

SPEECH BY MR LIM SWEE SAY, MINISTER OF STATE FOR MINISTRIES OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY AT THE CLOSING OF THE MALAY LANGUAGE MONTH 2000 ON SATURDAY, 26 AUGUST 2000 AT 4.15PM AT THE SINGGAHSANA HALL, MALAY VILLAGE, GEYLANG SERAI

When I was young, I like to fly kite. I lived on the third floor of a 4-storey HDB flat. I flied my kite from the common corridor on the highest floor because the wind was stronger up there. It was easier for the kite to catch the wind and take off.

During the kite-flying season, there were many kites in the sky. I painted my kites with bright colours and nice patterns so that it would stand out in the sky. I used glass powder to sharpen my line, in case other boys tried to use their kites to cut mine.

There were many trees in the housing estate. I made sure that my kite was balanced and could fly straight. I used a combination of "pulling back" and "letting go" of the line to control the path and direction of the kite, so that it would stay away from the trees.

When the weather turned bad, when I had enough fun, I pull back the line, retrieved the kite, and returned home.

There are some similarities between kite flying and competing in the Knowledge Based Economy.

There are many opportunities in the New Economy. Like catching the wind, it is easier to catch these opportunities from a higher and more supportive platform.

So we develop state of the art infrastructure and strengthen our capabilities in technology, to offer a conducive environment for Singaporeans to have a head start in the KBE.

Competition will be keen and strong, just like the many kites in the sky. We therefore invest heavily in education and lifelong learning. We also nurture technopreneurship and promote innovation.

Just like the glass powder, these efforts enable Singaporeans and our local start-ups to acquire new skills and better capabilities to compete in the New Economy.

Some of our old rules and regulations may hamper the growth of the New Economy, just like trees in the housing estate waiting to trap the kites. We have therefore reviewed and updated some of our rules and regulations, to create more space for the new start-ups to innovate and take off faster.

We have made a good start so far. We will continue to create a more conducive and supportive environment for Singaporeans to join the KBE.

However, the efforts of the Government alone will not be enough to speed up the development of KBE in Singapore. The various communities need to find ways to encourage and help more

Singaporeans, young and old, to learn new skills and acquire new knowledge, in the school or at the workplace.

Only by embracing life-long learning, can every Singaporean, young and old, like a colourful kite, catch the wind when the wind is up, fly straight and soar to great height.

At the same time, as we pursue exciting opportunities in the New Economy, it is important that we continue to nurture in Singaporeans a stronger sense of emotional attachment to the community, and to Singapore.

This emotional attachment is very much like the string that links the high flying kites to the solid ground. As long as this link is strong, it enables the kites to soar high in the sky, without being blown away by the strong wind up there.

If this link is cut, the kites may continue to float high in the sky for a short while more if the wind remains strong. But when the rain comes in, or when the wind dies down, the kites will end up somewhere on the trees, or in the drains, all broken up.

To preserve this link, we must continue to strengthen our cultural heritage and our Singapore identity.

It is important to promote the learning and use of mother tongue because language is not just for acquiring knowledge. Language embodies the learning of manners, passing down of noble Asian values, and appreciation of our cultural roots.

We also need to promote the proper and courteous use of language because it reflects the good upbringing and good mannerism of a person. As we make the transition into the information age, it is unwise for us to use impolite or improper language in any form of communication, including emails on the Internet. This applies to all languages, Malay, Mandarin, Tamil or English.

I commend you for your efforts in promoting the use of standard Malay through the Malay Language Month. Over the years, the improper use of English in Singapore has led to Singlish. And now, the improper use of English on Internet has led to a new form of Internet English. We must put in our best efforts to make sure that this does not happen to our mother tongues, namely the Malay, Mandarin and Tamil languages.

The creation of www.bahasawan.org, a portal of the Singapore Malay Language Council, is a timely move. It is a platform for Malay language users not only in Singapore but also the region and the world. We should make full use of the portal, and expand it to promote the use of Standard Malay through the cyberspace.

I thank you again for this honour to join you at the closing of The Malay Language Month. Let us all work together to encourage our fellow Singaporeans to learn new skills and knowledge; and to

Speak good mother tongue so as to help deepen our cultural roots and strengthen our Singapore identity as we enter the new age of KBE and information society. Thank you.