

**SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG AT THE
OPENING OF THE 2ND TRIENNIAL CONFERENCE FOR
GRASSROOTS LEADERS ON SUNDAY, 19 OCT 97, AT 9.00 AM
AT THE SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AND
EXHIBITION CENTRE**

Over the last 30 years, we have slowly and carefully built up an extensive network of grassroots organisations throughout Singapore. They are now a vital part of Singapore's social infrastructure, serving the social needs of the population at neighbourhood and community levels.

Building Bonds

2 The primary mission of our grassroots organisations is to build and cement the bonds among Singaporeans and between Singaporeans and our country. This is being achieved in three main ways.

3 First, by organising social events such as block parties, excursions, baby contests and National Day dinners. Organising such activities may be tedious and unexciting, but it is important work. It creates opportunities for neighbours to mix and get to know each other better. Over time, the constant socialising among neighbours would lead to mutual understanding and goodwill as well as strengthen the sense of community and nation in Singapore.

4 Second, by providing community-based social services to meet the needs of the residents. The new Community Development Councils or CDCs, working together with the CCCs, CCMCs and RCs, will now spearhead this aspect. The grassroots organisations will mobilise local resources and create avenues for the more successful to help the needy.

5 Third, by acting as a bridge between the people and Government. This part of your work is less visible, but important. You help to explain Government policies to your neighbours and friends and clarify their doubts and misunderstandings. You also provide useful feedback which helps the Government understand ground concerns and problems, and formulate practical policies.

Into the 21st Century

6 The mission of building bonds and cohesive communities remains unchanged as we enter the 21st Century. What will change is the environment we live in. Singapore in the 21st Century will be a very different society - demographically, economically and socially. Let me highlight three trends as illustrations:

- (a) Our population is aging rapidly. The 60 years and above age group will double to 20% by the year 2010.
- (b) Our people will be highly educated, with 60% of every cohort of Singaporeans having at least a polytechnic diploma qualification.
- (c) Most Singaporeans will hold well paying but busy jobs. They have sophisticated tastes and are widely travelled.

7 These and other developments will have tremendous impact on the work of our grassroots organisations. We will need to consider how our mission can be better fulfilled under the changed circumstances. How can we be more effective? How can the various grassroots organisations leverage on each other's strengths so as to better serve the community? How do we recruit effective leaders to serve a better educated and perhaps more critical population?

8 By understanding the changes affecting Singapore and the challenges we as a nation face, you will be in a better position to garner support for our vision of building a cosmopolitan city and the best home in Singapore.

Singapore 21 Committee

9 During the National Day Rally on 24 Aug, I announced my intention to set up a Singapore 21 Committee to identify new ideas to make Singapore a global city and the best home. Teo Chee Hean will chair this Committee. It will have 8 new MPs and 2 NMPs as members. (I have given the names of the Committee members and the terms of reference of the Committee to the press.)

10 The Singapore 21 Committee will focus on what I have called the "heartware" of Singapore - our love for the country, our rootedness and our sense of community and nationhood. It will look beyond economics and material comforts, to focus on our intellectual, emotional, spiritual, cultural and social needs.

11 The Committee will form 5 sub-committees, each concentrating on a particular dilemma that Singapore faces and finding ways to try to resolve the dilemmas. The five dilemmas are:

- (a) Internationalisation/regionalisation vs Singapore as Home
- (b) Less stressful life vs Retaining the Drive
- (c) Attracting Talent vs Looking after Singaporeans
- (d) The Needs of Senior Citizens vs the Needs of the Younger Generation
- (e) Consultation and Consensus vs Decisiveness and Quick Action

12 Teo Chee Hean will invite Singaporeans to contribute to the work of the Committee by participating in group discussions, surveys, studies and dialogue sessions. I hope we will see many Singaporeans responding to this call to contribute towards our vision for the 21st Century.

Foreign Talent

13 One key strategy to achieve our vision is to gather talent for Singapore from all over the world. This was the theme of my National Day Rally on 24 Aug. Singapore had prospered because we had absorbed and used talent from all over the world, especially the region. We must continue to do this.

14 Singaporeans in general understand and support my message but some are concerned. Those who worry have three main anxieties. Let me address them.

15 The first anxiety is about their and their children's future. They worry that the foreigners will take away jobs and promotions from their children. They fear that with the additional competition from foreigners, their children will have to work very hard in the future just to make a decent living for themselves and their families.

16 While this anxiety is natural, the question we should ask ourselves is: What will happen if no foreigners work in Singapore? Are we better or worse off?

17 Our experience tells us that foreign talents bring along with them expertise and contacts. They add value to our economy, making it much more competitive overall. As a result, many new jobs especially well paying ones, are created for Singaporeans.

18 Let me cite you the example of our financial sector. It is one of the pillars of our economy, growing at double-digit rates almost every year. Unlike many other countries, we adopt a relatively open approach to the entry of foreign financial institutions and foreign expertise into the sector. It was a foreigner, Mr Van Oenen, Head of the Singapore Branch of Bank of America, who gave us the idea of the Asian Dollar Market, and helped us start it in 1968. Today, our Asian Dollar Market is a US\$500 billion market, which is why Singapore is a major funding centre in the region.

19 Overall, our financial sector provides 85,000 jobs. And because the value added is high, employees in the sector are generally among the

highest paid in Singapore. Of the 85,000 jobs, only 6,000 or 7% are held by foreigners.

