Speech by Mrs Sayeed at NTU’s Thank You Lunch to NOL for the Establishment of the NOL-Captain MJ Sayeed Scholarship on 3 August

Good afternoon Mr Cheng Wai Keung, Chairman, Neptune Orient Lines

Dr Su Guaning, President of Nanyang Technological University

Distinguished guests.

I am here, in awe before you, because I am absolutely overwhelmed by the magnificent gesture of the Neptune Orient Lines Group, in conferring a scholarship in the memory of my late husband, Mr MJ Sayeed.

It is a magnificent act, and I am greatly thankful and indebted to them.

I fumble to find adequate words to thank the NOL Group for the honour, great respect, and regard they have bestowed to commemorate the memory of my late husband, Captain Mahammad Jalaluddin Sayeed.

Your monumental gesture of this scholarship has rescued Captain MJ Sayeed from the depths of oblivion, and brought him back in our midst to be a part and spirit of the NOL and has given me a renewed purpose in life.

I stand here, this afternoon, painfully proud but privileged, to speak to you this afternoon.

In a small single room in the Fullerton Building, my husband, with a young group of dedicated, committed young Singaporeans worked with zeal and zest, endurance and endeavor, to set up a world-wide, sea-borne trade, Oriental Shipping Company, the birth of Neptune Orient Lines.

It was a very busy, arduous and challenging time. But the young group, had a lot of work to do: Freight agreements, maritime insurance, calculated risks, getting into conferences, fighting for cargo, and unlimited cargo, for Singapore – is that right Mr Cheng?

So it was a very very difficult and challenging time.

But my husband, who encouraged them and said, You have to run with the hares, and hunt with the hounds. Let’s encourage the team to go on.

So ships were purchased and owned and registered under the Singapore flag. And they were put on their maiden voyages, laden with cargo, crossing the oceans, a speck on the big ocean, competing with the Goliaths of the shipping world.

Mr Sayeed said, we do not stop there. Most ships were bought, more diversification, container ships, super-tankers.

NOL now has a diversified, profit-orientated company, and it was well set on an even keel. It was time now, for Mr Sayeed to say goodbye to Singapore. He passed the mantle, proudly, and confidently, to the young Singaporean group dedicated, devoted to him, and to the country.
As he said, they had not only acquired the skill, the sophistication in managing and operating the ships, but they had learnt the chess board maneuvers in handling trade in the international shipping world.

As Mr Goh Chok Tong said, we were inexperienced, we knew nothing about shipping. But Mr Sayeed taught us the tricks of the trade, or as he said, taught us the ropes.

Today, Singapore has Neptune Orient Lines which ranks among the 10 in the world. It has a modern fleet, sophisticated fleet, and ranks 10 in the world.

Singapore is a small island, 220 sq miles only, with no natural resources, except for a deep harbour, which today, has become one of the three busiest ports in the world.

With its comprehensive, high-calibre infrastructure facilities, in technology, in banking, in finance, communication, high technology industry, a firm currency, law and order, and absolute transparency, Singapore today, is the hub of the East, and with the batch of scholars coming from the Nanyang Technological University, we pave the way, as Dr Su Guaning has said, for a new knowledge-based economy. And I may add to what Mr Cheng has said, it will soon be an internationally renowned maritime and logistics hub.

It was once said, all roads lead to Rome, as we studied. But today, I shall say very proudly, all sea-links lead to Singapore. Neptune rides the waves, and may the sun never set on the Neptune flag.

I’d like to congratulate the two recipients of the scholarships. But I would like to add that a scholarship is just not an award. It is something you have to desire, you have to aspire, you have to want. Because a scholarship embodies the thoughts and the personality of the man, and should be an inspiration, for a man is the measure of all things.

Mr Sayeed had a brilliant, scintillating, inquisitive mind, indefatigable energy, and a fine soul, combined with sincerity, truth and human kindness. As he often quoted, no man is an island, entirely to himself. Any man’s death diminishes me, for I am involved in mankind, quoted by John Donne.

He had the great rare gift, of the joie de vivre, as the French say, the sheer joy of living every minute of his life. He started to learn Mandarin when he was here in Singapore, at the age of 48. And when he was leaving Singapore, he wrote a letter to Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew replied, saying, “For a person of your years, you find the time and interest in between your duties, to be able to write a note to me in Chinese, demonstrates a triumph of an inquisitive mind, and an indomitable spirit over hard challenges.

On 18th Sep 2005, Sunday, 21 hours, Captain Mahammad Jaluddin Sayeed slipped his moorings, and found himself across an ocean of time to a new world. Sunset and evening star, and one clear call from me, and may there be no moaning at the bar, when I put out to sea. I hope to meet my Pilot, face to face, when I have crossed the bar.
As Shakespeare said, all the world’s a stage, and all the men and women are merely players. They have their exits and their entrances. Mr Sayeed left the world, with happy happy memories and he cried aloud, oh, for the voice and a touch of my hand that is still.

I thank Mr Cheng Wai Keung, Dr Su Guaning, I was very very impressed by my tour of the Nanyang Technological University. And I am very confident that the entrepreneurs, expertise, engineers, and the global leaders in the making at the Nanyang Technological University, will back Singapore in building, as Dr Su said, paving the way for a new knowledge-based economy.

And also, as Mr Cheng said, to drive the way to an internationally-renowned maritime and logistics hub. So Singapore will soon be, not just the hub of the manufacturing world, but also the hub of international maritime and logistics.

Thank you once again. Goodbye.