

TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS GEORGE YEO AT THE INAUGURAL FULLERTON-SJI LEADERSHIP LECTURE ON 22 JANUARY 2010 AT 5.00PM AT THE FULLERTON HOTEL

Fellow Josephians
Dear friends
Ladies and Gentlemen

I feel so honoured to be invited to deliver this inaugural lecture for the Fullerton-SJI series. When Warren invited me, I felt a little uncomfortable because he wanted me to talk about my leadership moments, which seemed somewhat personal, and it should be for others to talk about you and not for you to talk about yourself. Also, the idea of a lecture suggested hard work --- having to sit down and write a paper, something for publication. I told him that might be a little boring so I will not have a prepared script, but I have pointers and I will talk around those pointers. So it is not going to be a lecture in the traditional sense of a lecture, but a reflection about the nature of leadership in the world we live in.

The world we live in is going through exciting transformations. Just two weeks ago, in my constituency on the shore of Bedok Reservoir, we unveiled a piece of the Berlin Wall, an icon of the end of the Cold War marking the opening of a new chapter not only of European history but of world history. The symbolism goes beyond just the division of Germany or the lifting of the Iron Curtain. It is much deeper. What caused the collapse of the Soviet Union, symbolised by the collapse of the Berlin Wall? You remember President Reagan, who was ever the breezy optimist? He decided to take the Cold War to his limit --- his Star Wars initiative. That really broke the Soviet "camel's back" because he pushed precisely in the direction in which the Soviet Union was weak at --- electronics and space technology.

I was in the Air Force and got to know the Israelis very well. I remember from 1980 to 1983, I must have visited Israel close to ten times. In the period after the war over the Bekaa Valley, they showed me gun sight videos of the MiGs and Sukhois that they shot down with their F16s and F15s. It was like shooting ducks in a carnival. Yes, the Israeli pilots were good but that would not have accounted for the 100 to 0 outcome in air-to-air combat. And the MiGs were good aeroplanes for dogfights, in some ways more manoeuvrable than the F15s and F16s. The Soviet missiles were not inferior to the American missiles but where they were weak and overwhelmed by the Israelis was in their electronic warfare and systems management.

The Soviet command economy, when it came to producing steel or generating electricity or structures or laying railway tracks, that they were very good at because you could mobilise people and command them to do things. But the development of electronics, of ICs, of electronic warfare, required the cooperative efforts of a large number of individuals cooperating in a different way. You cannot command the writing of good software. Good software requires creative individuals and individuals who network with one another, coming together, understanding each others strengths and weaknesses and achieving a joint common purpose. So it was really that technology which transformed the outcome of the Cold War but which did much more than that. It created a phenomenon called "disintermediation", a term used in the financial industry.

Old banks found that with electronic systems and globalisation, they could be bypassed through all kinds of new financial instruments not regulated the way traditional banks were regulated. Over the years, bright minds in America, Europe and elsewhere developed all kinds of new financial products, dissolving the old boundaries between banks and non-banks --- in effect, an entire non-bank sector even bigger than the regulated banking sector, which in the end became a major cause of the financial collapse that we saw in the year before last. We read how Obama yesterday, taking Paul Volcker's advice, said that we have got to tighten regulation, make banking simple again, put in the firebreaks and ensure that banks do things which are comprehensible. Well I am not sure if it is that easy to achieve such an outcome because the technology

continually allows people to bypass regulations and hierarchies. The fact now is hierarchies are breaking down, dissolving into messy networks and it affects everything. It affects the relationships of teachers to students; of parents to their children; of employers to their employees; of ministers with ordinary citizens. With the revolution in information technology, communication, transportation, everyone has choices they never had before. You ask a kid anything now, you give him a textbook, he will Google, he will check, he will find alternative views and teachers are often put on the defensive. Well, you can try and shout down the student, say, "Shush, quiet," but can you win the respect of the students? Or is it not wiser to say, "Look, what does Google say? What does Wiki say and let's have a discussion". And in the process, instead of fighting disintermediation, instead of manly trying to protect hierarchies that are no longer sustainable, you begin to operate the network.

When we talk about leadership, because of this profound change from hierarchical structures to network structures, which are very complicated, there has to be a change in the way leadership is exercised. One key aspect of it is the style of leadership. Let me go back to my old responsibility as Minister in-charge of Broadcasting. With the proliferation of bandwidth, with the technology now available to us, broadcasting has fragmented, audiences have fragmented. Each of us has in our pocket a narrowcast capability, both to receive and to transmit. I myself have become my own broadcaster, or maybe I should say "narrowcaster". The key here is understanding that the audience has changed. In the old days, you could say, "Well, let's watch a movie at Capitol," but today Capitol doesn't exist. But if you go to Cathay or Lido, which movie are you talking about? It is a world of cineplexes. Did you watch television last night? In the old days it was either [Channel] Five or Eight. Today that is meaningless. After dinner at home, eyeballs are looking at different things. I remember once watching a movie, I think it was Harry Potter, the lights were dimmed before the screen came on. Looking at the people sitting in front of me, almost everyone was staring into his telephone or hand held equipment into a different world. We can call it mass customisation but I think that has too "industrial" a ring to it. But really we're talking about multiple "narrowcasting".

