

**SPEECH BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER TEO CHEE HEAN AT
THE KENT RIDGE MINISTERIAL FORUM ON 5 APRIL 2010,
1900 HRS, AT SHAW FOUNDATION, ALUMNI HOUSE, NUS**

SINGAPORE – FOREVER YOUNG?

1. Singapore is celebrating our 45th birthday this year as an independent country, and its 51st year of self-government.
2. The road from British colony to independent nationhood was fraught with struggle, sacrifice and bloodshed. 45 years ago, we emerged as an ‘accidental nation’. Our prospects were, to say the least, uncertain – an overcrowded third world city made up mostly of immigrants or their children, facing high unemployment, racial and political strife, unfriendly neighbours, and cut off from our hinterland.
3. Some Singaporeans, particularly a segment of the well-educated and more mobile, decided that they were better off seeking their future elsewhere. But most Singaporeans stayed. They either had no choice, as they had no skills and no one else would take them, or they decided that they would stay and work to make this young nation succeed.

4. We were literally a young nation. In 1966, Kandang Kerbau Hospital entered the *Guinness Book of Records* for delivering the highest number of newborns in the world within a single maternity facility for that year, and it continued to hold on to this record for a full decade.

5. The Singapore flag, first unveiled in December 1959, was designed to encapsulate our values and aspirations – the crescent moon signifying our hopes as “a young nation on the ascendant”.

6. Today, we are a vibrant, bustling place. Although there are two and a half times as many people as were here in 1959, we are better housed, move around the island more easily and quickly, have better schools, enjoy more leisure options, and live in peace and security in our homes and in the region. We are healthier and can expect to live nearly 20 years longer, but our population is no longer so young.

7. We are internationally mobile, travelling frequently for leisure and business. Some work abroad – having skills that are sought after in many countries. A number decide that they want to seek their futures elsewhere. At the same time, many are attracted to visit us, more than three times our population each year, for leisure or business. And more people than we can possibly accept want to live and work here.

8. We rate highly in many international comparisons. In a 2009 study, for example, by the US based Caux Roundtable, Singapore stood at 14th world-wide, and highest in Asia, among 200 countries/territories ranked. This composite index takes into account factors such as economy, quality of life, longevity and living standards, plus legal and political institutions. We have done well. However, we have our feet firmly planted on the ground and know that there is room for improvement.

9. But we worry. We worry about an ageing population and low birth rates. We worry that shining new cities such as Dubai – where everything appears bigger, bolder, brasher, brighter – may surpass us. And we witness the re-birth of great metropolises of the past, such as Shanghai and Mumbai. We worry because we want to stay ahead. We worry that thinking we have “arrived”, we might have lost some of that energy and enthusiasm, that daring spirit where we have everything to gain and nothing to lose. We wonder whether as a nation we are still young – like you.

An Attitude of Mind

10. There is no need to look too far into history to know that past success does not guarantee future achievements. The recent experience of two island nations, Ireland and Iceland, holds lessons.

11. Up to just three years ago (till 2008), Ireland was still known as the Celtic Tiger – just as Singapore has been termed one of the East Asian Tigers. Ireland enjoyed impressive sustained rates of investment and growth following structural reforms from the early 1990s. Irish citizens who had left Irish shores years ago to seek employment elsewhere returned home. However, a period of excess in the 2000s led to an asset bubble, which was exacerbated by the global financial crisis in 2008. Today, Ireland's economy is in deep crisis. Unemployment is above 11 percent. In January 2009, 120,000 people, including personnel from the Police and Armed Forces, demonstrated on the streets over government austerity measures to bring the country's finances into balance.

12. Another island nation, Iceland, also enjoyed a boom, particularly in the mid-2000s. It was regarded as quite a miracle. However, poor regulation of the banking and financial sector resulted in a highly leveraged economy. When buying a car, Icelanders could choose which

foreign currency to take their loans in, perhaps half in Euros and half in Yen, at lower interest rates than taking a loan in their local currency. The Icelandic economy collapsed in the late 2000s. As a country and as individual Icelanders, they are now faced with huge debts because the Icelandic currency has fallen sharply, to a third of its value.

