

**PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG'S NATIONAL DAY RALLY 2008  
(ENGLISH TEXT OF SPEECH IN MALAY), SUNDAY, 17 AUGUST 2008, AT  
THE UNIVERSITY CULTURAL CENTRE, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF  
SINGAPORE**

1. After several good years, our economy faces more challenges this year. The US economy has run into serious trouble, and this is affecting the whole world. The difficulties will continue into next year, at least. Our growth will slow, but I am confident that we can weather the storm.
2. One major worry of Singaporeans is higher inflation. The prices of energy and food have soared worldwide. In Singapore too, prices of many things have gone up. Singaporeans are feeling the pinch. The higher cost of living particularly affects lower-income households, including Malay/Muslim families.
3. The Government is doing its best to ease the burden on Singaporeans. We have distributed substantial assistance in this year's Budget. Nearly every household received something, but the needy and elderly got the most. The assistance they received is enough to cope with rising prices.
4. You can help yourselves. Shop wisely, and go for house brands instead of more expensive brand name products. It is also important for families to be frugal and exercise financial discipline. As the Malay proverb goes: *Ingat sebelum kena, jimat sebelum habis*. (Be mindful of your action before it is too late; save before it is gone)
5. I spoke about this a few months ago, and am encouraged that the Malay/Muslim community has responded constructively. For example, many families have participated in the "Talking Dollars and Sense" programme run by the CDCs. This has helped them to plan their finances, manage their expenses, and reduce their arrears. The families feel less stressed, because they now know how to cope with financial difficulties.
6. In these difficult times, I am worried about the dysfunctional families, especially the future of their children. The Malay/Muslim community is working hard on this problem. I attended PPIS's (Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura or Singapore Muslim Women Association) anniversary dinner last month. I was impressed to see many well-educated Malay/Muslim women with careers and families, but who are actively contributing to PPIS. They are a new generation of professionals. They organise programmes for single mothers and run family service centres. This is an example of successful Malays who have come forward to serve the community.
7. Helping dysfunctional families is a long-term effort. Mendaki is working with Malay/Muslim organisations, through the Community Leaders' Forum, to

mobilise the whole community. The Government is strongly supporting this. The Malay/Muslim community should also support it. In line with this, we should allocate more resources to this effort through Mendaki, from the MBMF or Mosque Building and Mendaki Fund. Then we would be able to achieve even more.

8. Besides funding Mendaki, the MBMF also supports the mosque building programme. This has been a very successful community initiative. For 30 years, through the MBMF, the Malay/Muslim community has built new and modern mosques, one by one, all over Singapore. 22 mosques have been built, and the 23rd, Al-Mawaddah Mosque in Sengkang, will be ready this year. Many visitors from neighbouring countries have seen and admired our mosques, and how they are run. This is indeed a tribute to our Malay/Muslim community.

9. Now the mosque building programme is almost complete. The question is what we should do next? I suggest we start a new programme: a mosque upgrading programme.

10. The older mosques are showing signs of wear and tear. I remember an occasion about 25 years ago, before I entered politics. Then, I was driving. On my way home from Johor Baru, I saw An-Nur Mosque in Woodlands for the first time. It looked beautiful with its blue minaret. I thought to myself, "This is a nice mosque." Older Singaporeans might remember that An-Nur Mosque was built in 1980. It was among the first six "new generation" mosques built under the Mosque Building Fund. Today, it is still beautiful but I have visited An-Nahdhah Mosque in Bishan and its Harmony Centre. I have also seen the design of Al-Mawaddah Mosque which is very impressive. These new mosques are in a different class.

11. It is apparent that the old mosques need a new lease of life. This can be done by upgrading and adding new facilities to our old mosques. For example, we can provide activity rooms for youths, and lifts and ramps for the elderly. The community can then enjoy mosques which are up-to-date, and meet the needs of the modern Muslim community.

12. Our mosque building and mosque upgrading programmes need to be complemented with good religious education programmes. Last year, three full-time madrasahs (Aljunied, Al-Irsyad and Al-Arabiah) came together to form the Joint Madrasah System (JMS). They will work with MUIS to upgrade their programmes, and raise the quality of madrasah education. But to do this, the three madrasahs will need more resources. They intend to raise funds and have asked MUIS for support.

13. The Government has considered this carefully. The madrasahs are not part of the state school system, so it would be difficult to justify government funding. However, there is merit in tapping the broader Malay/Muslim community

for support. We can consider earmarking part of the MBMF for religious education, including for initiatives such as the JMS.

14. I have touched on three major initiatives for the Malay/Muslim community – first, to enhance Mendaki's efforts on dysfunctional families; second, to launch a mosque upgrading programme; and third, to fund religious education from the MBMF. To do them, we need to raise the MBMF contribution rates. At the same time, we will ensure that the rates are affordable, especially for workers earning less.

15. I have discussed these ideas with Minister Yaacob Ibrahim and the Malay MPs. They have sounded out community leaders, and received support for these ideas. Dr Yaacob will work out the details and announce the specific proposals this week.

16. In making these changes to the MBMF and religious education, we should remember our multi-racial and multi-religious society. As we maintain our traditions and practise our religious beliefs, we also need to strengthen our togetherness as one nation. This is how we have kept our society cohesive and harmonious. We must treasure this precious achievement, and do our best to keep it this way.

17. So, as the Malay/Muslim community upgrades the mosques, you should continue to participate in other grassroots activities. The mosques too should organise events with other community organisations.

18. A good example is the Rahmatan Lil Alamin (Blessings to All) event, which I attended at Al-Iman Mosque in Bukit Panjang recently. The event held a blood donation drive and provided meals for poor Singaporeans of all races and religions. The food was cooked by volunteers from all the mosques in Singapore. I did not donate blood but I was lucky to enjoy the delicious nasi briyani.

19. Similarly, while the community upgrades madrasah education, you must also put more resources to improve the study of English, mathematics and science. This way the Malay/Muslim community will continue to make economic and social progress to ensure a bright future for the next generation.

20. The Malay/Muslim community is building a progressive and well-integrated Community of Excellence. The spirit of the community is strong, united and confident. With the Government's full backing and support, let us continue to improve on what we have achieved, and strive for even greater success for the community and for Singapore.