But are we completely fragmented? Have we lost our sense of commonality? No, there are times, occasions, situations when our common humanity rises up to the fore and we are together. But when that subsides, we are each doing our own thing, linked up differently and separately. Now leadership in this new "network world" requires a different style and it requires a more democratic style. If people have no choices, you can put them in a room, force them to look at the same PowerPoint presentation or the same blackboard, read the same textbooks, take the same exams, if they fail these exams that's it, they'll be penalised. Today, well, I'm not happy with this system, if I'm not happy in Singapore, I go elsewhere. If you won't employ me, I can find some other employer. If I don't like you as an employee, I can find some other employee. In such a world, and I'm not talking here about one-man-one-vote which is, I think, a gross oversimplification of what democracy means, but the original idea Lincoln expressed at Gettysburg: "government of the people, by the people, for the people", I think that is a very important conception of leadership in the Internet world. In other words, leadership not as a one way relationship - of the leader having the ideas, the plan and others following like clone armies in Star Wars. In this day and age, clone armies are weak armies. Mindless supporters are worthless. Leadership becomes a chemistry among people, enabling them to draw energy from one another. And for that to happen, leadership has to respect each individual in his own right and according to his own nature.

Joe McNally, who founded La Salle College, he never taught me but he was always there hovering around, and I got to know him and I became a patron of La Salle College when I entered politics in 1988, when it was then still only two classrooms in St Patrick's School. I found him a great inspiration. After he retired, he threw his CPF into La Salle College which got him into trouble with the brotherhood. I think a complaint went up to Rome about his financial lack of discipline [Laughter]. But he had faith and he always said that, "God will provide", and God eventually did provide but through people like us who were his friends. His first love was the arts, but following the vow of obedience he had to teach when he was a Brother, but when he retired

he decided to go back to the arts, and he did sculptures. One day, he had an exhibition at the art museum at the old SJI building and I stopped to appreciate one of his art pieces of a Christian Brother hovering over a young boy, in bronze. That young boy stood erect but was not intimidated. I asked Brother [McNally], I said, "What is the meaning of this?" Now Brother [McNally] never believed in corporal punishment. He said it was always important to respect each child as an individual, with his own nature and relate to him as an individual. Without that respect for the individual, there is no chemistry. The wick is not lit until the individual is respected as an individual. And in a network world, that respect for diversity, for individuality, is very important, and those who can accomplish that in large numbers energise the network and are energised by the network. Then you have real force.

The old hierarchies no longer work. You give a big speech, a lecture to a hall full of students sitting obediently, it will get dutifully reported in the newspapers, on television, but the ferment doesn't take place. It's not easy because old ways have got to be set aside, old habits have got to be re-learned. And for that kind of leadership there is a messiness which one must live with, an untidiness which is a part of the landscape. What Warren said about how when you open the windows, the flies come in and you've got to swat them --- that saying didn't come from me, I think that saying came from Deng Xiaoping when he opened up China. In the last few days on my fanpage in Facebook I've been "swatting a few flies". In fact a whole bunch of them I had to clear because they were preventing me from communicating with all the others. The alternative was of course to shut down Facebook. But where are you then?

So accepting a certain messiness, a certain uncertainty, a certain unpredictability, is a part of the new leadership requirement. You know parents now find it more difficult to deal with their children because you can lock them up in their room, you can take away the computer but you can't take away their handphones. And in any case when they leave the house they are connected again. They know more things than what they are prepared to admit to their parents. And we have to accept that as a matter of course. Relationships of Ministers, Permanent Secretaries to the citizenry; of priests to the laity, of teachers to their students, of parents to their children; of employers to employees --- all this will have to go through a profound transformation. Because of legacy, some will make this transformation more effectively than others. A Darwinian process is at work.

In the last US presidential elections, at the beginning of the campaign, I was talking to a strong supporter of Hillary Clinton, and he assured me that Hillary would win the Democratic nomination because she inherited from her husband a well-oiled fund-raising machine. She had an enormous war chest, but Obama bypassed the traditional networks, got Facebook to help him, reached large numbers and very quickly built up an arsenal bigger than Hillary's. And he was only able to do that because he tapped younger people, he tapped new sectors which others thought were not productive. I dare say watching companies, watching families, watching churches, mosques -- - some could make the adjustment quickly, they would increase their power they would increase their reach. Others who find it more and more difficult will shrivel and wither away. And even countries will face the same Darwinian pressures.

So maybe I end here. Warren suggested that we set aside more time for Q&A and, because in keeping with what I said, it's better to have a dialogue than a monologue [Laughter].