13. Ireland and Iceland will stabilise if the countries adopt the appropriate economic and financial measures and the people are prepared to accept a period of austerity. Otherwise, they will wallow in high debt and low growth for a long time.

14. But we do have examples of small countries like Switzerland, or equally relevant to us, cities like New York or London, which have thrived over several centuries. These places have had their ups and downs, but have done well because they have constantly reinvented themselves and adapted to the changing environment. They have managed to remain “young” by being at the forefront of developments, often leading world trends with new and innovative products.

15. Therefore, for city-states like Singapore, being “young” is really an attitude of mind – to keep ourselves socially and economically energetic, competitive and attractive. What are these key attributes or factors?

The DNA of A Young City-State

16. In my view, there are five building blocks that provide us with a strong foundation – our DNA to be a young city-state – that will enable Singapore to continue to thrive into the future.

A Strong Culture of Education and Learning

17. First, a strong culture of education and learning. Education and learning is the best investment we can make for our future.

18. Our students receive a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy – the keys to future learning and continuing education. Singapore students consistently do very well in international comparisons in Science and Mathematics. Our students also do very well in comparisons of literacy. This is quite an achievement considering that our students take their literacy test in English, which is not the home language for most of our students.

19. Such achievements are possible because parents and students place a lot of importance on education. And we have consistently invested significant resources to improve the quality of education in every school and for every student. Our schools also help students develop qualities

such as independent thinking, social responsibility, self-awareness and teamwork, which are important skills for the future work environment.

20. Our students and education system have also increasingly recognised the value of diversity. Students can increasingly choose to achieve success by pursuing education pathways that match their interests and individual abilities. I am particularly happy with the success of the NUS High School of Mathematics and Science, the Singapore Sports School, and the School of the Arts, which cater to students with exceptional talents and interests in these fields. We also have schools which cater to late developers. And our neighbourhood schools increasingly have niches of excellence in wide-ranging fields from robotics to the performing arts.

21. Our universities, polytechnics and Institute of Technical Education are among the best in their class in the world, and we are investing heavily to make them even better. For instance, the Institute of Technical Education rolled out new programmes at its School of Design and Media last year. Our polytechnics – in partnership with the newly established Singapore Institute of Technology – are collaborating with overseas universities to provide poly graduates pathways to obtain degrees in niche fields. And the new Singapore University of Technology and Design,

which will collaborate with MIT and Zhejiang University, will add further dynamism to our university landscape.

22. In 2008, we introduced a comprehensive Continuing Education and Training Masterplan to allow workers to continually upgrade their skills. One of the key tasks of the National Productivity and Continuing Education Council, which I chair, is to re-examine this masterplan and put in place a world-class continuing education system for Singaporeans.

23. Ultimately, education is not just about institutions. Learning is an attitude of mind, and a lifelong process. A strong culture of education and continuous learning keeps our people fresh, young and relevant, no matter what their ages are. This is one of the keys to keeping Singapore and our people “Forever Young”.

Seeking Knowledge, Innovation and Ideas
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24. Complementing a strong culture of education and learning is a culture of seeking knowledge, innovation and ideas. This is the second building block.

25. In the next phase of Singapore's economic growth, we need to focus not only on cost-effectiveness and efficiency, but also on innovation and knowledge creation. Therefore, we have invested to grow Singapore as an R&D hub in areas ranging from electronics to pharmaceuticals, from wealth management to water management, from biomedical engineering to financial engineering, and also in new areas such as media and design.

26. Many of you are familiar with Biopolis and Fusionopolis, our hubs for biomedical and engineering research, just across the Ayer Rajah Expressway from you. Our intention is to grow such research centres in collaboration with private sector research, to create new knowledge and seed the new industries and products on which our future economy and wealth will be based.

27. We have managed to attract a critical mass of top scientists to work in Singapore, spread their passion for research, and nurture and groom young scientists among our top students.

28. And because of the talent pool we have and our growing reputation as an ideas hub, many foreign MNCs are drawn to Singapore. This creates good, high-value jobs for our people. Let me give you two

examples. Rolls-Royce is in the process of constructing a Rolls-Royce Campus at Seletar Aerospace Park. Its total investment in this Campus will exceed S\$700 million, and will create some 500 new jobs, when fully operational. Those of you who play video games may be familiar with Electronic Arts or EA, the world's largest video game developer. EA has located its Asia-Pacific headquarters and one of its largest game development studios in the region in Singapore.

