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**MITA Building, 140 Hill Street, 2nd Storey, Singapore 179369**  
**Tel: 6837-9666**

**SPEECH BY SENIOR MINISTER MR LEE KUAN YEW AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL BOUNDARIES AND CULTURAL CONFIGURATIONS, 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE CENTRE FOR CHINESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY, WEDNESDAY, 23 JUNE 2004.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address this distinguished assembly of scholars at the International Conference on National Boundaries and Cultural Configurations. I congratulate Nanyang Technological University on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Centre for Chinese Language and Culture.

Singapore is at the crossroads of East and West. East-West trade through the waters of Southeast Asia go back to the earliest days of our history. Next year, Singapore together with many other countries will be commemorating the 600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the voyages of the Muslim Ming Admiral Cheng Ho whose treasure ships went all the way to Africa and maybe beyond. Modern Singapore was founded by Stamford Raffles of the British East India Company who recognized Singapore's unique potential. Through him, we inherited political, legal and administrative structures from Britain that have added to our strengths.

**The Making of Modern Singapore – A Cosmopolitan in Asia**

Raffles was in search of a suitable site to support and protect the British trade between India and China. He decided on Singapore because of its natural harbour and strategic location at the southernmost point of the Asian continent that ships must pass between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. When he signed an agreement with the Temenggong to buy over Singapore in 1819, it was a tiny fishing village. The British governed Singapore from 1819 to 1959 except for the 3 years 1942 to 1945 when the Japanese Imperial Army occupied it.

From a few hundred *orang laut* fishermen, by 1824 Singapore had grown into a busy port with 10,000 traders from China, India, the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia. Today, it has grown into a nation of over 3 million with 77% Chinese from various provinces in China, 15% Malays from the whole archipelago, 7% Indians and a mix of other Europeans and other Asians.

When we became independent it was not easy to inculcate a sense of nationhood to bind together peoples of different races, languages, religions and cultures, each with strong emotional ties to their roots. Over the forty five years

since self government, Singapore has made much progress to develop a strong sense of nationhood. And Singapore continues to receive skilled and talented people.

### The Chinese influx

The Chinese arrived soon after Singapore was founded in 1819. From their humble beginnings as labourers and traders, they have contributed to Singapore's development and made it an important node in a network of Chinese communities overseas. They are the largest community in Singapore. They prospered in Singapore and sent funds to their home villages in Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan and elsewhere in China. At the same time, the Nanyang (Southeast Asia) intellectual and cultural elite began to associate with the leaders of China. They participated, at times with great personal peril, in the revolutions in China. They helped to fund the Nationalist revolutionaries and sheltered some of their leaders in Nanyang. The role of the Overseas Chinese in China's revolution of 1911 is commemorated at Singapore's Sun Yat Sen Memorial Hall. Singapore had played a part in the momentous changes in China.

One historical model of the bicultural elite that we need to replicate is Dr Lim Boon Keng. Born in 1869 to a Straits Chinese family, Lim Boon Keng was not taught Chinese. He was a Queen's scholar and studied in Edinburgh to become a doctor. Yet he subsequently became fully bilingual and bicultural, contributing significantly to both Singapore and a China at the turn of the century.

He realized during his stay in UK that whatever his accomplishments, the British would always treat him as a British subject of Chinese origin, not as their equal. He resolved to connect with his cultural roots. Upon his return to Singapore, he started to learn Chinese and promoted its use as a medium of instruction. He launched a "Speak Chinese Campaign". Ahead of his time with regard to female education, he co-founded the Singapore Chinese Girls' School to educate the Straits Chinese women. He raised funds for the founding of the King Edward VII Medical School, the forerunner of National University of Singapore, to enhance medical training.

Late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, China's Qing dynasty was determined to reform for national renewal. China needed the support of the capital and expertise of the overseas Chinese. Lim promoted the Chinese language and Confucianism studies so that the Straits Chinese would not be a people without roots. He also encouraged them to master English, to seize opportunities for enterprise in China, and to enhance their role as bridges between East and West. He visited China often and helped Chinese officials attract investments from the Chinese in Southeast Asia. Unfortunately Qing China's reforms failed. When Dr Sun Yat Sen organized the Chinese Nationalist revolution to overthrow the corrupt Qing dynasty, Lim was a strong supporter.

Lim Boon Keng was an outstanding example of a bilingual and bicultural Singaporean Chinese of that era who contributed to both China and Singapore's development.