Thank you.

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Moderator Warren Fernandez: I told you there'd be lots of history and philosophical references and Minister has not disappointed. I'm sure you have lots of questions for him but let me warm things up by taking up this jawbreaker that you mentioned, this "intermediation", and the need for leaders to build trust and respect. Can you tell us, in your view, how do you think political leaders are going to do that in this new age? What stays the same and what changes?

Minister George Yeo: First, there must be recognition that this transformation is a profound one. It's not going to go away. It's a little like climate change. If the climate is changing and you are unwilling or unable to change, I think you're in deep trouble. The first requirement is to be prepared to take the leap into a new position. You may take the wrong leap, and many will take wrong leaps, but that is part of the sifting process. In this new world, trust enjoys a special premium. In an agricultural society, without television, without broadcast facilities, you awe large numbers through drums, through music, through regalia. Chinese dynasties gave a lot of attention to ritual. Without ritual, you cannot govern a vast empire. Today you have telephoto lens, you can be a Pope, you can be an emperor, you can be an Obama, it doesn't matter, people watch your every grimace, your every emotion, and if a picture looks too touched up, it is disbelieved. So you notice on Facebook and the Internet, pictures which enjoy a high credibility are those which are not touched up, which look a little grainy and spontaneous. If in the old days combing your hair and looking spiffy are de rigueur, today, a certain informality helps because it makes you look more authentic. It's frightening, so even if you're the Pope, you have got to accept that people are going to take close-up pictures of you, people are going to take pictures of you behind the altar and what you do inside because everyone has a camera-phone. And if you are not what you put yourself out to be, I think you'll be quickly discovered and before you know it, you're out there on the Net. I've been blogging and posting on Facebook the last three years and I've had many such experiences. After a while, if you are not consistent and honest you'll be found out.

Singaporeans love postings about food. So one day I had char kway teow and posted: "It is very good, my favourite stall". Immediately the question came: "Where is it?" I said: "Well, it is at Bedok Reservoir". "Which block?" I gave the block number. Within two days, there were postings, comments and reviews about the char kway teow stall. Some agreed with me, some disagreed with me. So you have to accept that, and if you are unable to be comfortable with yourself and be truthful in the presentation of yourself, I think you'll be discovered very quickly. Perhaps in the past that was not as important but going ahead into the future, I think it is very important. Be what you are and be accepted for what you are.

Moderator: Could you tell us a bit more about your blogging? I'm sure many people are interested in how you do it, how you find the time to do it, why you do it and what do you hope to achieve out of it.

Minister: I went into it not quite sure what the experience would be like. I was quite prepared to experiment and to call it off if it didn't work out well or consumed too much of my time. Then I found out that if I unfreeze and just move with the flow and take advice from my young friends, it became quite fun and I felt younger as a result [Laughter] and energised, because you get spontaneous responses which are sometimes quite touching. You know how important morale is. When your morale is up, you can read a book quickly and remember everything, you can write, you can compose poetry. When your spirits are down, your mind is a blank and everything looks gloomy and grey. In a group, we can lift each other's morale or we can help depress one another. Part of the essentials of leadership is the ability to get group spirits up --- not leaders suppressing their own emotions and putting on a false front because that is brittle and cannot be sustained -

but individuals cheering one another on, comforting each other when they have problems. Sometimes on Facebook in the most unexpected quarters you find people say, "Thank you," or "Hey, you're doing a good job". That brightens the day, lightens life's burdens. So I'm enjoying it and because of that it doesn't seem to consume too much time or energy. In fact, while waiting for my emails to decrypt, because in the Foreign Ministry everything is classified [Laughter], and it takes some time for the emails to encrypt or decrypt, I look at my Facebook - I have two computer screens - I give a reply, make new friends.

Moderator: Shall we take some questions from the floor? Yes please. Ah, an SJL boy. Go ahead.

Question: I would just like to know how did your experience in SJL make a difference in you being a leader in society?

Minister: Well, I don't think of it in a conscious way. When you're in SJL, as Warren said, it's baked into you. "Ora et labora." ["Pray and work"] I can't remember who said it originally, whether it was Augustine or whether it was Ignatius, "Work as if everything depended on you and pray as if everything depended on God," [Laughter] which I think is a good philosophy of life. Do everything within your powers to make things better, but at the same time realise that there is a higher order, a higher flow, which you have no control over and which may in the end decide your fate and the outcome of what you do. So accept what life gives out and at the same time do not be fatalistic or inert. It's kind of a yin-yang thing, it's a bit contradictory but it is very well expressed in our school motto. If you ask me, the spirit of SJL comes to this. Don't just work, also pray and I'm referring to prayer not just in terms of saying the 'Our Father' and 'Hail Mary' but an attitude towards life, towards existence, towards why we are here. Just yesterday or the day before, someone asked a sarcastic question on my blogsite, I think an opposition supporter [Laughter]. There are a quite few of them appearing on my Facebook site. He said: "Oh, you as a higher mortal, what you think of us as lesser mortals?" I knew that I was being baited. I said I don't see myself as a higher mortal, I said we all come and go in the same way. What distinguishes us is how we spend our time in between. I said thank you for your kind words anyway. Sometimes people bait you but if your underlying disposition is a kind one, not a vindictive one, then I think the answer will come out right and it will calm things down. But if your deep nature is vindictive or aggressive, it will come out one way or another when you are provoked.

