

TRANSCRIPT OF SENIOR MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG'S DIALOGUE SESSION WITH RESIDENTS AT HOUGANG ON 26 MARCH 2006

Mr Low: "A very good morning, especially to residents of Hougang, friends. Thank you very much for making available this wonderful Sunday morning to join me to welcome our Senior Minister Mr Goh Chok Tong. Mr Goh is no stranger to all of us and we're very happy in Hougang that this would be a few of his visits and his interest in the affairs of Hougang. This morning, we are very happy to have Senior Minister to share with us some thoughts on globalization and business opportunities and of course, with the hot topic that he is here to be my mentor and adviser. With me on this Table too on my right is Mr Lau Ping Sum, former Member of Parliament and now he's the director of our PAP headquarters. He's here to enable those of us who only understand Mandarin and if you have a question later on, you're most welcome. (Comments in Mandarin.) On my left, on the extreme left of this table, is Encik Othman, Member of Parliament for Marine Parade GRC and we welcome our Malay friends, if you need to ask questions later on in Malay and let Mr Othman answer for this morning. So without much ado and taking more time, I'd like to call upon our guest-of-honour this morning, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong to address you. Thank you."

Mr Goh: "Thank you Eric. I've been to Hougang many times before and I can recognize a few familiar faces, especially the grassroot leaders. It is indeed an honour to be tasked by Prime Minister Lee to help Eric Low to help the residents, so I'm looking forward to the challenge. But today, I want to speak on the topic of challenges and opportunities and I shall try and frame this topic for discussion. I shall approach this topic at two levels – one, at the national level, two, at the people's level, individual level; the challenges facing you and the opportunities before you. For the national level, we do indeed to face many grave challenges and this is not in order of the challenge. First, security, the threat of terrorism. Second, an ageing population. Singaporeans are getting older, we know that, as a society we are getting older which means there'll be problems of looking after the aged, resources to look after them and how do we serve the old.

"Next will be our birthrate. Now our birthrate is coming down, which means that we'll have fewer people in future for the workforce and to make Singapore a strong, vibrant and robust, because we need young people in order to have a strong economy. We need them to run the economy. So there are many other similar challenges and of course for opportunities, what do we have? Now, the world is now one big open world and to make a living, the country has got to compete against other countries; China, India, Malaysia, Thailand, the Middle East and so on. So the most difficult challenge for us is if we can wind down all these challenges into one question. How to make a living for ourselves? That's the national challenge that we have. I shall pause here for Mr Lau Ping Sum translate this into Mandarin and then I'll continue."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Mr Goh: "Now for these national challenges, you don't have to worry. Leave it to us and to the members of parliament, but you have to ask yourself one question. How do you get the right people to be in charge in government to look after your interests? Once you've got a good government, then of course it is the job of the government with the members of parliament, together with the people to overcome the national challenges and to create the opportunities. So I want to focus now on the individual level, the personal level, your level. What are the challenges facing you and how can we serve your interests. First you can put your own personal interest in the context of the constituency because you live here, you know what you want, you can let us know what you want and together we can make your life better in Hougang constituency and of course your life better by helping you to get a job, by having good education for your children, by looking after the old. So this is where I want to have a dialogue on. You're free to ask any question you like on a national basis, on a policy basis, but you can also, if you like address the challenges facing your constituency and yourself over here. But I hope you will not get into the individual problem, a petition. That we should discuss, but not at this dialogue because for instance, if you have a personal problem to resolve, there are others with other problems, so time is limited, leave your very personal problems and challenges till after the dialogue where Eric Low can then get your details, put them back to me. But let's discuss how we can make constituency of Hougang better for yourself."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Mr Goh: "Let's open the floor to this exchange of views with you. I think Eric can be the Chairman."

Mr Low: "Yes, ok. Maybe you can give us your name and then proceed with the question."

Mr Goh: "If you're not a resident of Hougang, please also say so. If you don't say so, I'll assume you're a resident of Hougang."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin.)"