After WW2 the overseas Chinese community leaders in Singapore and Malaya decided to set up a university in Singapore to provide tertiary education for Chinese-stream students. In 1955, Nanyang University became the first Chinese language university outside greater China. This auditorium was built by Nanyang Technological University (NTU) on the campus inherited from Nanyang University.

### China's Resurgence

The rise of China as a large economic power started with Deng Xiaoping in 1978. Opening up the economy, he learned from other countries, including tiny Singapore.

Deng had visited Singapore in November 1978. I talked with him over three days. It left an impression on him. After his return to China, the People's Daily changed its attitude to Singapore. We were no longer excoriated as "lackeys of the US-British imperialists". Instead Singapore was described as a garden city and a model of how to develop good housing for the people and for tourism. I met Deng in Beijing on three subsequent occasions in the 1980s. He kept up his interest in Singapore's developments.

During Deng Xiaoping's southern tour in 1992, he stated that China could learn from Singapore, especially in social development. That year alone, Singapore received over 400 delegations from China. But short study visits was not satisfactory. So we proposed the Singapore-Suzhou Industrial Park collaboration to plan, build and integrate the township and draw investments from the industrial countries. I have just attended the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Singapore-Suzhou Industrial Park. It has attracted 2,500 visits from delegations all over China. The SIP is now a model for planning and development and China's most successful investment centre (ETDZ).

China's entry into the WTO is estimated to bring a US\$800 billion increase in Foreign Direct Investment between 2001 and 2010. As China adopts the latest technology, upgrades and updates production techniques, it will become a huge market for raw materials and manufactured components from Southeast Asia. Its growing middle class will boost tourism in East Asia and the world. Its rich will want private banking services, to diversify their assets globally. China's overseas investments in 2000 were a modest US\$551 million, one-fifth of which went to Southeast Asia. These investments are expected to increase rapidly.

Bilateral trade between Singapore and China multiplied seven-fold from \$5.3 billion in 1991 to \$36.9 billion in 2003, some 18% per annum. Singapore is China's sixth largest foreign investor with US\$44 billion. To ride on China's growth, Singapore needs a core group with a deep understanding of

contemporary China. This means a bilingual as well as bicultural groups of key players. Bilingualism gets us through the front door, but it is only through biculturalism that we can reach deep inside China and work with them.

#### NTU programs to facilitate co-operation

NTU plans to increase our ties with tertiary institutions in China and India as it has with those in the US, EU and Japan. Today, NTU is an important provider of management education and training for Chinese officials and businessmen. The Masters of Science (Managerial Economics) Programme, taught mainly in Chinese, has become a popular course of study for rising stars from diverse provinces and regions of China. They were selected as highflyers from those likely to become at least mayors hence the programme has been nicknamed the “Mayor Class”.<sup>1 [1]</sup> NTU is also conducting Executive Masters in Business Administration programmes in China through the International EMBA program as well as the joint venture with Shanghai Jiaotong University in Shanghai. These programmes have attracted Chairmen, CEO’s and Managing Directors of major enterprises in China.

We need more modern day bilingualists/biculturalists like Dr Lim Boon Keng to deepen and widen our links with China. If Singapore had not nurtured and attracted bilingual and bicultural talents over the past four decades, these NTU programmes would not have been possible. However, our bilingual education in English and the mother tongue gives our students Mandarin for social not business purposes. For deeper interaction, Singapore needs to nurture a few hundred students from each year’s cohort to a higher level of Mandarin and a deeper appreciation of China’s history and culture so that they can engage in China growth. Our multi-lingual background is changing as we become more of an international centre where English is the main language.

The Centre for Chinese Language and Culture (CCLC) is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary today. Its primary mission was and is to teach the Chinese language and culture, and the history of the Chinese in Nanyang, and do research in Chinese language and the cultural issues relevant to the Chinese in the region. In future, as part of the new School of Humanities and Social Sciences in NTU, CCLC will research on Chinese communities in the wider world.

One task of this Chinese Division is to nurture students with a strong foundation in Chinese language, culture, literature, history and philosophy, and with an appreciation of contemporary China.

Located at the confluence of three great civilisation from Asia, the Confucianist, the Hindu and the Muslim, together with a legacy of political, legal and

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<sup>1[1]</sup> NTU also offers two Executive Masters in Business Administration programmes with residential segments on NTU’s campus - one in collaboration with the Shanghai Jiaotong and another which NTU runs on its own. The programmes are popular because it teaches western management practices in Chinese, coupled with immersion in Singapore.

administrative structures from Britain, Singapore is well placed to play a hub role in globalisation.

