

**Speech by Minister K Shanmugam**

Excellencies, friends and distinguished colleagues,

1           A very good evening to all of you.

2           “Little Red Dot” – President Habibie first used the term to tell us how small we were and to tell us we should know our place in life. Little could he have realised his phrase will become immortalised and in many ways come to symbolise the very opposite of what he intended to convey – small yes, but steely, determined, resolute, successful, and influential. Volumes 1 and 2 of *The Little Red Dot* put forward perspectives on Singapore’s development through the eyes of our own diplomats. Today, Volume III allows us to see ourselves through the eyes of our friends from other parts of the world. We thank Prof Tommy Koh and his team who have put together this collection of stories unique to Singapore – it reminds us of the human face of diplomacy and nation-building.

3           Singapore is turning 50 next year as an independent nation. It is a major historical milestone for us. When we first started, few believed we would survive as a nation-state. Without this series of books, few apart from senior MFA officials or diplomats would know the inner workings and the diplomatic challenges when we first started.

4           In Volume I of *The Little Red Dot*, our first Ambassador to Egypt Mr Lee Khoon Choy, wrote that the job of a diplomat was not only about bilateral relations, but also to understand the mindset, lifestyle, and culture of the host country. Without precedents, our first generation of diplomats had to learn how to do this by trial and error.

5           We live in challenging times. Volume II of the series carried us through the rollercoaster of crises upon crises that our diplomats had to face in the 2000s, such as September 11, SARS, and the Boxing Day Tsunami, to name a few.

6           The essays in this third volume weave our story into a larger fabric of interdependencies among nations and societies. *The Little Red Dot* brings to life many interesting stories of this process of learning and immersion.

7           It came naturally for the authors of these stories; some saw the similarities Singapore shared with their home, yet others have made Singapore their home! They have all become part of the living, breathing, story of Singapore.

8           For the Singaporeans amongst us this evening, you may appreciate Dr Ashraf's anecdote in his essay about discovering Singapore as an ordinary person. Dr Ashraf, you spoke of the leadership that has helped to build Singapore, but for me, your story also underscored the complexity of state-society relations. Because we have lived in the rhythm of this "choreography" all our lives, it is not always apparent in our daily hustle and bustle - though we should always remember - that the contribution of every citizen keeps that rhythm going.

9           I don't want to spoil a good read, but there are several excellent stories in this book of weathering through crises together, of collaboration and discourse between Singapore and our friends. These drive home Frank Lavin's point about building mutual trust, and how there is no better time to demonstrate friendship than in critical junctures.

10          The story of diplomatic relations is never straightforward, but the perennial task of a diplomat is to find multiple avenues to work towards common ground, and we have to strive tirelessly towards this. Our friends have shown us where we have done well. They have also said where more can be done.

11          We are now at crossroads as Singapore embarks on the next fifty years, with a new generation of Singaporeans born after our independence. As we move forward to our next stage of development, it makes sense to pause and look back at our diplomatic history and reflect on the words of our foreign friends written

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in this volume. On that note, I will leave you to discover more of *The Little Red Dot's* pearls of wisdom. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I did. Thank you.

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