Q: "Senior Minister, Mr Eric Low, Mr Lau Ping Sum and Mr Othman. I'm Tek Kiat (?), I stay in Hougang. I suppose in the spirit of today's dialogue on challenges and opportunities, I'd like to phrase my question in terms of challenges and opportunities as well. My question really is on the role of government-linked companies versus small and medium enterprises. Opportunities, for small and medium enterprises, we all know that there are many, the government is encouraging the startup of a lot of small and medium enterprises. However, challenge, for small and medium enterprises, we also do have the ground feeling that government-linked companies are actually going into the territory of small and medium enterprises and stifling

competition. So I was wondering what is the role of government-linked companies? How, if any, are your views on whether the stifling of competition is actually true? Thank you."

Mr Lau: "(Translation in Mandarin)"

Mr Goh: "The question is actually not government-linked companies versus small enterprises. It should be big and powerful companies versus small companies, because we may not have any government-linked companies, but we have multinational companies working in Singapore. You have a big retail chains like Giant or Cold Storage supermarket competing against your provision shops in the heartlands. You have big taxi operators versus maybe you know your small bus operators and so on. So, is it good or no good? I think there is a place for both. And that's why we have both small medium-sized enterprises as well as big companies. The big companies can't do certain jobs which a small company can do. It's not worth it. You know are they going to come into Hougang and open a big chain of retail shops over here? I can say no because they look at their markets, so they separate over there and there are areas where only big companies can do which small companies can't do like logistics. Some small companies can't do it as well as the international companies. Airlines, shipping lines, they can't do. So these are done by the government-linked companies. Telecoms, no, we can't do. But the key is do we have competition on the level playing field? Say even for telecommunications, years ago there was only one telecoms company. We knew it was not good, so we created competition by having two, three such companies. Even in the area of power generation. Yes, we had PUB before, now we try and have two, three companies compete and they are all big. Is there a place for small companies over here? I think it's difficult, but somebody can go in and grow the company, but I think it's difficult against the big boys.

"So therefore, my answer to you is it's not much government-linked companies as to whether you have big companies versus small companies and how do small companies exist. Now, there are very, very small companies which are very entrepreneurial. The people are creative. They start small and over time because they're creative, they're innovative, they can find a way to serve the big companies and then they become big themselves later on. So the key is do we have a level playing field in Singapore for everybody, whether you're big or small. I think the answer is yes."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Mr Goh: "I want to at this point know whether there are Malay friends over here who may not fully understand English. I take it they don't understand Mandarin. So if you have please put up your hand and then Othman Eusofe can try and summarise the points in Malay because we want this to be an inclusive dialogue. Language shouldn't be a problem and if there are Malay friends who don't follow the discussion, please put up your hand. I think for this better put this in Malay first."

Mr Othman: "(Remarks in Malay)"

Q: "(Question in Malay)"

Mr Othman: "What are the benefits for Hougang, benefits for the people in Hougang and how we can participate?"

Mr Goh: "Well, I did not come here with a basket of chiku to offer you. I came here to listen to you. What do you want to tell me? What are your interests? Because frankly speaking, I know Marine Parade much better than Hougang. So you tell me, then I'll see whether I can do those things for you. What benefits are you looking for? Please, maybe you come and tell me, then after that. Maybe upgrading, hawker stalls upgrading, transportation, schools, jobs, old folks home, whatever it is, you let me know."

Q: "(Question in Malay.)"

Mr Othman: "I think upgrading is important, particularly lift upgrading. The other constituencies have upgrading programmes, but Hougang hasn't got yet. So he's keen to have upgrading."

Mr Goh: "This is one reason why I'm keeping interest in Potong Pasir and Hougang because we have seen the rest of Singapore being upgraded: Toa Payoh, Marine Parade, Bishan and so on. Their flats have been upgraded and lifts are being put on every floor. And my concern is if we do not do it early for Potong Pasir or Hougang, we wait for another five years or another 10 years, you'll find that these two constituencies have been left behind in terms of the beauty of the estate. So I'm here to help Eric Low to persuade you that if this is what you want to make Hougang better, we'll do it for you. You follow me in English?"

