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SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION,
AT THE DEMONSTRATION - MICROMOUSE COMPETITION - ORGANISED
BY THE INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS, SINGAPORE, AT THE FRENCH-
SINGAPORE INSTITUTE ON WEDNESDAY, 1 JUNE 1988 AT 4.30 PM

I am very pleased to be present today to announce that Singapore will be sending a micromouse team to London to take part in the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE)'s Micromouse Competition in July this year. This competition is the third international competition, the first two being held in Japan in 1985 and UK in 1987. Our selected team is the one fielded by the National University of Singapore (NUS). Three students from the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineers and their micromice (named MIR3+ and SUNEE II) will represent Singapore in London under IES sponsorship.

Last year in October, we held our own national competition. The best of our mice managed to solve the maze in 24.3 seconds. Given the complexity of the maze design, this is a very creditable performance for newcomers. According to the guest judge, Mr Don Christiansen, who is, in fact, the original proposer of the first contest in the US in 1977, the mice were adjudged to have attained a standard to participate in international competition. At the selection contest held recently, the IES selection committee was impressed by the marked improvement that the micromice have made within the last few months. I am confident that our selected micromice are in the world class, and hope that they will do Singapore proud in the international contest in London. Let us wish them well.

At first contact, some people may think that micromouse competitions are frivolous. After all, the mice are glorified mechanical toys and the players are probably overgrown "boys" still intrigued by mechanical gadgets! There may be some element of truth in such a view! But never forget that some of the world's greatest inventors and innovators never lost their childlike wonder and fascinations and hence were able to turn out new wonders which stick-in-the-mud adults never can!

But there is also a very serious side to creating a participating entry in micromouse competitions. What is a micromouse? It is more than a mechanical toy. It contains all the technology of robotics. Anyone who can build and programme a micromouse has mastered the technology of the robot. We are entering the age of robots. We have robotic product lines, intelligent robots for solving and sorting out complicated problems. Most of the cars we drive in now are assembled with the help of robots. There may in future be domestic robots to assist in the housework.

Therein lies the significance of micromouse. Our engineers and technologists involved in the micromouse competitions are mastering the techniques of robots. This can only strengthen Singapore's hand in becoming a high technology manufacturing and service centre. International micromouse competitions have become a kind of yardstick of a nation's ability in robotic technology. In Asia, only Japan, Korea and Taiwan have participated in such international competitions. We are the fourth country to do so. It says something for the engineering entrepreneurial spirit of our technologists.

May I wish the participants all the best as they prepare for the battle of the micromice.