

# *Singapore Government*

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**Speech by Mr David T E Lim, Minister of State for Defence and Information and the Arts, at the BB's 70th Anniversary Youth Convention at 9 am on 4 September, 2000, Suntec City.**

### Youth Development in the New Millennium

1. I congratulate the Boy's Brigade on their 70th Anniversary, and on the launch of the book today to commemorate this.

2. The world has changed a lot these 70 years. As we stand at the beginning of a new millennium, the question we ask is how relevant is the Boys Brigade to the youth of today? Or more generally, how relevant are youth organisations to the development of youth?

3. I would like to address this in three parts.

Firstly, we need to ask: how is the world different today for our youth than it was a generation or two ago?

Secondly, given these differences, what outcomes do we seek for our youth?

And finally, how can we achieve these outcomes?

## ***How the World is Different***

4. How has the world changed? The benchmark I will use to measure this is the time when Singapore first became a sovereign country – a time when some of us were youth.
5. I see three major differences between now and then.
6. Firstly, today's world stands in contrast to that of yesterday by our "connect-ness" to the rest of the world.
7. It is not just the Internet, and the world of knowledge and information that it opens up. But it is the way the world is organised today. Trade and investment flows have resulted in a global economy that is interwoven and interdependent. An earthquake in Taiwan impacts our electronics industry, as much as an early frost in Florida raises the price of the oranges we eat.
8. We need to be conscious of world affairs in a way that is far more pervasive than when we first became a nation. We have no choice in this matter – our radar screens are busier, and we need to monitor them more closely, because what is just a blip today may become a major crisis tomorrow. We need to be world savvy.
9. Secondly, there is wealth and prosperity in Singapore where once there was unemployment and poverty.
10. The result of this progress is the abundance of opportunities and diversity of choices that young people enjoy today. Where we were once dependent mainly on entrepot trade, we have now built a strong manufacturing base, and diversified beyond that into financial and other services. There are jobs in the tourism and hospitality market. There are bright prospects in education and healthcare. There is money to back entrepreneurs, and facilities to support researchers.
11. The transformation of Mohammad Sultan road is but a small icon of how diverse lifestyles have become. Arts groups and artists are popping up like mushrooms in early morning sunlight; discos and cyber cafes spawn overnight. There is no food, no fashion, no gadget so far flung that we cannot find it down on Orchard Road.
12. The young today have a bewildering array of futures to choose from. But they have been brought up in a period of our history that has known only progress and material well-being. They will need to make their choices wisely.
13. Thirdly, there is peace and harmony in our land. Threats of communist insurgency have long been forgotten. Our region has been peaceful for the past

generation. And our multi-racial society has accepted a shared destiny built on the principles of meritocracy and equal opportunity.

14. Our crime rates are low, and our streets are safe. Even our statistics on youth delinquency report a situation well under control. We are not yet perfect, not crime free, not completely free of tensions. But on the whole, it is a safe, secure and carefree society that our young people live in today.
15. But security is only a stone's throw away from conflict. We cannot assume that things will always remain peaceful. Although we have economic strength, we are still vulnerable to strife and discord. Our youth can celebrate, but they must not be complacent.

### ***Choosing outcomes for our Youth***

16. Each of these changes, connect-ness, wealth, and peace, have improved our lives. But each advance also brings with it a corresponding risk.
17. Our "connect-ness" with the outside world carries with it the risk that we become less united as a people and as a nation. Our affiliations with causes and interests globally may pull us so strongly that we lose our ties with local communities and friends.
18. Our wealth may make us care more about material comforts and possessions than the things that really count in life – relationships, helping others, touching lives.
19. And our peace may lull us into a complacency that all that is well will continue to be well, that frictions and divisiveness could not happen in our country.
20. But those who study history know that none of these things – opportunity, wealth, and peace – continue unchanged. We cannot predict how they will change, or what events will trigger off changes. We cannot build walls around our island to lock in and preserve our way of life. Indeed, the essence of a globalised world is that there are no walls, no borders: only opportunity and risk.
21. So we cannot protect our young. We can only prepare them. They live in a world of abundance. We can help them to understand the foundations of their good fortune. Their future is bright. We can help them take advantage of opportunities so that they will not be squandered away.
22. Let us build confident youth. What we hope for are not youth that are cast in our own mould, seeing the world only as we see them, or caught up in the same anxieties that test our confidence. What we hope for are youth that are purposeful, community minded, and thoughtful. These are the outcomes we wish

on our youth.

