

EMBARGOED TILL AFTER DELIVERY
PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY MINISTER MENTOR LEE KUAN YEW AT BUSINESS CHINA'S
1ST ANNIVERSARY DINNER ON WEDNESDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2008, AT
PARLIAMENT HOUSE**

Since China opened up in 1978, I have visited China almost every year. I have observed the rapid transformation of the people and their economy. In 1992, Deng Xiaoping said: "Learn from the world and, especially Singapore, and do better than Singapore". After his exhortation, we had hundreds of delegations visiting us in 1993-94. I proposed to Premier Zhu Rongji that we have a project of an integrated township, which later became the Suzhou Industrial Park, where we transfer our knowledge in planning, execution and administration. We have since trained about 10,000 of their officials in Singapore. Suzhou is now an icon in China for other special economic zones to learn from. After Suzhou, we are now committed to the Tianjin Eco City project which Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong proposed to Premier Wen Jiabao. This will be a 10-15 years' project.

Singapore Government-linked companies and Singaporean businessmen are known in China for reliability and integrity. Singaporeans will find doors open to them in the provinces, cities and towns. I have met many Singaporeans with Chinese as a Second Language (CL2 or CLB) in non-SAP schools who have improved their Mandarin after six to 12 months of immersion in China. A group from Raffles Institution with CL2 has gone into a consultancy business for Chinese companies to use their Internet methods to recruit and promote their staff. Because they had a basic knowledge and fluency in Mandarin, after six to 12 months in Shanghai, they built up the vocabulary.

The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry set up Business China in November last year. “Business-China” can help those who want to explore business in China by improving their Mandarin and their knowledge of social and cultural conditions of present-day China. With the recent signing of the China–Singapore Free Trade Agreement, there will be many opportunities for Singapore companies in China’s fast-growing markets. We should not miss the many opportunities to expand our businesses in China.

During this present financial crisis, China’s economy will still continue to grow, but at a slower pace of 8% not at 12% before the crisis. When the world economy recovers, China can resume its rapid growth of 10% to 12%.

The young in China’s cities are now fluent in English. But their master language is Chinese; it is their preferred language. Singaporeans interact socially in Mandarin but use English for official or business matters, as our mastery of the Chinese language is at a second language level, not equal to theirs.

To converse in Mandarin socially generates a sense of closeness or “亲切感”. If we understand “Putonghua” and can read Chinese, we will have direct access to Chinese TV programmes, magazines, newspapers and can keep abreast of developments and trends.

In Beijing, I recently met Singaporean Lim Ming Yan when I witnessed the formal opening of “Raffles City”. He heads CapitaLand’s business in China. He did Chinese as a second language in school. At university and in his work, his main language was English. When he was posted to China, he was able to bring his Mandarin up fairly quickly, because of his 12 years in school of having Chinese as a second language. Now, he converses comfortably in Mandarin with the Chinese officials and businessmen.

Our bilingual education policy has equipped our people with a good foundation in their mother-tongues. If they do not use the language regularly,

they will lose fluency but the foundation in their early school years can revive it quickly and widen their vocabulary. “Business-China” can provide the training and opportunities for Singaporeans to refresh their Mandarin and be familiar with the business terminology, and be knowledgeable about current socio-cultural norms in China.

Government and business leaders from China and Singaporeans doing business in China will give talks on China's development plans. Business-China can arrange networking sessions between Singaporean businessmen and visiting Chinese officials, including the “Mayor Class” officials who are at Nanyang Technological University to attend courses on Singapore’s management and development strategies. Business-China will start an e-learning portal with interactive learning resources and reference materials that you can access at your convenience as members.

The media, schools and tertiary institutions, and the Ministry of Trade & Industry and IE Singapore, will support the work of Business China. Good progress has been made in the first year.

Singapore’s high standing in China with both the government officials and businessmen will help you get started. But you must not let down the Singapore’s reputation for reliability and integrity.