

**OPENING ADDRESS BY PROF S JAYAKUMAR, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
COORDINATING MINISTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITY, AT 2ND INTERNATIONAL
RISK ASSESSMENT AND HORIZON SCANNING SYMPOSIUM 2008, 13 OCTOBER
2008, 9.15 AM AT MARINA MANDARIN SINGAPORE**

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen, and a warm welcome to our friends from abroad.

2 As the International Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning (RAHS) Symposium is into its second season this year, it will focus on the various applications, approaches and challenges to horizon scanning. This symposium also presents opportunities to promote active dialogue and encourage collaboration around horizon scanning concepts and technologies. Over these two days, Singapore will also share our own Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning programme.

Governance in a Complex World

3 Risk assessment and horizon scanning has become a key matter for many governments. We are now living in a highly, and increasingly, complex world. Some of the strategic events which have surprised the world include the Asian Financial Crisis, SARS and 9/11. More recently, we have also been reminded of how uncertain and inter-connected the world is today by issues such as global warming, the sub-prime mortgage crisis, rising oil and commodities prices, food shortages and collapse of financial institutions.

4 These issues offer us only a glimpse of the complexity and uncertainty the future has in store. It is important therefore to have a coherent and systematic framework to anticipate and manage potential changes. However, it is not possible for us to have a crystal ball through which we can see the future, nor can we predict what strategic surprises lie ahead.

5 What the government can do is to encourage a coordinated analysis of trends, weak signals and wild cards, as this makes it more possible for us to anticipate and be prepared for a range of possible futures. This explains why we need to take the business of risk assessment and horizon scanning seriously.

Strategic Anticipation using RAHS

6 Singapore embarked on the RAHS project in 2005 to explore and develop tools that could help us think about possible futures, and anticipate events that might have strategic impact on Singapore. It was an important consideration then that the tools we develop would complement existing structures and processes.

7 Scenario planning has served us well as a strategic planning tool for the last 15 years or so. But there are also limitations to scenario planning as it could not help us

deal with an era of unprecedented complexity and change. New tools had to be explored and integrated into existing strategic planning processes.

8 The RAHS project is thus a journey of discovery. Singapore is actively exploring new approaches to strategic anticipation, with the goal of developing a useful toolkit that would help us analyse and apply different solutions to different problems. In this process of discovery, we would also have to challenge old paradigms and change mindsets.

9 Three years after the inception of the RAHS project, we have developed a useful baseline capability, and have learnt a good deal in the process. Amongst others, we have learnt that RAHS is a natural part of networked government. It offers a whole-of-government approach to detecting and identifying early indicators of strategic issues, both threats as well as opportunities.

10 Another important element is that for RAHS to work well, collaboration is critical. Agencies cannot be working in silos and examining issues in a compartmentalised way. RAHS requires horizontal collaboration and sharing of information across agencies. A useful case in point will be the study on strategic early warning for the aviation domain, where 15 agencies from the aviation security community used RAHS to build models and analyse possible scenarios of threat. Inputs from the various agencies ensured that the models and analyses were reflective of the multi-faceted and complex nature of the issue.

11 The way we think about the future must mirror how the future actually unfolds. As we should have learnt by now, the future is not a straightforward extrapolation of simple, single-domain trends.

12 We have also found that RAHS is useful not just in the traditional security domains, which it was originally conceived for, but also in helping us think systematically about issues as diverse as energy and environmental security, social and demographic trends, and evolving economic and financial conditions. Indeed, the highly uncertain and complex issues are often those which occur where the various domains overlap.

Diversity

13 Diversity is therefore a manifestation of the opportunities and threats we face as well as the character of the approach we should take to dealing with complex issues. Diversity should inform the various processes in horizon scanning. In RAHS, we make use of different sets of tools to address different problem-spaces depending on the level of complexity of the key factors and relationships involved. Different methods, technologies and resources should be explored and tested. This is one reason why the RAHS Experimentation Centre has engaged many local and international agencies in joint experiments, in areas such as maritime security and indicators of national stability.

14 For instance, in maritime security, we have collaborated with a research agency and a university from the U.S., testing tools that can help analyse possible connections between terrorist elements. Separately, we had a major U.S. military command providing technology to look into how analysts could set their own parameters to trigger alerts for maritime threats. Such collaboration is one way to combine and test different approaches and tools, contribute to larger sense-making efforts and help lay the foundations for an effective community of practice.

15 Indeed, the RAHS programme has embarked on an active outreach effort in the past year with the three local universities. It has been used by university students to analyse the supply chain for agricultural commodities (at the Singapore Management University), the Asian Financial Crisis (at NUS), possible futures relating to China, and global food and multi-lateral security issues (at NTU). There were several important motivations for this outreach to local universities. We wanted them to provide feedback to the RAHS system. We also hoped that they would help to build useful models across a diverse spectrum of domains. But, more importantly, we wanted to expose the students, our next generation, to the importance of strategic anticipation and strategic planning.

16 Diversity also characterises the work of the Horizon Scanning Centre. It conducts environmental scanning across a large number of domains. In particular, its job is to focus on cross-cutting trends and on the intersections of domains, where we see emerging strategic issues beginning to appear. Water scarcity is a case in point. The issue of water demand and supply intersects with many other trends and issues such as climate change, demographic change, food production and local conflicts.

17 Additionally, the Horizon Scanning Centre should aim to propose alternative scenarios and challenge the orthodoxy. This is important as early convergence on scenarios or a premature consensus on strategies could lead to a situation where governments are blindsided and exposed to wild cards. A diverse range of views and perspectives is therefore critical. In Singapore, we hope to institutionalise this process through the Horizon Scanning Centre and the network of RAHS agencies. This must also be gradually expanded beyond government and Singapore.

18 A healthy diversity can only be assured when horizon scanning agencies from different countries cooperate in their sensemaking efforts. Some countries have already started this. In the U.S., the Office of the Director of National Intelligence is developing a globally-networked and integrated Intelligence Enterprise based on collaboration and innovation.

19 For us here in Singapore, I understand the RAHS Group has begun discussions on possible projects with a few countries. Singapore provides a favorable environment for experimentation. It is only through pilot projects, exercises and workshops that we will begin to discover the right combination of methods, technologies and approaches useful to the task of risk assessment and horizon scanning. I hope this

symposium will help initiate and catalyse many meaningful conversations on such possible collaboration.

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20 This RAHS symposium again brings together a good mix of practitioners, consultants and academics who have worked on the various aspects of strategic anticipation. We have 19 accomplished speakers here who will share with us on the various applications, approaches and challenges to horizon scanning. I am confident that they will spark some robust and spirited discussion of useful strategies to deal with complex problems.

21 The organisers have informed me that the level of interest in the event has grown. Today, we have about 300 international participants from about 25 countries. This is about 40% more than the previous symposium. Therefore, I would like to commend the organisers, namely the National Security Coordination Secretariat, the Defence Science and Technology Agency and the Centre of Excellence for National Security, for the effort put into organising the symposium.

22 Finally, I hope that it will be an invigorating and rewarding event for all of you. It is my pleasure now to declare the Second International Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning Symposium officially open.

Thank you.