

ENGLISH TEXT OF NATIONAL DAY RALLY 2006 SPEECH IN MALAY, SUNDAY 20 AUG 2006, AT THE UNIVERSITY CULTURAL CENTRE, NUS

1. The May elections have settled the direction for Singapore. The outlook is good, and Singapore is set to progress. Over the years, the Malay community has progressed, and we have drawn closer as one people. As a result, the focus and concerns of the community have increasingly converged with broader national issues.

2. One national issue is how to adapt our economy and society to a rapidly changing world. We are developing new industries such as biotechnology and digital media. We are opening promising new markets, including in the Middle East. We must equip our young with the skills and mindsets to seize the new opportunities. Above all, we must retain a strong sense of purpose, resilience and self reliance in our people.

3. I am happy that Malay Singaporeans are doing this. In our ITEs, polytechnics and universities, Malay students are doing well. Young capable Malays are taking up careers in these new fields. They carry out research in biomedical laboratories, design clothes in the fashion business, or do computer graphics in media companies.

4. For example, a recent polytechnic graduate, Mohd Firman bin Osman, is designing computer games at Koei, a leading Japanese game publisher based here. Many other Malays are seizing opportunities abroad. For example, Mr Hendra Ahmad is an engineer at a startup company Underwater Projects Group that designs submarines in Florida. In the UN Development Programme office in New York, Ms Shirin Hamid, is in charge of IT.

5. I know some families still face difficulties. This is why we have many help programmes for them. I encourage them to take advantage of all the schemes available to help them improve their lives. For example, 600 families have joined the Home Ownership Plus Education (HOPE) programme. If your family qualifies for HOPE, please consider joining it.

6. For those who do not have jobs, this is a good time to find jobs. The economy is growing steadily. More than 81,000 jobs were created in the first half of this year. Many companies are short of workers and are hiring. If you keep an open mind and a positive attitude, you will find many good jobs.

7. For example, Mdm Rosmini Sulong a 43-year-old mother of two lost her job in 2002 when her firm closed down. But she pressed on, and sought help from NTUC. She upgraded her skills and found a new job as a healthcare attendant in Singhealth.

8. We should all learn from Mdm Rosmini's spirit of perseverance. If you have been unemployed for some time, seek help from the Distributed

Careerlink Network (DCN) centres. Make the effort to learn new skills, and prepare yourself for the jobs available. Be flexible. The more flexible you are, the more easily you will find jobs. More importantly, don't quit at the first sign of difficulty. Achieve self-reliance and pride. Provide for your families and give a future to your children.

9. At the same time, I encourage employers to be fair and objective in hiring people regardless of race. The government hires people on merit, and judges them by how well they do their job. This is the way to get talent. This is also the basis of our multi-racial society.

10. Another national issue is the impact of new technologies, particularly the internet, on our society. The digital age opens up many opportunities and will transform our lives. But we will be more exposed to external influences, and undesirable or extremist views. Singaporeans need to distinguish what is true or false, good or bad, on the internet. We must work harder to share common experiences, and to develop a national consensus.

11. To maintain our bearings in this new world, we must hold firm to our cultural and moral values. We must also strengthen the emotional ties among Singaporeans and our attachment to our country. ***Di mana bumi dipijak di situlah langit dijunjung*** [Malay proverb which means one must be loyal and uphold the country where one resides]. This will be all the more important for young Singaporeans who grow up connected to the internet, and see opportunities all over the world. As they reach for the stars, we must also imbue in them the obligation to give back to society, and to brighten the lives of others.

12. Aside from these common concerns, there are also several issues more relevant to the Malay community. Last year I talked about dysfunctional families. I am encouraged that the community has responded realistically and constructively.

13. At the Community Leaders' Forum in November last year, concrete programmes were rolled out, such as a Programme for Troubled Teenagers and a Teenage Sexuality Campaign. My Government will support these efforts fully. MCYS will work closely with the Malay/ Muslim groups, assign enough resources to deal with the problem, and help dysfunctional families get their lives back in order.

14. By tackling this problem, the community has shown its can-do spirit. In the same spirit the community has set up the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) to help the JI detainees, and to educate the Muslim public.

15. Malay Singaporeans play an important role in shaping the future of our nation. Singaporeans of all races need to stay united in purpose, and work together as one national team. I am confident the Malay community will continue to hone your skills and build a Community of Excellence. Together, we will create a brighter future for the Malay community and for Singapore in this rapidly changing world.