that the world is their job market if they possess the right ability and the right set of skills, and they command world class salaries. They also have far greater exposure to alternative lifestyles and values through popular culture, the media, travel and the Internet. From an economic viewpoint, a more extensive menu of choice will enhance our quality of life, but that is only if we make our choices rationally or wisely. While the family, the school, the community and the society can help support and guide decision-making, ultimately our young must make their own choices. This responsibility of choice is indeed a heavy one.

### **Choosing the 5 'C's**

4 So how should our young choose? I would advise our young to rely on the 5 'C's to guide them in making their choice. By these, I do not mean "career, cash, car, condominium and credit card". Instead, I am referring to the 5 'C's that our Prime Minister said good leaders should possess in his recent speech in Parliament: namely, capability, character, compassion, conviction and commitment. These are qualities that our young should also seek to possess.

5 Lifelong employability has replaced lifelong employment in the new economy. Our focus should thus be on capability rather than career. Our young should pick up the knowledge and skills that would provide the foundation for their adult life. More importantly, they should cultivate a spirit of adventurism, curiosity and youthful discontent and be ever ready to take risk, innovate, learn and improve. They could draw inspiration from what the late US Senator Robert Kennedy used to say: "Some people see things as they are and say why? I dream things that never were and say why not?" (attributed to George Bernard Shaw) But should our young stumble and fall along the way, they must be able to take failure positively, learn their lessons, pick themselves up and try again. The ACS school motto "The Best Is Yet To Be" captures this indomitable spirit.

6 But capability alone is not enough. The recent scholarship and bond breaking issue is a good example. How should a scholar choose when a better career offer is made elsewhere that requires him to break his bond? Taking one step back, how does an 18-year-old decide whether to take up a scholarship when

he is not even sure of what he wants to do 4-5 years down the road, but desires the honour and prestige now? This is a decision that cannot be made with capability alone. It involves one's character, compassion, conviction and commitment. These are values which provide the moral compass to steer our young in the right direction when they are faced with a multitude of options.

7           The school complements the family and plays a part in instilling in our young the right values and attitudes that would prepare them for the difficult choices they have to make in life. ACS (Independent)'s mission is to nurture the scholar, the officer and the gentleman in its young - a man sensitive to the needs of his family, his community and his country. I am sure that the ACS scholar is not just a man of capability but also a man of right values and attitudes, and that the ACS scholar will make the right choice.

8           In this context, I am happy to note that ACS is participating in the "Adopt A Block" programme initiated by Tanjong Pagar Community Development Council. It is a step forward. Through community involvement programmes like this, students can move out of the classroom into the community, and go beyond caring for themselves to care for others. There are intangible but valuable lessons that they can learn from this experience that would help to mould their values and attitudes.

9           With an outstanding Principal, dedicated teachers, and the continued support of the Board of Governors and Alumni, I am confident that ACS (Independent) will continue its 114 year-long proud tradition of accomplishments, and equip its students with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that would prepare them for the challenges of the future. Finally, I wish all of you a very happy 35th National Day.