Moderator: Just to follow up on the young man's question...

Minister: Joe Conceicao, who used to be a teacher at St Patrick's [School], he likes to say this: "Know your centre, find your centre, be well-centred". And centering is simplicity. If you have a clear core position, then you can handle complexity with a certain calmness. But if you do not have a centre, and you are chasing all kinds of things; very quickly you will lose your balance. You can be practising Tai Ji or Karate or whatever; always have a centre, always go back to the centre.

Moderator: If I could follow up, you mentioned Brother McNally as being a source of inspiration. Were there others like him that inspired you to take up public service?

Minister: To take up public service?

Moderator: Or to play a leadership role or step up in leading when called upon?

Minister: In the course of your school life, there will always be a few teachers and a few individuals who have a disproportionate impact upon you and the way you look at yourself and the world. Brother [McNally] didn't influence me when I was a student, he inspired me much later after I entered politics. But there were teachers, and there were not many, there were teachers in school or in the schools I went to --- St Stephen's, St. Patrick's, and SJL --- who somehow touched me deeply and changed me.

Moderator: How did they change you?

Minister: Sometimes it could be a word of compliment. I remember in Secondary One, my History teacher said --- because I did very well for the exam --- he said: "Oh, you must have memorised everything." I thought, "No, I didn't, I didn't memorise everything." But I felt it was a great compliment, and, you know, as a little kid, that motivates you, that gives you confidence. And sometimes, you get told off, and that also puts you right. I was making a bit too much noise in class one day and one of my teachers said: "Shut up!" in front of everybody, that knocked some senses back into me. So it's like that. I think in life, you have a trajectory, and then you get propelled one way, you get knocked back and then you find your own balanced course. But not many, I think in the course of one's journey, there are not many who can affect you like that, which is why good teachers are real treasures. And invariably the teachers who touched you the most are those who understand you the best, who reach into you and in that contact, in the chemistry, a transformation takes place. And you can't do that if teachers see teaching as only a job, it must be much more than that.

Question: Thank you Minister for the speech. My name is Li Yu, I come from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. My question is regarding Internet censorship, because, you know, a few days ago, Google actually sent a signal to the Chinese government regarding censorship. So what's your view towards censorship in China's context? And in what way do you think the network structure based on Internet technology will affect the leadership of the next generation? Thank you.

Minister: There's much more to the Google saga than what has come up in the public domain. I'm quite sure Chinese intelligence, US intelligence know much more than they're letting out. The problem is a fundamental one. Cyber space is a new reality which will create all kinds of new problems and, in fact, all the challenges of law and order of governance, of market operations in the real world, have their reflections in cyberspace. Freedom, crime, privacy, intellectual property, standards, enforcement, harassment, recourse to justice and so on. The UN has got certain standards, I think under UNCITRAL or something. That sets a basic framework, but there are many challenges to the global governance of the Internet, of cyberspace which have not yet been overcome, and this will be a subject of great importance in the coming years. You can't homogenise values and regulatory systems in the Internet, as you can't homogenise and rationalise regulatory systems in the real world. In the real world, you accept that there's diversity, but there are layers and levels which people can meet and exchange. So too in cyberspace: there must be the principle of subsidiarity, you must be able to be yourself, to have your privacy, to have your separate existence and culture in cyberspace, while at the same time having enough portals for you to interact with others, so that you will benefit from all the advantages of connection and globalisation. So I see this tension between China and the US over Google as a necessary one. If it's not Google, it will be something else, or somewhere else. And it surfaces real problems, which have got to be addressed. You say this is a crime in your country but this is not a crime in my country, so you cannot expect me to enforce your laws in my country. But hacking must be against the law in both countries, in which case all national jurisdictions should oppose hacking or theft of intellectual property or destructive behaviour. But at the same time, when it comes to censorship in Europe, Holocaust denial is not allowed. In most countries, incest laws have got to be adhered to in cyber space, but to varying degrees. Pornography, hate sites, different countries have different regulatory standards and we cannot deny countries their right to attempt to censor according to their own social norms --- knowing at the same time that whatever you try to do, there will be bypasses. But you can always add friction to these bypasses.

Moderator: Minister, if I can just take that a little bit further with the issue of Internet censorship which was one of those that I flagged earlier on when I made my remarks. There is also the issue of censorship and at the moment there is a new review committee which is taking another look at that. And I wonder if you could say, having gone through the experience, what advice you would give to those who are leading the charge on the issue now? And the third point is the pruning of

the Banyan Tree. It is still a work in progress, what's your assessment on whether there's still a need for more pruning in this new disintermediated world?

