



# SPEECH

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**SPEECH BY DR MALIKI OSMAN, MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, AND MAYOR, SOUTH EAST DISTRICT, AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF SMU'S SG50 BOOK, "SINGAPORE AT 50: THE BUSINESS OF NATION-BUILDING", AT SMU, 21 AUGUST 2015, 0930HRS**

Professor Arnoud De Meyer, President of the Singapore Management University,  
Members of SMU and the media,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

1. I am very happy to be here this morning to launch SMU's latest publication, Singapore at 50: The Business of Nation-Building. This publication could not have come at a more opportune moment, this being Singapore's Golden Jubilee and also SMU's 15th year of establishment. My heartiest congratulations to everyone who had been involved in this project!

2. I was reminded last week while watching the National Day Parade, and I hope you had the chance to watch the parade too, of how much we can achieve as a nation when we work together. The atmosphere was electrifying, and made all the more powerful because we knew that Singaporeans in Singapore and around the world were celebrating as one people and one nation, as we waved our flags and sang songs from our heart. The Parade gave us a chance to appreciate the work of our Pioneers for building Singapore into what it is today; to reflect upon our achievements; and inspire the younger generations to work towards a better future. It is my hope that the Singapore flag that flew so high during the Parade will continue to fly with pride as the next generation takes on the mantle of nation-building for more years to come.

## **Building the Hardware: Transformation of Singapore from Third World to First**

3. What is nation-building? Much has been said about nation-building in the context of hardware and heartware.

4. Many have said that Singapore's transformation is a miracle. We have strong fundamentals and are "hard-wired" to do the necessary to succeed. We grew up with the survival instinct and hardwork is a value we internalise. I know that for a fact, because I was born in 1965. And for 50 years, I hear nothing from my parents but just work very very hard. Today, we have attained a high level of GDP on par with First World nations, we boast some of the best educational institutions in the world and countries all over the world come to us to learn about our urban planning and civil service and how we can house our people and make almost 90% of them home owners in just one generation. This book covers a total of 17 Singaporean organisations and industry sectors that have been key in the transformation of Singapore.

5. For our Pioneers, to build these sectors from scratch amidst the bleak circumstances that we found ourselves in 1965, was no easy feat. To turn them into world-class organisations within one generation is surely a testimony of our Pioneers' visionary leadership, fortitude, hard work and sheer resolve; that which gave them the strength to make tough decisions and surmount significant challenges.

6. It is indeed an honour that the Singapore Armed Forces forms the opening chapter of this book, marking also 50 years of the SAF's establishment. In some way, such an arrangement drives across a very important message that a strong and credible defence forms the foundation for Singapore's progress and prosperity. As you read through this chapter, I am sure you will agree that the progress of the SAF over the past 50 years has been nothing short of remarkable too. 50 years ago, many doubted that Singapore could be defended at all but 50 years on, no one doubts the ability of the SAF to protect Singapore. From our humble beginnings of having only two wooden-hull boats, a CESSNA training aircraft and six high-frequency radio sets, the SAF today boasts a comprehensive range of advanced platforms across our three Services such as our F-15SGs, Leopard 2SG Main Battle Tanks and our frigates. During the recent NDP, you would have caught a glimpse of the SAF's assets and capabilities via the Mobile Column and aerial displays. Time and

time again, the SAF has responded at a moment's notice when called upon; whether it is to tackle security challenges or bring relief when disaster strikes. Our servicemen and women have received compliments from their foreign counterparts during multilateral exercises and international missions.

7. MINDEF and the SAF do not take their hard-won achievement for granted. National Service (NS) is the cornerstone of our defence. Our soldiers are committed to protecting our home, our way of life and our future. However, nothing strengthens their commitment more than the support they receive from their families, employers and the community. At this point, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the close relationship that SMU and the SAF have forged over the years, and to thank SMU for being a partner in their support for NS and in our endeavour to develop our people to the fullest potential.

### **Building the Heartware: Singapore Identity and Social Cohesion**

8. But of course, nation-building isn't just about developing the economy, building up infrastructure or creating a strong military. It is more than that. It goes further into the softer aspects and involves the shared sense of identity that is built on intangible elements that tie people together – that which forms our shared objectives of our nation and our common Singaporean values. The challenge for Singapore has always been to maintain our social cohesiveness, amidst factors that threaten to pull us apart. We have been tested as a nation, going through several economic downturns, national crises like SARS and security threats like the Jemaah Islamiah episode. Each time, we emerge stronger as a people, believing in ourselves that our destiny is in our own hands. Going forward, we need to maintain a common sense of identity and purpose, which can be strengthened by collective experiences that bind communities and individuals together.

9. For Singapore, NS is one such collective experience. Like what the late Dr Goh Keng Swee said, and I quote “nothing creates loyalty and national consciousness more speedily and more thoroughly than participation in defence and membership of the armed forces.” That crucible of NS forges a very strong mutual understanding and social harmony among our population, so much so that Singaporeans help each other in need and always recognise each other overseas!

10. As we move forward, we will face significant challenges of a fast aging population and a young generation growing up in circumstances completely different from the preceding generation coupled with competition from an open yet highly volatile global economy. The social fabric will transform and the nature of the ties that bind us as a nation will evolve.

### **Working Together to Shape our Collective Future**

11. Looking forward, Singapore's journey in the next phase of nation-building will be just as challenging as it has been for the past fifty years. We will need to find new ways to forge ahead in this challenging global economy while taking care of those who are less fortunate and those lagging behind. We will need to work even harder to improve the quality of living, being inclusive and recognising the potential of every Singaporean. More importantly, we will need to maintain our special Singaporean identity and common purpose so that Singaporeans continue to be invested in making our home the best one for our children and their children.

12. To be sure, Singapore is in a position of strength, having emerged from the transformations illustrated in the book. I hope these 17 stories will be a source of inspiration for the younger generations, so that they can address the challenges facing our nation with the same passion, resolve and sense of unity possessed by our Pioneers.

### **Conclusion**

13. In closing, I applaud and thank SMU in initiating this project and bringing it to completion. This book is indeed a wonderful way to mark 50 years of Singapore and a fine contribution by SMU's Centre of Management Practice that has shown tremendous dedication and commitment in researching and compiling this rich collection of stories. I would also like to thank all the other organisations involved in this collaboration, for sharing your journey and stories. Once again, my heartiest congratulations to SMU and the launch of Singapore at 50: The Business of Nation-Building. Thank you.

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