Mr Lau: "(Translation in Mandarin)"

Mr Goh: "You know lift upgrading and lift stopping at every floor is very important. When I was a young MP, I used to walk up to the top floor because I wanted the exercise. Later on as I got older, I will take a lift up and then walk down. Now I take a lift up and I take a lift down."

Mr Lau: "(Translation in Mandarin)".

Mr Goh: "Yes? Let us know your name."

Q: "My name is Martin Gay. I'm from Hougang Ave 8, not part of our constituency."

Mr Goh: "But still Hougang?"

Q: "Yeah, I have a question to ask Mr Goh. The Malaysian government, they intend to demolish the Causeway, so they want to give a new bridge. So to us, we have no benefits, so we can call off the talk, we don't hold the meeting anymore. You can use the \$500 million you use for our own purpose. You can use the money to help the Singapore people. So why are you wasting your time to go and hold the talk there?"

Mr Goh: "Well, this issue is being negotiated at the moment and of course Singapore's position has been given in Parliament by George Yeo and we have also agreed with the Malaysians that whilst negotiations is in place, we shall not make any comments in public because that will complicate the negotiation. But it is indeed true that there are no benefits for us in having the Causeway removed. That's why we're prepared to cooperate, but they must make it worthwhile for us to cooperate. But beyond this I will not want to get into further comment because it's an agreement between us that we don't want to comment on this issue publicly even though the Malaysians are doing so."

Mr Lau: "(Translation in Mandarin.)"

Q: "Good morning distinguished guests. As a citizen of Singapore and a resident of Hougang, I've got some concerns. There are major changes with the globalization. The challenges are great. Things have moved so fast in the last five years and I'm a bit concerned about three things. First there is a gap. Previously, everything was geared towards the old people and now it's changed to the young. What happened to the middle road, people like us? Next, there needs to be a change in mindsets on three levels – government, people and the individual because training, retraining, re-engineering is something that has to be a good morning for the next generation. But what is happening now is that there are changes, but the government has got some protocols that need to be changed. So there are people being exploited, then the individual says "Aaiyah, I get exploited, better I don't go for training. Old, you know the brain cannot, rusty already." So, how can we change this? Because if we don't change this, as sure as I am tomorrow the globalization is going to affect the whole generation of the baby boomers of the 1950s and 1960s, what do we do next? Exploitation takes place. Does the government know of it? I'm sure they do. But what do we do to make sure that this exploitation won't happen?"

"Then, I'm very concerned as a citizen, every morning when I open my window, to my right I see such a estate of the 1990s, to my left I see the estate of 1950s and there I am depressed every time I come home I'm in the 1950s zone. How can I come out of the 1950s zone? The mindset of the strategy to say okay if you don't vote us, we won't upgrade, I think the people have said "hey I still want a voice in Parliament that says oppose. So if I vote for you, but ten others don't vote for you, am I going to be penalized because many of us will be penalized". So help us. I think the strategy needs to change. We need to look forward. Then the next area that I see many people say, Mr Low Thia Kiang has a big heart. Does he wear the

heart on the outside? And Mr Eric Low doesn't have a heart. No, I feel that it's maybe the communications, the grassroots communicating with the people and the people responding. We have to take responsibility because basically, communications is three things - words, body language and tone. And my tone is passion and hopefully my passion can be passed on to recreate our Hougang area. Thank you."

Mr Goh: "Now the slogan of Workers' Party is "You Have a Choice". So you have to make the choice. Now let's zoom in on the choice for not just yourself but for many individuals. They want to have upgrading, lift stopping at every floor. The programmes which PAP can do and like chikus maybe your breakfast and medical service and so on. At the same time, they also want to have a voice in Parliament. We understand that. It's in fact quite legitimate, to want to have a voice in Parliament but the choice is not to be exercised by me. The choice is to be exercised by you and how do we make you decide? Your point of communications is very important. So my approach is a simple one. You tell me what you want, and you say you want to have all these good things for Hougang. Well, Eric Low together with the PAP can offer you this programme to vote on. We want this, to work on this, or do you want to have opposition in Parliament? You vote on this. You decide. It is a very difficult decision but you have a choice. That's the message. So you've got to decide and I would like you to decide.