23. Purposeful, because continued success will come only if our youth aim for specific goals. Otherwise, they will just be bobbing in sea of opportunity, but going nowhere.
24. Community minded, because their lives will be hollow and meaningless if they are only measured by achievements, and we are no longer around to cheer them when they win prizes. But their lives can have meaning, as our lives do, when we touch others, and leave behind not trophies, but lives transformed by what we have done.
25. And thoughtful, because they will need a compass to steer through the dark moments of despair and the dazzling lights of opportunity.

### ***Attaining Outcomes***

26. How then do we go about doing this? This is a question I would like to leave with you. But I have two ideas to share.
27. Firstly, we can create opportunities for them to learn by their own experiences. We cannot preach. We might try to teach. But the best way to move forward is to walk with them.
28. There are so many voices, so much information, that young people today cannot be faulted if they reject official pronouncements and promulgations. Who is to be believed? Whom should they trust? Why should they accept our point of view?
29. There are no quick and simple answers to this. Trust is basic and fundamental. But trust can only be established when tested over time. When I walk with a friend, and I am there to help him when he needs me, our bonds of friendship grow. Should I let him down, as I might from time to time, the bonds of friendship built up before, hold us together.
30. Building trust, and at the same time, preparing our youth to be purposeful, community minded, and thoughtful, is a process. It's not a class or an elective. Not an event or a summer camp. We can begin by designing and creating experiences that enable youth to discover for themselves the shape and structure, the resources and constraints of the world they will inherit.
31. For example, the National Youth Council, through the SIF, has launched a Youth Expedition Project to offer youth opportunities to travel to regional countries. To do service, and also to see for themselves how our friends and neighbours live, work, and play. The feedback from the first 300 participants is very encouraging. 8% of them were involved in community work before they went. 80% said they

want to be involved in community work when they returned. It is a sea change of attitude.

32. I hope that youth organisations, like the BB, will make use of this channel to build your own programs for your members. But you should not be limited to program this alone. But, using this as an example, create new and innovative experiences for your own boys to engage the world.
33. Secondly, we can encourage youth to read and reflect on events at home and around the world. Yes, there's a plethora of views out there. What is right or wrong, what works or doesn't work is often a matter of opinion. But some opinions are sounder than others. Our youth will have to decide for themselves what causes they believe in, and which way they would go. But to decide, they must first be aware. They need to keep abreast of world knowledge to be world ready.
34. The newspaper editors tell me that readership of the main newspapers in Singapore – Straits Times and Zhao Bao – have grown older. Circulation numbers have not fallen, but the age of readership has risen. They conclude that fewer youth are reading the main papers. Some prefer a quick glance at the briefer and lighter newspapers. Some may not read the papers at all – perhaps they read magazines, listen to radio or TV, or surf the net.
35. It doesn't really matter which medium they choose. But it is important that youth keep abreast of current and world affairs through some medium. This is another challenge to youth organisations: find ways to raise the curiosity and interest amongst your members for things that are going on around the world.
36. They may not fully understand the implications of a few statements that a prime minister may make, or the implications of a new law that is being considered in countries far away. But if they form the habit, then over time they will begin to put the pieces together, just as we did, as we grew up.

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### **Conclusion**

37. Ladies and gentlemen: the MTV and Internet generation are no more different in the way they need to be nurtured, guided and mentored than their parents. Older youth, the ones who have put the pieces together, worked out the solution or at least part of it, are in a prime position to reach younger youth. To the members of the BB here today, I urge you as I urge other youth leaders, to take on this challenge, and to be leaders, facilitators and friends to your younger members. Your energy can transform the BB, and make it as relevant an organisation today as when it started 70 years ago.