29. If we are trapped in the industries of the past, we will become the new “rust belt”, with old factories, making old products, using old skills. If we have to depend only on imported ideas, we will not be able to climb beyond our current economic level to new heights, and will eventually be surpassed and left behind. To be “Forever Young”, we need to be at the forefront of knowledge and innovation – creators and not just users of ideas.

A Vibrant and Sustainable Global City

30. The third building block is for Singapore to be a vibrant and sustainable global city – a city where people want to live, work and play, and can enjoy an active and fulfilling life. Singapore also has to be an environmentally sustainable city.

31. If we think that Singapore is going to be a crowded city, then consider the following. The world passed an important tipping point last year – with more than half the world’s population now living in cities. By 2050, more than 70 percent of an even bigger world population will be living in urban areas. There will be many cities, which are bigger and more crowded than Singapore. And people will want to live in such cities. Why is that so?

32. In spite of crowding and other drawbacks, living in cities makes economic sense. The concentration of people and resources in close proximity to each other has a great multiplier effect in generating innovation and economic activity. By 2050, 86 percent of the population in rich countries will be living in cities. According to Eduardo Lopez Moreno, the co-author of the *UN’s State of the World Cities* report, “The world’s largest 40 mega-regions currently cover only a tiny fraction of our planet, and are home to fewer than 18 percent of the world’s population, [but they] account for 66 percent of all economic activity and about 85 percent of technological and scientific innovation”.

33. What are mega-regions? According to the report, the world’s mega-cities are merging to form vast mega-regions. In the future, they

will grow and potentially stretch hundreds of kilometres across countries, and be home to more than 100 million people each.

34. Though cities only occupy two percent of the Earth's land area, they consume over 75 percent of its natural resources. There is a pressing need for sustainable urban development solutions. Because of Singapore's unique circumstances, we have the opportunity to be at the forefront of successful urban living – which is connected, safe, sustainable, and socially integrated.

35. Fortunately, we have got our basics right in city-planning. By continually looking for ways to make Singapore a better home, we have developed expertise in areas critical to the good functioning of a city, such as urban planning, traffic management, public housing and water management.

36. In addition to the “hardware”, we have also been building up the “software” that makes Singapore an exciting and livable city. Social integration and community policing contribute as much to keeping a city safe and successful as do constructing new buildings. Our arts and sports scenes are also taking off. Singapore now hosts many international acts and festivals. For example, the last Singapore Biennale was a resounding

success, pulling in more than half a million visitors. We also innovated by hosting the first-ever F1 Grand Prix night race in 2008. The next highlight for us will be the Youth Olympic Games later this year. When our new Sports Hub is completed, with a wonderful new stadium with a retractable roof, it will be a magnet for sporting events.

37. It is no surprise then that we have moved into the field of providing urban solutions for sustainable living. While we are already at the forefront in integrated traffic management and public transport, MIT and our universities are carrying out research in Singapore on future urban transportation. We are already a pioneer in water management with NEWater, and are carrying out R&D to do even better.

38. Our new growth precincts such as Marina Bay and Punggol will serve as “living laboratories” for new ideas and technology in sustainable development. Others are studying how we socially integrate our housing estates, or even build and manage mosques. A city that is not built for sustainable and renewable living – physically and socially – will eventually choke on itself and atrophy.

39. We keep on renewing our city – upgrading our HDB estates with new facilities, redeveloping them to provide better-designed housing, and

ensuring that they are socially well-integrated; sprucing up Orchard Road with new malls and a cosmopolitan street life that excite Singaporeans and visitors from any culture. Even our historic buildings are given a new lease of life and look new. We also have a new waterfront skyline with iconic landmarks such as the Marina Barrage, Singapore Flyer and the Marina Bay Sands IR. And the Gardens by the Bay project will create a refreshing new lung in the heart of the city. We do not let our city decay, and are forever keeping it young.