Under the British Raj, our links to South Asia - India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka - were comprehensive. From 1819 to 1867, Singapore was governed from Calcutta. We inherited our administrative and legal systems from British India. The British brought Indian workers to build roads, buildings and bridges. The Government House, now the Istana, was built in 1869 by the British Royal Engineers with Indian convicts brought from the British penal colony of the Andaman Islands. Teachers and civil servants from India and Sri Lanka staffed the lower ranks of the administration, some promoted to intermediate ranks. Singapore has played a significant role in India's independence movement. The Indian Congress Party had branches in Singapore and in Malaya. During WW2 the Japanese military brought Indian independence fighter Subhas Chandra Bose, who had slipped away from India to Tokyo, to Singapore. He and they organised the Indian National Army (INA) from British Indian prisoners of war captured in Singapore in February 1942. They went up to Burma to check the British advance from Imphal into Burma. The INA officers infiltrated the British Indian Army units to persuade them not to fight. After the war, the return of these prisoners of war who had been added to the pressures on the British and hastened India's independence which came in August 1947.

Because India was not in a chaotic state like China was, many Indians in Singapore returned to India. Hence the lower percentage of the Indian population in Singapore, some 7% compared to 77% Chinese. Because English is still a link language in India, we have no language problems in dealing with Indians. We also have similar systems of law and administration and governance inherited from the British. But there is still a need to nurture a core of bicultural Singapore players to engage India.

With globalisation we are receiving a fresh wave of immigrants from India, this time, mostly professionals in IT, management, banking and accounting. We are also settling a CECA (Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement) with the Indian government, started under Prime Minister Vajpayee is likely to be finalised under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. A South Asian Institute will soon be established at the National University of Singapore.

Singapore's links to the Islamic world are deep in its history. Ties with our neighbours do not present language difficulties. The Arabs spread Islam through trade with the archipelago way back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, long before the British came. Arabs such the Aljunieds, Alkaffs and Alsagoffs have played a historical role in Singapore's development, as did prominent leaders of the Malay and Indonesian communities like Mohamad Eunos and Ambo Solo. The Malay community in Singapore absorbed Muslims from all over the Islamic world especially Muslims from Peninsular Malaysia and the islands of Indonesia. Among the 12 Muslim Members of the Singapore Parliament, 2 are Javanese, 5 are partly Indian, one is Arab, one is Boyan and 3 are Riau Malays. One of

Singapore's oldest mosques, the Sultan Mosque, has a charter that still requires its Board of Trustees to be composed of two Arabs, two North Indians, two South Indians, two Malays, two Javanese and two Buginese. Near the Mosque is the old palace of the Sultan converted into a Malay heritage centre. And with the devolution of power to the provinces in Indonesia, many are gradually re-establishing their old direct economic and cultural links to Singapore.

In the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, China and India will be the two largest and fastest growing economies in the world. They will have tremendous impact on the economies of the world, including, in particular, Southeast Asia. By virtue of our position at the confluence of great civilisations and cultures, Singapore can be a catalyst in this development if we continue to have bicultural and multicultural players <sup>2[2]</sup> who can engage in these economies. We can play a growing role as a meeting place and home for students and entrepreneurs from China, India and Southeast Asia, all of whom can feel comfortable in Singapore. A city state like Singapore with a strong rule of law plus Western economic and managerial practices, and an effective, corruption-free administration can then add value to China, India and our ASEAN neighbours in their interaction with the US and EU to the benefit of all.

I congratulate NTU for having made a promising start to train Singaporeans for their roles in this different world. On its tenth anniversary, I also congratulate the Centre for Chinese Language and Culture for nurturing a bilingual/bicultural elite who will enable Singapore to be an important player in the modernisation of China.

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<sup>2[2]</sup> NTU is engaged in cutting edge research in collaboration with top ranking universities like MIT, Stanford and Caltech in the US. NTU intends to develop into a regional centre of learning and scholarship. It has linked up with Peking University, Tsinghua University and Shanghai Jiaotong University in China. It is seeking similar links with institutes in India (Institute of Technology, Madras, Institute of Science, Bangalore, the Indian School of Business School), Indonesia (University of Indonesia, Bandung Institute of Technology), and Malaysia (University of Malaya, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang). NTU aims to be more of a multicultural university.