Well, if you think having an opposition is more important, then you vote for opposition. But if you think now there's a way, I can get my views put into Parliament through somebody, then I would say vote for what is in your interest and that is to have upgrading, to have whatever you need for Hougang. We can do that for you and your point of view can still be put across in Parliament and the simple way is this. If you vote for Eric Low, I can tell the Prime Minister, let him be the opposition in Parliament. We can lift the Whip for him. He can say what he wants to say in Parliament. Then whatever disaffection you may have, put it to him, there is no Whip to control him, well he can speak his mind for you. Then you get the best of both worlds. But in the end the choice is yours.

"But let me address this question about the sandwiched class. Yes, the message is aimed primarily at the older ones and the young. Why the older ones? Older ones because they are in a very difficult position, meaning those over 50, they lose their jobs, difficult to get a job, they get old, they get sick and they don't have the savings for them and that group requires special attention. Then we are focusing on the young. Why the young? The young do not have the resources at this age. They need our help in order to have their own potential maximized and then the young represents the future of Singapore. So we need to pay attention to the young in order they can be trained and, therefore, later on they can give something back to society. Those in the middle, are like parents. We bear the brunt of the burden. We have to look after our parents, we have to look after our young. It's difficult. Now when you have aged parents to look after, there are very young people to look after, and your resources are quite limited, it is very difficult. Even if you have the financial resources, it is very difficult physically to look after the young and the old.

So that's the way life is. Those in the middle are the ones who must bear this burden. Now are we not helping those in the middle? The answer is yes, we are helping. How are we helping them? We are the ones who are creating opportunities for them to have good jobs. We travel overseas to economic space to be widened for them and there are many people in that group. I mean the young they can't they are studying and so on, the old, they can't go out, but this group, they are going out to look for opportunities for themselves, to make a living for themselves and in Singapore, we are creating the opportunities for them.

"Training and retraining is important but let's be frank. It does not always guarantee you the kind of job you want. You can train and retrain but if your skills are limited, you can only move up half a grade and that half a grade increases the skill but does not get you the job that you want. But these are problems we have got to try and resolve at a personal level to match jobs with the skills that they have.

"So, to come back, you've got a choice, you've got to decide what you want to do for yourselves and for Hougang. If you leave it to me, I will say make this estate as beautiful as Marine Parade. We can do it but you must want it. If you want it, we will do it for you, but you have to decide. You cannot say I want this and I want the other one. That is not life, you have the choice. So you've got to decide this."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Q: "I am Madam Lin Yiang (?) I am staying at Hougang Ave 2. A lot is being said about upgrading and taking care of the young and old. I think I have to add on with one additional challenge which actually represents a very minority of such parents. Basically I have a handicapped child who is in primary school. Talking about upgrading at the moment our constituency, or my neighbourhood area, there's no rain shelter, there's no ramp, it's very difficult, we the parents, taking care of a handicapped child of school-going age, all the transportation and all that. On the issue of upgrading, this should be looked at also, taking care of handicap-friendly facilities as well, the very basic that people are looking for lifts and all that, that's not enough.

"The other issue is my son, this handicapped child I have is a boy doing his PSLE this year. So of course, naturally as parents we also want the best for him in his choice of secondary school. We looked through the MOE, they have a thick booklet last year on selection of secondary schools. We could not find, it was kind of difficult for us to match a suitable handicap-friendly school to match his expectations, based on his academic results and achievements. These schools are either too extreme end and he's actually not at the top of his cohorts but he is neither at the bottom. He's an above average performer and we look at schools and we can't really find one that can suit him to bring out his potential to the fullest. That's what every parent hopes for in a child. That makes it very difficult, we've got a lot of challenges in that area. I hope that even in schools, all schools are handicapped accessible so that we don't face this kind of constraint. We have to look at

distances from school because of his condition. The parents have to be in and out of the school many times, that kind of thing.”