A Vibrant and Dynamic Population

40. Being a vibrant global city helps us with our fourth building block, which is to be a magnet for talent and to rejuvenate our population. For without a sustainable and renewable population, even the best formulated national strategies and policies will not bring Singapore growth and progress.

41. As a city-state, Singapore does not have the natural, unhindered inflow of population from a large rural domestic hinterland. If we shut our doors and keep people out, we will starve ourselves of this natural inflow that our competitor cities have. But as a city-state, we have one big advantage over our competitor cities – they have few tools to regulate this

rural inflow, while we can shape, with immigration controls, who comes to Singapore. We thus constantly adjust the tap so that we can bring in the people that we need to sustain population and economic growth and dynamism, while maintaining our social cohesion and stability.

42. Our current birth rates are not able to rejuvenate our population. Based on our projections, one in five residents in Singapore will be 65 and above by 2030, compared to one in 12 today. Even if our birth rates improve, we will want to bring in others with useful skills and expertise to add to our population and talent pool. Other countries, especially those with a dwindling population, are adopting a similar approach. The US and Australia are encouraging foreign students studying in their universities to stay on after graduation. Some of you may also have read in the newspapers that New Zealand has launched a pilot project to attract working Singaporeans and students to their country.

43. Whether migrants that we want will choose to settle in Singapore depends not just on Singapore. Migration tends to take place in waves – when there is a confluence of push and pull factors which make migration attractive. We cannot be sure that this current wave of migration to Singapore will continue as conditions in the home countries of potential

migrants, and in other countries which are attracting well-qualified migrants, improve.

44. Singapore itself is for the most part, a nation of immigrants. This is one of the characteristics that defines us. It is both a challenge for social integration, while a strength for global integration. For most of us, at some point, our forefathers arrived from somewhere else, escaping from poverty, unrest or social injustice, coming to Singapore in search of work and opportunity. Some of the challenges that today's immigrants face settling into Singapore are similar to those our forefathers may have faced. I hope that Singaporeans will welcome our new immigrants and appreciate what they bring to Singapore, while those who come to Singapore make an effort to settle-in and integrate into our society. Together we can build the society that our founding fathers envisaged when they drew up the ideals and hopes of our young nation.

A Strong and Forward-Looking Leadership

45. Finally, the fifth building block. Underpinning our ability to tackle the challenges confronting us is a strong and forward-looking leadership. This means having the right people in-charge – a capable, experienced and committed team that is able to look ahead, understand the concerns

and aspirations of all Singaporeans, make the right decisions – tough ones if necessary – and lead our country forward. Our Government plans for the long-term, constantly thinking ahead, making and implementing plans for our next phase of growth. While many other countries are still mired in dealing with the financial crisis and its aftermath, we have already laid out plans for the next bound and are rallying our people to achieve them.

46. We will continue to need outstanding national leadership to keep Singapore on the right trajectory for social cohesion, growth and development. Leadership, however, is also needed at many levels in Singapore. Increasingly, Singaporeans want to contribute to the community – whether it is their immediate neighbourhoods, to the less fortunate in our society, in the arts or sports. And their services are needed. I am glad to see that many Singaporeans, both young and old, are socially motivated and want to make a difference. This will help to build a more vibrant and active people sector which will complement our public and private sectors. We need active citizens who are prepared to come forward to actively and constructively contribute to making Singapore a better home for all of us.

47. Leadership renewal is therefore key. We must continue to rejuvenate our leadership, at all levels, and inject new perspectives. This

is a challenge faced by many countries as well as organisations worldwide. And it is only those countries and organisations, which have in place a system and process for leadership renewal, that continue to maintain their vitality and success over the long-term.

Staying Forever Young

48. I am optimistic about our future. Singapore has the key attributes that will allow us to climb to new heights in the new world ahead of us. Our people will keep themselves fresh and relevant by always learning; we will seed new products and industries; we will be a model sustainable city, vibrant, exciting and eminently livable, standing out from the stifling sprawl of mega-urban regions; we will remain open to people who share our ideals and dreams, socially integrated and globally connected, together building a nation; and we can count on you to lead this nation with fore-sight, commitment and passion, keeping Singapore Forever Young!

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