

## Minister Josephine Teo's Speech at the MCI Family and SNDGO Joint Scholarship Award Ceremony 2023

My Parliamentary colleagues SMS Janil Puthucheary and SMS Tan Kiat How

Parents of scholars

Colleagues

1. Good afternoon, I am happy to join you for this year's Joint Scholarship Award Ceremony. We are conferring 85 awards by six agencies across MCI and SNDGG. It is proud moment for all our award recipients, as well as your loved ones. Congratulations!
2. You are about to embark on a new journey, that will expand your horizons and open up opportunities you may not have imagined. Your sponsoring organisations have high hopes, that you will return to serve the public and help keep Singapore a shining red dot.
3. Most of you were born in the new millennia, after the year 2000. Most of you, I suspect, have only a vague impression of our founding Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew.
4. When he died in 2015, there was a surge of interest in his life and work, though I'm not sure what you remember of it. You were in your teens at that time, with many preoccupations like getting good grades, taking part in sports or volunteering in the community.
5. As a young officer in the Economic Development Board, I spent two years in the Suzhou Industrial Park which Mr Lee took a deep interest in. Later, I was fortunate to be among the last batch of MPs who had a chance to interact personally with Mr Lee. He was kind enough to include me on four working visits abroad – to China, India, Indonesia, and Australia. I also served as Board Member and CEO of Business China, which Mr Lee launched in 2007, together with then China Premier Wen Jiabao, and remained as sponsor until he passed.
6. Mr Lee and his team made possible a Singapore that I could be proud to be citizen of. Without the opportunities he and the founding fathers created, there is no reason our lives are generally better than those who are equally capable born in many other countries around the world.
7. Among the many institutions the founding fathers built up and the legacy they left, the public service stands out for its consistent emphasis on integrity, service and excellence.



8. For most of our scholars, it is this public service that you will join on completion of your studies, and this public service that you must try and strengthen for the benefit of fellow Singaporeans.
9. This being the centenary of Mr Lee's birth, I wondered what else he left that could inspire those of us who serve the public through government agencies like MCI, NLB, IMDA, CSA, GovTech and SNDGO? It turns out that Mr Lee was prescient, and he saw much further into the future than most people did.
10. In 1998 - before many of us started going online - and in a time when the word "Internet" was just entering the lexicon of Parliaments worldwide, Mr Lee already recognised the power and potential of this transformative technology. Then, at the Asian Media Conference in Los Angeles, he warned that: "the Internet is as much a purveyor of truth as it is of outright lies.<sup>1</sup>" But, he also said, "Governments that try to fight the new technology will lose". Mr Lee's speech was made well before the era of social media. However, there can be no mistaking the key thrust of his message – which is that **Singapore must embrace technology, know its risks but not be afraid to harness its benefits.**
11. This attitude has in fact shaped developments in the MCI family, from policy officers in HQ instituting new laws on Online Safety and articulating Singapore's vision of "AI for the Public Good", to IMDA setting out its Digital Connectivity Blueprint and building up tech talents in areas like 5G and Cloud.
12. We see the Government's conviction also through CSA's vigilance in safeguarding our cyberspace and GovTech's persistence when transforming digital government services.
13. We will need scholars - like **Aryan Agrawal, Jerome Lim and Elsa Lee** - who are recipients of our Smart Nation scholarship and passionate about cybersecurity and technology, to help us promote and protect our digital space.
14. And we will need the same conviction in the future leaders in the infocomm and media sectors, such as our SG Digital Scholars **Shao Yang** and **Calleen Koh**.
15. Not only do we need to learn and embrace technologies, we have a collective duty to bridge the digital divide. This means helping those who are daunted or have fewer resources, gain access and confidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Speech by Mr Lee Kuan Yew at the Asian Media Conference, Los Angeles, 29 Oct 1998



16. This is why, in the digital age, NLB has taken on new roles as “Equaliser” and “Learning Marketplace”, whilst remaining steadfast in its core mission of nurturing an informed citizenry and encouraging Singapore story tellers.
17. As Mr Lee reminded us in 1970, “One test of an educated man is his ability to continue reading and learning throughout his life<sup>2</sup>.”
18. NLB scholars **Mandy Lim** and **Colin Hia**, will be glad to know that as recently as 2006, Mr Lee affirmed his belief that “even with the Internet and a myriad of online search engines and e-books, libraries will have a central role<sup>3</sup>”.
19. Another challenge for MCI is the fast-evolving media landscape, where opinions can be polarized and divisive on issues relating to race, religion and LGBTQ. In the year of our independence, Mr Lee already warned “Either we learn to think in terms of the national interest, instead of sectional interest, or we are in trouble. <sup>4</sup>”
20. Our Information Service Scholars like **Abdul Mateen** and **Faith Ngien** will need to apply creativity and harness the power of media for nation building, to help Singapore navigate complex times, strengthen trust between Singaporeans and stay united when society comes under pressure, as we did during the COVID-19 pandemic.
21. Keep in mind what Mr Lee said that “without a clear enunciation of government positions and policies and the reasons for them, it is not possible to rally people around common goals<sup>5</sup>.”

## Conclusion

22. There are many more of our scholars I did not name, but whose enthusiasm and potential give us much reason for hope.
23. We are confident that you will do your utmost to further build our Smart Nation. I look forward to meeting and greeting you and your loved ones during tea later.
24. In closing, allow me to share just one more quote from Mr Lee that recognises the limitations of looking to the past. He said, “Each generation has to reflect

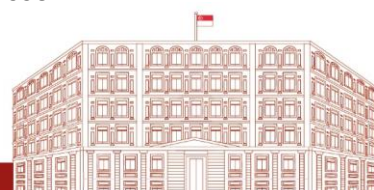
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<sup>2</sup> Speech by Mr Lee Kuan Yew at the opening of the Queenstown Branch Library on 30 Apr 1970

<sup>3</sup> Speech by Mr Lee Kuan Yew at the official opening of the Li Ka Shing Library at Singapore Management University, Bras Basah Road on 24 Feb 2006

<sup>4</sup> Speech by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, when he opened Trade Union House and Singapore Conference Hall at Shenton Way on 15 Oct 1965

<sup>5</sup> Speech by Mr Lee Kuan Yew at the Asian Media Conference, Los Angeles, 29 Oct 1998



its own experiences and to adjust to a new environment and the expectation of more changes to come<sup>6</sup>.

25. Mr Lee himself was always willing to challenge his own assumptions, and change course, if necessary, I had witnessed this for myself.

26. As future leaders, you are torchbearers entrusted with the responsibility of pathfinding, and shaping Singapore's destiny. You will meet unique challenges of your time, but we have the confidence that you will be able to overcome them as long as all of us make the effort to preserve Singapore's DNA of being forward-looking, adaptable and united.

27. So, on that note, congratulations once again to all our scholars and your proud parents. Thank you!

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<sup>6</sup> Transcript of Mr Lee Kuan Yew's interview with Max Christern of NRC Handelsblad on 30 Jul 1999 at Istana