Minister: Censorship is not an easy subject to handle because of its very nature. But no one can accept a free-for-all because in any society, the young must be raised. And of all the species, human beings take the longest to achieve full maturity as adults. And the reason is not just physical. The reason is because there is a lot of social programming needed to make that individual a part of society. Many lines of software code have got to be input. From the time the child is born, he learns accents, tastes in food, languages, social norms, what is right, what is wrong and he becomes an adult. But in the first twenty years of his life, more or less, you have got to have a nursery and that nursery requires censorship. So no society, however much it proclaims freedom to be a higher ideal, will give up censorship because it has got to raise the next generation according to certain values and norms. Take the US, in fact there are many aspects of political correctness in the US, which from the perspective of other countries comes across as very much looking like censorship. You know, when you prepare your resume in America you can't have a photograph because otherwise people will judge you on the basis of your skin colour or whether you look one way or another. You can't give your age, you can't give your race. Ok, fair, that is the American system but other countries have other values, other starting points and end points and therefore they have other norms which they require people to adhere to. And it is not whether these regulations are water tight, hermetically sealed, which matter. I came to that conclusion very early when I was in the Ministry (of Information and the Arts). What matters is the signal you are sending, what is approved, what is disapproved. Children observe adult behaviour, they get scolded, they get told off, they get praised and gradually they are channelled and their form is set, and that is important. And censorship is important for setting certain norms. So I don't see us --- we will probably make adjustments because of the Internet, we will probably liberalise a bit more because there is no choice --- I don't see us giving up the idea of censorship because it is so important for inter-generational continuity.

Now on the Banyan tree, whether we like it or not, instead of a Banyan tree we are beginning to see all kinds of growth. It is not just Singapore but all societies. The climate has changed, the ground has changed, the vegetation changes and that is inevitable. In some ways we should facilitate it and direct the tendencies so that we optimise the outcome. In other words, if you look at the world as a dense World Wide Web and nodes are competing with one another, our economic well-being requires us to be an important node with many synaptic connections to other nodes --- economic links, cultural links, Free Trade Agreements, standardised access, free movement of money, of people, of ideas --- then all the nutrients, all the energies will follow through Singapore and then we will light up. That is what we want to be. And because of our own history and the way we are organised we have to move in that direction. Being diverse, being connected, maintaining order amidst the diversity, treating diversity not as an inconvenience or as something to tolerate, but as something to be celebrated and as a strength. It does not mean that we give up all control because if we do not swat flies, then you cannot open your windows wide open, you don't get all the oxygen that you need, so you need to swat flies, then you can open the windows wide. And that requires boldness because there are risks. That requires effort because there is a lot for work to be done, and it requires a certain tolerance for occasional discomforts.

Question: Thank you Minister, I am Ashok Riza. I have a thick Indian accent, I'm sorry. I am an Indian and I was a student of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. I heard the Minister of Education speak at our school and I ask the same question that I am putting to you. As you mentioned, education was a very important trait and the role of the teacher was also very important for creating and nurturing leadership. I am also a school teacher, I have been a school teacher for the last four years. Being in Singapore, I really appreciate the kind of structure that the education system has. My question is: for the Army and the Air Force and the Navy there are many scholarships for higher studies so that people are lured to pursuing those careers, so that they can achieve a scholarship that would allow them to further their careers. But on the other

hand school teachers do not have any such scholarship. Do you think, in the general sense of speaking, should there be more incentive for teachers, for more intelligent people, to become teachers? I am not just talking about scholarships but other incentives to attack the problems of high rates of attrition and other problems that school teachers face.

Minister: I am not familiar with the scholarships that are available to teachers or would-be teachers in Singapore, but you know that we give a very high importance to education in Singapore and that we are very concerned about the quality of recruits in the teaching profession. We ensure that teachers are paid competitively and since the bright students have a range of scholarships available to them. From first principles, I do not see how we can afford not to give competitive scholarships to those who are interested in teaching but I am not familiar with teaching. I am not familiar with the details but maybe someone here can answer you specifically. But if it is what you say to me, then I think we have a problem. Can someone answer that question? I do not know. Is it true that there are no scholarships available for the teaching profession?

Comment: Minister, perhaps I can answer that question. We provide actually a whole range of scholarships including both overseas and local scholarships. In fact, the focus on educating talent is quite furious because we recognise that the education system has a need for that kind of talent.

Minister: That is what I thought.

Question: How do you feel about the present generation? The capacity that they have for leadership and do you have any advice to give them that would further develop their talent?

Minister: Those in your generation?

Question: Yes.

