

Singapore Government

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Speech by Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed, Senior Parliamentary Secretary

(Foreign Affairs) and MP for Cheng San GRC (Punggol East) at the National Day Observance Ceremony on Wednesday 11 August 1999, at 8.00 am, at

Keppel Hitachi Zosen Ltd, at No. 15 Benoi Road

This is the last National Day we will be celebrating this century and millennium. For the Gregorian calendar, it is the dawn of the third millennium. For our young Singapore, we have just completed our third decade. Our 34th Year of Independence.

2 Nevertheless, as a country, as a people, we have shown to the world what we are capable of. Together, the Government, its people, and a productive partnership between Singapore, multinational corporations (like Keppel Hitachi Zosen) and our trading partners have shown what's possible. We have transformed the sleepy and mosquito-infested swamps of Jurong into a miracle of an industrial town. The same goes for Singapore, from an outpost entrepot port into an international hub of commerce, finance and services.

3 A tiny Singapore, with hardly any natural resources, we now have a credible per capita income, one of the best airports in the world, even the busiest port. Flying the Singapore flag high is not all plain sailing. We've had our fair share of turbulences, both economic and socio-political. We've had racial riots and recessions. But each time we face such challenges, we have showed our resolve to make things right.

4 We can see with our own eyes what hard work, discipline, social cohesiveness, good governance, honest and clean government have given us. Thanks to the support of the people of Singapore, our workers in particular, we were able to turn around faster than originally thought possible. So strong were and are our fundamentals that we have been able to weather the recent financial crisis well.

5 We must however not easily rest on our laurels. There are still many uncertainties around. There are still many challenges to overcome. Complacency shall not be in Singapore's vocabulary.

6 Globalisation is very much with us, bringing with it new challenges as competition gets keener. We cannot survive with old tools and skills. We will have to constantly be on the move, upskilling, training and retraining.

7 We always have to be a step or two, if not more, ahead. To remain static is to decline. We will have to help each other, checking ourselves and not to allow complacency to set in. We simply have to continue to work hard and push ourselves to greater heights. We can do it but we have to do it with our eyes open to the new challenges of KBE or knowledge-based economy.

8 We are making good progress in creating awareness for the move to the KBE era, but the gap between awareness, understanding, and action needs to be quickly addressed.

9 As competition grows and the effects of globalisation gets intensive, training and more retraining will not escape anyone.

10 That calls for our workers, even companies, to be nimble to meet the new demands of thinking workers and thinking companies.

11 Our workers come with different levels of skills, education, and mindsets relative to the needs of KBE. Employers, who are closer to these workers, should proactively help the NTUC and self-help groups like Mendaki, AMP, CDAC, Sinda to reach out to them to go for reskilling and upskilling.

12 For the Malay community, whose workers come with relatively lower levels of education and skills - I am sure this is also reflected in Hitachi Zosen's employee profile - the need is more urgent.

13 We cannot allow any section of our population to lag behind in this new KBE challenge. It will carry serious economic and social ramifications.

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14 I am confident the Government, employees, the NTUC and its affiliated unions, and the self-help groups, will collectively be able to tackle this challenge. The workers must of course play its part. They have proven to be good partners in progress and I trust they will again rise to the occasion.

15 Ladies and Gentlemen, on this occasion of our National Day, congratulations, and may we progress and prosper together in harmony. Thank you.

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