

**SPEECH FOR LAUNCH OF PROF JAYAKUMAR'S BOOK
"DIPLOMACY – A SINGAPORE EXPERIENCE"
THURSDAY, 9 JUNE 2011**

Let me first thank all of you for coming to this book launch.

I also thank Dr Tony Tan for agreeing to be the Guest-of-Honour.

Our Foreign Service has come a long way since 1965 when we became independent unexpectedly. In those days, most of us who had anything to do with foreign affairs had to learn our craft "on-the-job". There was no handbook on how to do it. We were learning as much as we were doing and constantly innovating and adapting.

46 years later, I think we have now built up a significant corpus of norms, principles and experiences that form the core of our foreign policy. Buried within our archives and the memories of several generations of ministers and officials are many important and interesting episodes and stories to be told about our foreign policy. Many lessons can be gleaned from them.

My book is not a comprehensive account of Singapore's foreign policy. It contains my own reflections on selected episodes where I was involved.

I started this writing project with the limited objective of serving as case-studies for younger officers in MFA and in the Civil Service. I thought they would find it helpful when they later faced their own challenging situations.

As I circulated my draft to various people for their comments, several strongly urged me to publish it and not limit readership to the narrow confines of the Foreign Service or Civil Service. Dr Tony Tan, a valued friend and former Cabinet colleague, wrote to me urging me to publish it because "the story deserves to be read by a wider audience".

I had tremendous encouragement and help from many in MFA, from former Foreign Minister George Yeo, his Permanent Secretaries and many officers. I wish to thank them.

Now a few words about the book's contents. Its central theme is that small countries face unique challenges. Size matters in the international arena. This does not mean that a small country is doomed to irrelevance, and I have tried to show how, through proactive and creative diplomacy, we can create diplomatic and economic space for ourselves and be a relevant player in regional and international circles.

But let me sound a note of caution or reality check: do not think this is a given; that Singapore will always be able – as some have described it – to “punch above our weight”.

If we have done well, it is because of a combination of several important factors:

- o Firstly, Singapore is viewed as a success story - not just in economic terms but in other aspects as well -- socially, our meritocracy, our multiracial harmony, our stability, law and order, our corruption-free system and world acclaimed legal/justice system etc. If we do not continue to be seen as successful, no one will pay attention to us.
- o Secondly, the quality of the people that represent us on the world stage - from PM, former MM, Emeritus SM, George Yeo and other Ministers. They are highly regarded and people seek out their views. We also have excellent Perm Secs and Ambassadors like Bilahari Kausikan, Tommy Koh, Chan Heng Chee, Kishore Mahbubani and Chew Tai Soo.
- o Thirdly, the ability of various agencies and Ministries to work and pull together as a team.

PM Lee Hsien Loong has a very good team of Ministers. George Yeo's absence will, no doubt, be felt for some time. Our economy is doing well. MFA continues to recruit good officers.

Can we guarantee that this combination of factors can be sustained indefinitely? I do not know. What I know is that the moment we fail to do so, we will be marginalised in the international arena.

I make this point because all Singaporeans and not just our civil servants and MFA officers must understand that, for all our success and growth, we will always remain a small state and vulnerability is an inherent condition of all small states.

Even some of our young MFA officers, when they first joined, wondered why we could not be like, say, Denmark or Switzerland. Of course, they are soon exposed to the harsh realities of international diplomacy and they quickly understand why not.

But not all Singaporeans can have this experience of working in MFA. At the same time, **no foreign policy can succeed unless it has the understanding and appreciation of the domestic public.** This is the other reason why I later thought it important to write this book for a wider audience.

Foreign policy is always work in progress. Issues will change with time, but we will always have to be guided by our core national interests. As I look at the many old hands present here this evening, I am grateful for those who have brought MFA to where it is today. We now have a new team helming MFA. I am confident that Minister Shanmugam and his team, together with the men and women in Singapore's Foreign Service to whom I have dedicated this book, will continue to hold the torch high.

Thank you.