Mr Goh: “May I ask if you don’t mind in what way is your child handicapped, physical handicap?”

Q: “No, he’s suffering from a medical condition called muscular dystrophy.”

Mr Goh: “That’s a kind of physical handicap.”

Q: “More than that actually.”

Mr Goh: “Yes, it’s more than that, muscular dystrophy, I know that. I would put the question not as a personal problem which she has raised. It is actually a wider question. There are indeed many children who are physically handicapped who therefore cannot move around quite freely. And it is indeed right that we should pay attention to this group because this group in a sense is also like the aged parents that we have who can’t walk, who may need a wheelchair to move around. Certainly as you can see, generally we are now paying more attention to this group. Now we’ve got more resources, you find the MRT, buses will be made friendly to these physically handicapped people.

“For Hougang, I would ask Eric to look around and discuss with me later on, on how we can Hougang a place that is friendly to the handicapped and to older people. I think it’s important that the handicapped and the older people can move around quite freely in Hougang - ramps, lifts, easy access, road crossings, I think this has got to be done. I would go beyond just Hougang. I think this is something we’ve got to do for every constituency. And the older the constituency, meaning there are more old people in the constituency, there are more handicapped, we got to do more. It’s an area which I would take up with personal interest, not just because of one particular problem because I think there is a general problem over here. Thank your for raising this. As for the child’s school, I think it’s best if you can give the details later on to Eric Low who can then contact MOE and try and help you find a school that’s suitable for your child.”

Mr Lau: “(Remarks in Mandarin)”

(Tape being flipped over to side B)

Q: “(Remarks in Mandarin)”

Mr Low: “This resident put up three points. The first point is about China, not really about Singapore. China, he talked about 1912 being the year of the successful revolution, Sun Yat Sen Revolution and he believes that in the year 2012, which is the 100th year anniversary, the unification of China and Taiwan will take place. He gave a recommendation of a new title to China. Second, he believes that although

many MPs say that they are serving the people, but some are only concerned about the MP's allowance, \$13,000 per month. He feels they should only be paid once a year and in fact they should contribute some of the money to Parliament, to reduce the cost of Parliament. The third, he recommends the death penalty for people who are drunk, drives a car and kills somebody."

Mr Goh: "For your first point, I have no comment. That's the wish for China. For the last point, the death penalty for certain offences, I think you better try and get into Parliament and then get this discussed in Parliament. The second point which is MP's allowance, MPs actually contribute a fair bit of their allowance for other uses. Very often in the constituency where there are people having some problems, you find MPs just give some of their funds to the CCC to help others. It's not that whatever they earn they keep for themselves. MPs also have to contribute, quite a big sum of their funds to the party so that the party, the PAP has got the resources in turn to reach out to help other people. Basically the MP's job, although it's part time, it is a full time job. They spend almost every weekend down at the constituencies to have meet-the-people sessions, they have to attend Parliament and there are many other work they've got to do. In my view I think it's a fair wage for the MPs. Maybe after this, I shall let Eric Low try and ascertain from you your interest. He knows the place well. "

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Mr Goh: "Let me add on this MP's allowance. There are many MPs who after becoming MPs find that their profession, their job suffers. Take the case of doctors. When they have to go to Parliament, they can't be at the clinic which means they can't be earning an income. This is a real problem for many of the professionals that we have. Let's say you are a lawyer, you have got to spend time in Parliament and your clients are not there. So their incomes actually suffer. For salaried employees, you need to have a very understanding employer and employers are not worried whether you're an MP or not. They base your promotion and your bonuses on your contribution to the firm. They let you be an MP but if you are running around as an MP and your contribution is less than your colleagues who are not MPs, you get lower bonuses. So don't think they just get the MP's allowance and continue with their own salaries and earnings. It is not so. There are quite a few doctors of ours who after a while find that they have to curtail. In the old days, Dr Dixie Tan, she was a cardiologist and she was spending so much time as an MP, she found that the patients could not find her, could not see her. So the patients went to see other cardiologists. After that the patients never came back and she had to close her practice as a cardiologist. So the MP's allowance is nothing compared to what she could earn as a cardiologist. Don't think MP's allowance is a lot. Bear in mind they have to lose a lot in their own work as an MP."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Mr Goh: "Eric Low is not an MP, he works hard like an MP and he gets no allowance."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Mr Goh: "To be fair to him, I must help him to become an MP."

