

SPEECH BY MR HENG SWEE KEAT, MINISTER FOR FINANCE
LAUNCH OF INAUGURAL VOLUMES OF *SINGAPORE CHRONICLES*
MOOT COURT, BLOCK B LEVEL 1, NUS BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS
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Mr Janadas Devan, Director of the Institute of Policy Studies,

Professor Wang Gungwu, Chairman of the Governing Board, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good morning. I am very pleased to join you at this very special moment for the launch of the *Singapore Chronicles* by the Institute of Policy Studies.

Introduction

2. It is a special moment. IPS presented this proposal to the SG50 Steering Committee about a year ago. The committee readily supported this proposal, because it is a worthy and exciting project. It is unprecedented in scope and takes a relevant approach. A series of 50 books on Singapore has not been attempted before. I am a bookworm and I looked forward to sitting down with 50 books on Singapore.
3. But it is not just that. It is important to know our history – what brought us here. A famous saying goes, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”. This was said by George Santayana. Indeed, we don’t want our young to repeat the darker times of our history, such as the racial riots.
4. Let me add to that – Those who cannot remember the past may miss the future. We are coming to the end of our SG50 year. We must look towards not just SG51, but much, much further than that.
5. The capstone event of SG50 year is The Future of Us exhibition. Prime Minister has just launched *SGfuture*, and, as you know, I have a deep interest in the Future Economy. I believe you cannot build towards the future without a deep

understanding and appreciation of the past. The *Singapore Chronicles* serve not only as a reminder of how far we have come, but as a reference for our way forward.

6. There is a certain Singapore Spirit that courses through our history, and through the volumes of the Singapore chronicles. The Singapore Spirit is made up of the qualities shown by our pioneers as they made a big difference, out of almost nothing, by being resilient, rugged, resourceful. It has grown out of our place in the world – principled, adaptable, self-reliant, and open to the world. And it is what we have developed amongst ourselves as friends and neighbours – paying attention to and caring for one another; drawing strength from our rich racial, religious and cultural diversity.
7. My hope is that, as we work towards the future, we and our young will draw out our best, from our history, build upon it, and grow the Singapore Spirit.
8. To do this, it is useful to have a set of primers, accessible to all. This series of primers is a factual analysis of events, institutions and processes. These are not polemical tracts that argue one way or the other. The point is not to establish a definitive point of view, but to make available our history – readers are free to form our own impressions.

Chronicling Singapore's history

9. Some defining themes make the series full, deep, and relevant.
10. One theme relates to our pre-Independence days. Our history stretches back 700 years at least. So it is good that the *Singapore Chronicles* series covers pre-colonial Singapore, colonial Singapore, the Japanese Occupation, the Emergency, Merger, Confrontation and Separation. Our story is incomplete without these historical watermarks.
11. Another theme focuses on institutions that helped turn a city into a nation-state once independence was thrust upon it. These range from the Constitution, the Presidency, Governance, Law, Policing and Multiracialism to the Economy, Transport and Gateways.
12. And yet another theme is the external dimension. Through the volumes on Defence and Diplomacy, we understand the realities of being a small island nation. How we present and conduct ourselves externally is fundamentally an expression of who we are, what kind of society we want to have, and thus defend – a multiracial and meritocratic way of life.

13. And finally, a theme on who we are and what matters to us – our sense of Identity. Volumes dealing with the arts, literature, heritage, flora and fauna, food, and sports reveal the crucial importance of culture in the confident self-definition of a nation.
14. Though IPS did not put it to me in this way, I find the whole series tells the story of our Singapore Spirit. In our institutions, we see our integrity, honesty, striving for excellence. In our external and economic affairs, we see our principles, our adaptability, our strength in spite of our size, and our openness to the world. In our social and cultural histories, we see the everyday ruggedness and resilience of ordinary Singaporeans, and we see the care we have for one another regardless of race, language, or religion.
15. Throughout, we see our determination to build, defend, and grow a multi-racial, meritocratic society of our own – our own Singapore, our own home.

Conclusion

16. Let me congratulate IPS on creating this knowledge bank for us to gain a deeper understanding of our past and ourselves.
17. Let me also thank all the contributing writers for your thoughtful authorship. To write is easy, to write concisely is hard, and to write concisely on such deep topics is even harder. I look forward to reading your work, and I must give special thanks to Arun Mahizhnan., Asad Latif, Sim Jui Liang and Susan Long, who drove this project for IPS. I know this series of books took a lot of attention.
18. When we grow our knowledge bank, we also grow the intangibles that can't be put on paper. Out of facts - understanding. Out of our achievements - humility. Out of our failures - wisdom. Out of our challenges - hope. Out of our differences – trust. Out of our past - A future. Out of everything that we have gone through together – our Singapore Spirit.
19. I am very pleased to declare *Singapore Chronicles* launched.