[Laughter]

Minister: I think you are an improvement over an earlier generation --- the kind of exposure that you have, the kind of knowledge in your head. I don't see any slackening. In fact, watching my own children, they seem to get less sleep than I get. I do not know what they do (laughter) but the system does not allow them to be slack. The intensity is there, the opportunities are there, the facilities are infinitely better than what we had in the past. That must be the wish for any society, that each generation is an improvement over an earlier generation. If the next generation is an attenuation, an inferior replication of their forefathers, then something is wrong. And you must hope that your children will be better than you are. It is only when that is the case that the Singapore story is worth telling.

Moderator: From what you were saying earlier, you were saying that this new generation requires a different style of leadership.

Minister: Oh, absolutely. In the old days, our founder Saint John Baptist de La Salle was a revolutionary. Before that, there was no such thing as mass education. If you're an aristocrat, if you're a priest, if you're a teacher, or you would go into a monastery, you were taught various subjects. He pioneered mass education, including education of poor children and he did that by classroom discipline, sometimes by physical punishment, but having teachers who were dedicated. The result was mass education which made possible the Industrial Revolution. Saint John Baptist de La Salle made a huge contribution to education in the world.

But we need now a new revolution because in a classroom of thirty or forty, everyone is different and it is only in recent years that they begin to understand what it means to be autistic or dyslexic or to have Attention Deficit [Hyperactivity] Disorder, that in the old days we will just dismiss as

being naughty or lazy. Today we say: "Oh, maybe he has a problem" and maybe we can treat the problem. Of course, sometimes it becomes an excuse! [Laughter] and beyond a certain point we say: "No, no, no, you're just being lazy or difficult and you must be put in your place". But knowing that we are all different, some have better memories than others, some are more talented in languages than others, some are more hyperactive than others, I think when that is understood, teaching becomes easier and more effective. And the tools are more available now, expertise is more available and our teachers are becoming more cognizant about these subtleties and differences. I think that is very good.

There is a "diversifying" of the education system in Singapore. What got us here was mostly mass education, top grade high quality mass education. Now we are beginning to have more pathways, so that depending on what your strengths and weaknesses are, you can still achieve your full potential. And I like in particular the slogan they have for ITE [Institute of Technical Education]. You know in Jack Neo's movie they said ITE "It's The End" [Laughter]. They [ITE] have a very nice slogan which is: "Thinking Hands". Accepting that some people are not good in book work, they are not good in regurgitating but they are smart and they know how to do things and get things done. And if well-educated, provided with the right opportunities, right training, they can make a big contribution in the marketplace and to society.

So over the years, now as we have more resources, more expertise and better teachers, we are now creating more pathways so that everybody can find his own place under the sun. And it is all part of the pruning of the "banyan tree". Some are shade plants, some need sunlight, some need more water and some need less and everybody can find his place.

Moderator: Sir, if I could press this point a bit here. This new scenario you're painting is quite different from the traditional idea that we have of leaders being authority figure showing the way and having to lead. If I can borrow the dialect phrase, "Bor tua bor suay," that sense of hierarchy, how are we going to make this transition from where we have been to where you say we need to go? What in your mind should be done, can you give us that?

Minister: I think we are all experimenting, we don't quite know what is the optimal balance point and it may vary from situation to situation. "Bor tua bor suay" expresses something very basic in our nature. All social animals have a pecking order. They may have to fight to establish that pecking order, but they have a pecking order. Without the pecking order, however defined, however policed, you can't create social organisation. If it is too rigid it is probably ineffective. But if there is no pecking order, group effort may not be possible. So philosophically there will always be a high and a low, big and small. But as to the operationalisation of that principle, I think it is contextual and it depends on the situation.

Take the armed forces --- Army, Navy, Air Force. In the Army, hierarchy has always been more important, less in the Navy, least in the Air Force. Pilots, especially the fighter pilots, have always been individualistic. It is a job requirement, it is a technological requirement, it is a domain requirement and our ability to tune for different situations is very important. And it requires from those in leadership positions a certain programmability. And sometimes it is important for those who are in leading positions to become students in certain situations.

When I moved into Facebook, into blogging, I decided I knew much less than the young people around me. If I had wanted to put on airs and tried to pretend I knew when I did not, I would have learnt nothing. So I put myself into the position of a student again and they knew they were teaching me so they felt a sense of responsibility [to ensure] that I was well-educated [Laughter]. And that was fine because if they did not feel responsible for me, I would have made mistakes. And they still feel responsible for me. They helped me to avoid mistakes. I would say a certain programmability is a requirement. If you think you know everything, you can't lead. You must accept that there are certain areas you do not know and be prepared to learn from others and take advice.

Moderator: The gentleman who has been waiting very patiently.

Question: Thank you very much, Minister. My name is Hareen Narula. We've had some discussions on Facebook but what I'd like to ask you is to...

Minister: Which institution are you from?

