

OPENING REMARKS BY MR HENG SWEE KEAT, MINISTER FOR FINANCE, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE INTER-RACIAL INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY TRAIN ON 26 JUN 2017 AT 1100 HRS, HARBOURFRONT STATION

Mr Lee Kim Siang,

Chairman, Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society

Organising Committee of the Inter-Racial Inter-Religious Harmony Nite
2017

Harmony Train supporters and friends

1 Good morning! It is my pleasure to join you this morning to launch the Inter-Racial Inter-Religious Harmony Train. Selamat Hari Raya Puasa to all our Muslim friends!

National Archives of Singapore

2 This time last year, you launched the Harmony Truck. The Harmony Truck journeyed into the heartlands over two months, spreading the message of racial and religious harmony to over 45,000 people, bringing together locals and foreigners living in Singapore. Congratulations on touching many people with the important message that harmony extends beyond borders.

- a. Your journey continues this year, this time on a larger scale through the Harmony Train.

- b. This year, the focus is on the importance of diversity in the face of divisions that can threaten the peace we enjoy.

3 It is a timely, and serious focus. Of late, we have seen divisions along racial and religious lines lead to horrific attacks – in Manchester, London, Brussels, and, closer to home, the Philippines. It is sad to see this happening to our peace-loving friends and neighbours.

- a. Our home soil too, have been shaken by the news of recent arrests. Young Singaporeans were self-radicalised online, and sought to be a part of this mayhem and destruction.
 - i. In these cases, it is painful too to see the anguish caused to friends and family members who care about them.
 - ii. Thankfully, these cases were detected early, before they could do more harm to themselves or others.

4 We have been fortunate to enjoy inter-racial and inter-religious harmony.

- a. Harmony, trust and friendship are gifts, not accidents; not to be taken for granted. They require our careful and constant collective cultivation and safeguarding.

5 What can we do to guard against division and foster harmony? We can keep three things in mind. Since we are launching the Harmony Train today, I could not help but think about harmony in terms of a journey.

6 First, remember: we all have a common destination.

- a. We come from different backgrounds, but we head in the same direction.

- b. When differences threaten to divide us, we have to remember our common goals.
 - i. We want our home to be a place offering good opportunities to all, to each achieve our personal aspirations and do our best for our loved ones.
 - ii. We want our home to be a peaceful place, rich with genuine friendship and neighbourliness, where bonds of care and love help us overcome bumps in the road.
- c. These are deeply worthwhile goals, and we should be resolute about defending them, especially in times of crisis when suspicions or fears may cause us to forget what we have in common.

7 Second, as the saying goes – it's not about the destination, it is about the journey. I would say, it is about our fellow travellers.

- a. Each of us is unique, different from others. But this doesn't mean we are divided.
- b. The greater the diversity amongst fellow travellers, the richer the journey. We bring a wealth of perspectives, experiences, and talents to make the journey smoother, better, more interesting.
- c. We should make the most of our diversity through frank and frequent communication. Use the journey to understand one another – put across our point of view, and also listen with an open mind and heart. Talk about difficult things, and, just as importantly, share a laugh, a cry and a cheer. Be prepared to reach out and support one another if the train lurches.

8 Finally, there is one way harmony is *not* like a train journey – it does not come to a stop.

- a. We don't just reach a final point, and say to ourselves, we're there already, no need to make any more effort.
- b. Safeguarding the special harmony and peace we enjoy is a perpetual work-in-progress.
- c. So, let us remember and be resolute about what we have in common: a common destination we are heading for, our shared goals and values.
- d. Let us honour and draw strength from our differences: our rich diversity of wisdoms, talents and passions.
- e. And let us not think of just getting on with the journey; let us think of the journey as a continuous chance for joyful, enriching mutual discovery and respect, where we learn, share and appreciate ever more about one another.

9 The Harmony Train reminds us daily that we are all in this together.

- a. Today's ground-up event shows what we can achieve when we each do our part.
- b. For the last 14 years, Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society has organised the yearly Inter-Racial Inter-Religious Harmony Nite.
- c. With the Inter-Religious Organisation, Chee Hoon Kog Moral Promotion Society, Chee Hia Kog Moral Society, SINDA, Yayasan MENDAKI, CDAC and Eurasian Association, you bring together people of all backgrounds to celebrate all that bonds us across differences.
- d. This year, you've joined hands with the National Youth Council to create the Harmony Train.

- e. My sincere thanks and compliments to everyone involved, including supporters from the business community.

10 I wish you all the best with this initiative. I hope that many people will join us on board this journey of safeguarding the special inter-racial, inter-religious harmony we enjoy. While we each have our own path to travel, may we all journey together, in peace, trust and friendship – in a train of harmony.

Thank You.

National Archives of Singapore