Mr Low: "Before we take another question, I'd like now to take this opportunity because time is running out, I would like to share with SM your concerns. I've been on the ground for six years now. There are a few that are quite pertinent and I'd like to hear from you to tell our special guests today on these concerns. One is about market upgrading, the other one is HUDC privatization. Many of our residents here who have these two concerns, maybe I'll take the first one on market upgrading."

Mr Goh: "How many stallholders here?"

Mr Low: "Any stallholders here?"

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Mr Low: "Do you have any residents who wish the market to be upgraded? Can I see your concerns and your remarks? Nobody wants, please come to the mike on the market."

Q: "The present market at Hougang is very compact, if one person goes in, he has to squeeze himself to go and buy things which is inconvenient. Secondly the stalls are very close to each other, banging each other's back. I hope Mr Low...."

Mr Goh: "But nobody raised their hands when we asked them whether they want the market to be upgraded. Maybe you should ask them, those who don't want the market to be upgraded, put up your hands, the other way."

Mr Low: "Now I ask the question in the negative, how many of you do not want the market to be upgraded, put up your hands."

Woman: "The payments all increase."

Mr Low: "Okay we hear you, any more? So all also want the market to be upgraded?"

Mr Goh: "I think you want because at least one hand was put just now. But this is a serious question and we must think...."

Q: "I'm Koh, Hougang resident. Will the cost be going up if you renovate the ... and the market? What will the cost be? Will the hawker stalls, will they have to pay more? Can they do it or not? This is a big question mark for residents."

Mr Goh: "From the experience of markets which have been upgraded, when they're upgraded their business increase, the volume is there because there's more space to walk around for people to walk around and there are places for cars to park. Once business is increased, yes, the rental will increase because you are spending so much on upgrading, but overall the price of foodstuffs and the price of goods should not be increased because you've got the additional volume for the market. Whatever it is, this is for you to decide. If you are worried about costs being increased, you want your market rentals to be low, to be kept as it is, then you decide. Then of course, it will not be upgraded. If you ask my opinion, I think it is worthwhile upgrading to make it more suitable for the present time and for the future. Of course we can make a temporary market to ensure that the livelihood of the stallholders will not be affected at all. But that's my personal view. But I'm here take to take your views, because I want to know, then he can put it into his programme. But both ways nobody put up their hands, so I do not know what to decide."

Mr Low: "Then I will come down and get your opinion before I transfer that to SM. The other one is about HUDC. Do you want privatization? We know that is not possible but if the residents want it, I will definitely with the help of SM, we will hear you and we'll try and see if that could be done. Any HUDC residents, we would like to hear your views. Because at my block visits, always the residents say when is my privatization going to take place. This is our opportunity for you to air and then get SM to help me to see how we can help you."

Mr Goh: "But there are no HUDC residents here this morning. Those who are HUDC residents, can you please put up your hands. What is your view on privatizing the HUDC?"

Q: "I'm Mr Long (?) I stay at block 719, my wife has just left. I have a handicapped child, so privatization is always at my disadvantage. I am paying higher rental fee. At the same time, it will be more cost for me. I will say I will not support privatization."

Mr Goh: "What about your other neighbours? Do they want privatization or do they not want it? Do you know the views of your friends?"

Q: "For the 6th level itself, block 719, I would say the majority would not like to have privatization unless there's a major upgrading first."