Question: Sorry, I'm an entrepreneur. I'm here today under the umbrella of the Junior Pyramid. I have a legal background and I practised for a few years before going into business. Minister, I'd like you to turn inward and share, if you would, your thoughts on your personal life goals as a leader and what your expectations are for yourself as a leader, now that you are in a very conspicuous position of leadership and have broken new ground with your approach to the Internet and engaging the citizens. What would you like to have achieved as a leader in your own various positions of leadership, your expectations of yourself and what would you have considered a life of leadership well spent?

Minister: Warren asked me similar questions in the office as we discussed preparation for today's event. And I told him that I was not comfortable with the direction he was coming from --- You know, you're leader, what is expected of you and so on. Somehow I don't see myself in that way. I mean yes, you are in a leading position in the foreign ministry, you interact with staff, you interact with other people, you take advice, and you take decisions. Sometimes, [it is] for others to take decisions. It's less stressful that way. For myself, I take a more relaxed approach and if I have to lead, I lead; if I have to follow, I follow. If I need to be neither, that is wonderful [Laughter].

Question: Thank you.

Minister: Thank you.

Moderator: But if I could just take up his question. How do you stay motivated, how do you stay grounded being a leader? Without letting it get to you, or as you said to that person on the Net that you're not a higher mortal, you come and go in the same way and what you do in between is what counts. How do you stay grounded in that?

Minister: That is a difficult question. You're asking about deep motive forces in a person --- whether you are an optimist, whether you are a pessimist, what you consider to be a life well-lived. And I think it was Prophet Mohammed who said --- I'm paraphrasing --- that a person's life is judged by his offsprings, by the wealth, the physical things, he has left behind, and by the ideas he has imparted. I think having offsprings is an important part of life, although some choose otherwise. The things that you bequeath to your children give you some comfort, but beyond a point you will harm them. As [Michael] Bloomberg said once, about his intention to donate most of his wealth to foundations: "I do not want to deprive my children the pleasure of making their own fortunes".

Moderator: I'm sure they wouldn't have minded. [Laughter]

Minister: I have always taken this position that we are a collection of atoms. We come together to be what we are, we grow, we age, and we die. Then, we return back to that atomic state. But in between, we have changed the world around us --- some in a dramatic way, some in a small way. But big or small, do good, don't do harm. It should not be that the world, that society was better if you had not been born, if people wished you had not lived. And that's what I tell my children, whatever it is, do good. And depending on your destiny, your karma, you may do more good than others, but do what you can. And as they say in Opus Dei --- I'm not in Opus Dei [Laughter] - they have this slogan: "vale la pena" - it's all worthwhile. I was inspired by the kindness movement. You don't have to be heroic, if we can do a little good, do a little good, and the day is well-spent. But do not let the day pass without doing something. That's my thinking.

Moderator: Do we have time for one or two more questions?

Minister: Sure.

Question: Minister, thank you for your talk. I'd like to ask you one question...

Minister: Where are you from?

Question: I'm from China. I'm a student from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. I'd like to ask you one question regarding our leadership. Out of all the great leaders of this world, one of my most admired ones is Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew. In many ways, he is very similar to our great leaders in China, like Chairman Mao and Deng Xiaoping --- the one you mentioned just now. These are the people who have enough audacity to break rules, and also have great vision to establish long-lasting rules. But there comes the paradox of great leadership --- the great leaders break rules, they establish new ones, and then they expect others to respect their rules. So like Mr Lee Kuan Yew once said, if there is anybody who would dare challenge what he has established for Singapore he may come up from his grave [Laughter] and help his people. So I'd like to ask about your views on leadership. Is it true that leadership is a product of time? In Mr Lee Kuan Yew's time, leadership requires his style, and now Singapore is already very established, enjoying an amazing level of success. Does that mean that Singapore leaders now need only respect the rules instead of break the rules. Does that mean that Singapore leaders need to stay in the comfort zone and enjoy his success? Thank you.

Minister: [For] The general question, yes, I believe leadership is contextual and certain periods call for certain kinds of decisions. Certain periods call for heroic leadership. You cannot exercise leadership if you want to remain in your comfort zone. Change is always difficult and in life, you can't do anything worthwhile that is easy. Anything worthwhile is difficult. Because if it were easy, then it would already have been done. Those who are only interested to wallow in their comfort zone, they cannot be leaders because they will be unable to face criticism or challenges. Leadership means moving into new areas, it means causing discomfort to others and to yourself and persuading them that it is all worthwhile. This is effort, it is not leisure.

Yes, please.

Question: Thank you Minister Yeo. I'm from Hwa Chong Institution. I want to ask, how can we cultivate leaders of tomorrow, specifically in the business industry to have an ethical mind and not be driven by just economic interest or interest in other areas? So, I will like to ask that question, thank you.

Minister: A large part of leadership is inborn. If there is a strong figure in that group, the person less strong is less likely to be the leader. But if that person who is less strong becomes the strongest in the group, then he becomes the leader. So in that sense, leadership is relative and a large part of it is inborn. That's my view. Good mentors can see quite clearly in a child the kind of adult that the child will mature to become. And very often you can see aspects of leadership in young people. Of course they may flower in different ways and some bloom later than others.