20 Should we replace these 6,000 foreigners with Singaporeans? Definitely not. Our financial sector will simply collapse. Many aspiring financial centres would be more than happy to have some of the foreign financial expertise that we have. In fact, we have to attract a wider range of foreign financial expertise and skills to Singapore so as to add greater breadth and depth to the sector. Only then can we entrench our pre-eminent position and remain a major financial centre in future.

21 In the manufacturing sector, we have moved into wafer fabrication in recent years. This is the hi-tech end of the semi-conductor industry and where we can be competitive. A Government-owned company, Chartered Semiconductor Manufacturing or CSM, has invested \$5 billion in four wafer plants, two of which are already fully operational. CSM currently employs over 850 Singaporeans, mainly managers, engineers and technicians. But Singaporeans make up only 40% of CSM's staff strength. The other 60% are foreign talents from 24 countries, coming from as far as Russia and Scotland.

22 Wafer fabrication is a new industry in Singapore. We just do not have enough Singaporeans with the requisite expertise and skills to start the factory and operate it. If we had not tapped the talents of the foreigners, the 850 Singaporeans would not be working in CSM. They would have to compete against other Singaporeans for jobs elsewhere.

23 Talent is mobile. Countries now compete to attract talents to their shores. If foreign talents do not work in Singapore, they will be contributing to other economies and helping them compete against us. A protectionistic approach will only weaken our competitiveness, and make us poorer. Our children will be the losers, not the winners. Rather than shielding our children from the competition, we should focus on preparing them well to face the competition head on. We are already doing that, by investing heavily in their education and training. We will do even more. We will ensure that our children have the opportunity to develop their potential to the fullest.

24 The second anxiety concerns nation building. Some Singaporeans fear that if the foreigners working in Singapore are allowed to settle down here permanently, they will dilute the Singaporean spirit, our values and our cohesiveness as a people.

25 Not all foreigners working in Singapore would want to sink their roots here. Only a small proportion is likely to become Singapore citizens eventually. We should welcome them and help them assimilate into our society. And over time, if not they themselves, their children and children's children will be no less Singaporean than any of us. You see this phenomenon in Singaporeans who have migrated overseas. Their children speak with an American twang or an Australian accent and absorb values of their new country.

26 Thirdly, some Malay and Indian Singaporeans are anxious that the influx of new immigrants into Singapore will affect the current ethnic composition of our population.

27 On this, let me repeat the Government's assurance that we will maintain the relative proportion of Chinese, Malays and Indians as at present. The Chinese have the lowest birth rate of the three ethnic groups. Talents of Chinese origin will not come in such large numbers as to upset the status quo racial balance. We will manage this flow carefully.

Conclusion

28 We have overcome adversities, turn challenges into opportunities and succeed. But there will be new adversities, new challenges, and new competition. These are the facts of life. Our strategy to keep Singapore ahead of others is to turn it into an oasis of talents - Singaporean talents supplemented by foreign talents. If you have a better alternative strategy to sustain Singapore's prosperity, let the Singapore 21 Committee know.

29 Lastly, I want to pay tribute to you, the grassroots leaders, for your dedication and hard work. There are now 22,000 volunteers serving in the various grassroots organisations. All of you are the unsung builders of our society. Your commitment, dedication and service have made Singapore a cohesive and harmonious society.

30 I sincerely hope that a new generation of Singaporeans will emerge to take your place when you retire. Serving in grassroots organisations is contributing to our country. It gives us a sense of belonging and a feeling of tremendous satisfaction, because we give more than we take from our country.

Chairman
Committee for Educational Development for District

Ministry of Community Development
Parliamentary Secretary, Prime Minister's Office
Mr. Lee Sze San

Mr. Tan Joo Koh
Mr. Tan Joo Koh

Mr. David T. B. Lim
Mr. Tan Aijiah GRC

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Mr. Lim Joo Koh
Mr. Tan Aijiah GRC

Dr. Lee Tuo Yuan
Honoured MP

Mr. Lim Joo Koh
Honoured MP

SINGAPORE 21 COMMITTEE

Composition

Chairman: Adm Teo Chee Hean
Minister for Education & 2nd Minister for Defence

Members: Mr Chan Soo Sen
Parliamentary Secretary, Prime Minister's Office &
Ministry of Community Development

Dr Yaacob Ibrahim
MP for Jalan Besar GRC

Mr David T E Lim
MP for Aljunied GRC

Mrs Lim Hwee Hua
MP for Marine Parade GRC

Mr Lim Swee Say
MP for Tanjong Pagar GRC

Mr Ahmad Mohd Magad
MP for Pasir Ris GRC

Mr Seng Han Thong
MP for Ang Mo Kio GRC

Mr Inderjit Singh
MP for Ang Mo Kio GRC

Dr Lee Tsao Yuan
Nominated NP

Mr Simon Tay
Nominated MP

Terms of Reference

The Singapore 21 Committee is to identify and recommend new ideas for making Singapore a Global City and Best Home.

Specifically, the Committee will:

- (a) Consider how Singaporeans can participate actively in building the Global City and Best Home together;
 - (b) Gather new ideas and examine their usefulness and feasibility;
 - (c) Address the need for developing a consensus for action and other implementation issues; and
 - (d) Recommend the strategy and mechanism for implementing the various new ideas.
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