Mr Goh: "That's something for Eric Low to ascertain from the residents. If you don't need privatization, in fact from my point of view that's easier and I think this could be done. You ascertain the interest and let me know later on."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Mr Low: "A resident asked about the question of repeated fare price increase of public transport such as MRT and buses. What is the government going to do to help alleviate the burden of the low income families in this respect?"

Mr Goh: "I think everybody knows that fuel prices have gone up quite a bit because oil prices have gone up. In order for the public transport companies, MRT and buses to run smoothly, they would have to have sufficient revenue. The question is once you understand the cost will go up, fares must go up, how will the lower income group be helped. We approach this at two levels. One you have got to try and find ways where lower income groups also have their wages increased over time, which means there must be economic growth. If your wages can increase, then it will help them to pay for increased bus fares. But for those who cannot have your wages increased because they lack certain skills and maybe even have temporary loss of jobs, you've got to target them. You've got to find ways where we can help your children for example, if the children go to school and you've got to pay bus fares. This is where Eric Low and the CDC can come in. We target those groups, individuals who may have difficulties and we can help them to give a pocket allowance. We can work with the Straits Times to help the family with pocket allowances. For the targeted basis we can help those individuals who have been affected by the increase in bus fares and MRT fares."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in mandarin)"

Mr Low: "Owing to time, maybe we've got two more questions or three..."

Q: "Good morning SM Goh and distinguished speakers. I do have one question on globalization."

Mr Low: "Please let us know your name and where do you stay?"

Q: "I'm also Mr Low and I stay in Hougang. Presently Singapore is attracting a lot of Indian and Chinese nationals who are highly skilled, with permanent residency status in Singapore. As India and China are now new booming economies, do you think that there will be brain drain, whether people start leaving Singapore to go back to their own economies. One more question, how do we assure Singaporeans that there are no threat to their jobs, making these foreign workers feel at home, still welcome?"

Mr Goh: "Your concern is the concern of quite a few Singaporeans who look at the problem in isolation. We bring in Chinese workers, we bring in Indian talent, then you feel that your job is being threatened. Therefore you talk about the brain drain. If that can happen, then there's no problem because you can go out. So your assumption must be we bring in people here, you can't go out and you've got a problem. You will discover if you think through deeper that to sustain prosperity in the future, you have just got to make sure that you can compete on the basis of human resources. It's not your wealth, it's not your oil, it's human resources. Every

country, including China is in fact inviting talent into the country. China 1.2 billion people openly state they want to have more IT personnel, they want to have best researchers into their universities. If China needs brains into China, at least Singapore needs it more. Why is the US the world's number one economy? Because every year the US attracts a lot of talent into the US to be able to compete against China, India, anybody in the world. Are the Americans worried, I'm sure some are worried because they find this people taking away their jobs. But many people find that the brains that come in create more jobs for them and today US can still grow by about three per cent a year despite it's very huge economy because of the brain power and the skills that they have in the US. Jobs are generated, jobs are created for others. You take the case of a bank for example. We are a financial hub for many banks, foreign banks, a world class management. These are foreign workers with good brains from Switzerland, from Britain, from other European countries, they come over here. Do they take away the jobs of Singaporeans? The answer will be without him there, I'll be number one. But the answer is actually with him, there'll be no bank in Singapore from that particular country. They come over here, how many jobs do they create for Singaporeans? Take it in this light, when they come over here they create jobs.