Question: Hi, good afternoon Minister Yeo. I actually graduated from SJI International last year. I wanted to say that my respect for you has ballooned, simply because...

Minister: Ballooned?

Question: Yes, ballooned --- it has grown so much more, simply because you shared with us how you are willing to listen to young people as well. And I was thinking about this awareness about mutual respect with regards to leadership, and I find that yes, it is increasing but not fast enough. And there is this constant tension between the leaders and those being led --- teachers and students, employers and employees. And as a young person who is traditionally viewed as

inferior, I would like to say that perhaps we do realise and know that we are growing more in knowledge, and we do desire that mutual respect. So having experienced being in the position of a leader and also being led, I'm puzzled and sometimes frustrated as to how people sometimes ignore the upcoming transformation of leadership that we've talked about so far. So I'm just wondering, I don't think it can be answered right now in this seminar, but is there anyway we can increase this awareness in schools, this Darwinian process of changing leadership. In our society, perhaps talking about it on BlogTV[.sg], in schools and organisations, isn't sharing and discussing this change in leadership in a matured way better than ignoring it sometimes? Sometimes, that happens in schools, as far as students are concerned. Thank you.

Minister: We are quite conscious of this in Singapore, and there is almost a desire to help speed up this evolutionary process by exhortation, by structural reorganisation, and by just facilitating the spread of technology. We have always pushed for connectivity, pushed for broadband, introduced it into schools, encouraged students to go overseas to link up and try different things. All this is the result of policy. It's partly economically-driven, but partly it's the recognition that the world is changing and we've got to change ahead of others in order to secure our position. You may feel that we're not moving fast enough and there will always be some tension between generations --- that's inevitable --- but I would say on the whole, compared to other countries, we are more conscious of what's happening and pushing it in a deliberate way much more than others.

Moderator: I would like to ask you a question about your own portfolio at Foreign Affairs. Singapore is a small place, a small country, but we're often described as "punching beyond our weight". So, how does Singapore exercise leadership? Could you give us some examples of challenges we face, in trying to sort of lead?

Minister: The first thing we remind ourselves is never put ourselves to be a leader in anything [Laughter]. That's what we always remind ourselves, that's what we always remind our officers: never ever claim a position of leadership. Be helpful to others, work with others, don't be too worried about who gets the credit. We have objectives. An ASEAN which is integrated, secures around us a zone of stability, which makes possible our continuing development. Have good relations with our neighbours, particularly with Indonesia and Malaysia, and --- so long as it is not mistaken as weakness --- be accommodating, be humble. So to answer your question [as to] whether there is a style of leadership in Foreign Affairs, it is the suppression of leadership. (laughter)

Moderator: So is there any last question? If not I'll wrap it up. Maybe Minister, I have a burning question. I would like to ask you about Copenhagen and climate change. Was that a failure of leadership and how do you see it going forward?

Minister: I was not very hopeful that a grand bargain could be struck because the stakes were huge. When I was Trade Minister, I was involved in WTO negotiations and they were very tough. I used to coordinate agriculture and every time I went for meetings, I knew I would get no sleep, or hardly any sleep, the expectation of which was itself a source of stress. And in trade we have a positive sum because if you bring down tariffs, if you have more trade, the pie grows and then you can always share out the pieces and within each country you can help make up to those who are disadvantaged by opening up. The benefits of open trade are immediate. In the case of climate change, we're talking about billions, hundreds of billions, even trillions of dollars for benefits which may not be obvious in this generation. So you pay now in order that future generations will benefit, and how much they will benefit we're not sure. We know that the Earth is warming, we know that we are pumping a lot of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. We're not quite sure how much of it is anthropogenic, caused by human beings. In the last few months, the science itself is being questioned a bit more. I'm presently reading a book which gives a sceptical view. So in this milieu, you're getting countries to take decisions which cost them a lot of resources. The instinct is to pass the cost on to somebody else. It is not easy. I had a discussion with the Mexican Ambassador this morning, because they [Mexico] are hosting the next meeting,

a mini meeting in Mexico City. I said: "Don't set expectations so high that failure is guaranteed". Do what we can in modules and in pieces, and then little by little move us in that direction. A little progress gives confidence. People become more likely to cooperate. Go for the big bang [and you might] fail. Fail again, [and] people will be disheartened, everybody moves into Plan B and agreement becomes that much more difficult. This is going to be a protracted process. Better to be realistic, one step at a time, know the direction in which you want to move, and then as we gain experience, as we grow in trust, as science improves, as data comes in, we make adjustments along the way. And do the easy things first.

Moderator: Thank you, Minister. I'm sure you will all agree with me that this has been a fascinating discussion, from disintermediation to the Darwinian causes, and if you want to be energised and feel younger: start blogging [Laughter]. Please join me in thanking the Minister.