"In some cases, we are competing with them for certain jobs which is true. You got a university lecturer, you've got to compete against a foreign lecturer for particular post. But our point here is whose interest is more important, the student's interest or the interest of the lecturer? I think it's the student's interest. We can afford it, we want to bring the best professors to the university. If a local professor can't compete against a foreign professor, we take in the foreign professor because the foreign professor will educate thousands of Singaporeans. That local professor may be unhappy but it's the overall interest of the student we are concerned about. I would say to sum up, we recognize that Singaporeans lead with or without foreign talent coming in. We are now competing on the basis of making Singapore the best place to live in, the best place to work in, the most opportunity over here. If we cannot compete on that basis, Singaporeans will leave anyway because everybody wants to have a better life. We at the top are constantly addressing this, how to make this the best home, a land of opportunity so that Singaporeans will want to stay here. They work outside but no matter where they work, they will call Singapore home. That must be the approach that we take. So let's compete on the basis of talent globally, get them to come over as many as possible, then we will see Singapore thriving against all competition."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Q: "(Question in Mandarin)"

Mr Low: "This lady's question is recently she received a notice from the Ministry of the Environment not to sell coconut or coconut milk, fresh coconut milk, but she knows there is a hawker stall in Bedok which is selling coconut milk. Why the discrepancy between Bedok and here?"

Mr Goh: "I don't know the answer, but what they can do in Bedok we can do in Hougang."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Mr Goh: "In other words, we must be fair to the hawkers, similar treatment."

Mr Lau: "(Remarks in Mandarin)"

Q: "I'm a resident staying in Hougang Avenue 3. The question I want to ask is about those singles staying with their aged parents. Very often those unmarried singles staying with their aged parents, they play the role of the sole caregiver of the family but they are often neglected by the government. Actually they don't enjoy housing subsidies or flat incentives. For example, a single woman who is 50 years old staying with parents in the house with an annual income of more than \$10,000, she will only get \$200 from the progress dividend package but she will not be entitled to the workfare bonus because of the annual value of the household which does not belong to her."

Mr Goh: "The progress package, we try to be as fair as we can but obviously you cannot have a system which pleases everybody. In the past, we go by housing type, 3-room, or 4 room, those at the bottom you get more, those at the top get less. Of course people complain that housing type is not the best because incomes differ. So they move into annual valuation which I think is fairer than just by housing type. Of course we have the problems of singles and so on. I think the overall philosophy is we should make it more targeted, help those who need more help. The single in particular instance which you mentioned is a particular problem. I don't think we have addressed it adequately but we can try and see how we can address this better in future."

Q: "Thanks for allowing me to have the last question. I'm not a resident of Hougang constituency. Just now a resident from Hougang constituency raised the market concern. Actually I'm from Aljunied GRC grassroots leaders. We work very closely with Eric Low in our grassroots work. Look around yourself in Aljunied GRC, there are two newly upgraded markets, one at Lorong Ah Soo which opened last month. The other one is Bedok Reservoir which is in Bedok Reservoir Road. Both these two new markets' adviser, the MP of the respective constituencies. We have a multistorey car park with hawker centre in Lorong Ah Soo. We have a basement car park in Bedok Reservoir's new market. I think if Mr Eric Low comes into Parliament, I think Aljunied GRC with Aljunied Town Council can work together with the town council in this Hougang constituency, we can contribute ourselves, the grassroots for Aljunied GRC with Hougang constituency. We work closely together to have a better new market, hawker centre for Hougang constituency. About the cost concern, I think Lorong Ah Soo has very good experience building a new market. With the great help of the adviser, the MP and the Chairman of the town

council, they got a better deal in gas supply in their hawker centre from private suppliers, which is 20 per cent lesser. What we know is the two new markets after upgrading, the business of these two markets have been increasing. Most of the stallholders have not increased the cost of their goods, I think also with the help of the grassroots and the adviser of the constituency, I think all these concerns can be addressed by the adviser and grassroots leaders.'

Mr Goh: "Let me add by thanking residents and friends of Hougang who've come here this morning for the dialogue. I'm very happy to see so many of you very actively taking part in the discussion and very importantly not focusing on your individual problems. The problems that you've raised is actually a wider problem, not just personal to yourselves, so I find it to be a rather meaningful dialogue and I would of course come back here again and again, especially during election time, thank you."

Mr Low: "Without much ado, we would like to thank Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong for taking his time this morning to be with us and also Mr Low and Encik Othman and to all of you. Thank very much and I hope if you got anything else or feedback please come to me and I will pass it over to SM for consultation. "

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