



**THE CONFUCIAN PATH:
WHY SINGAPORE
SUCCEEDED, WHERE
WELFARE HAS FAILED**
COMMENT & ANALYSIS 16

TODAY

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Tuesday March 8, 2011 www.todayonline.com we set you thinking

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The number of women on corporate boards has dwindled in the last 10 years.

UN Women Singapore president Trina Liang-Lin



Education system should 'lift the tide for all S'poreans'

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SINGAPORE — Think of it not just as a single social ladder, or that the climb upward in Singapore is only possible on the rungs of science, literature and academic achievement.

Instead, there should be many ladders, built with different rungs, from sports and the arts to entrepreneurship and creativity.

And Singapore's education system should be judged on whether it builds enough of these ladders, to develop all the talents that can be found in Singapore, and not on whether all Singaporean children manage to reach the same heights.

Yesterday, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen laid out his ministry's response to the growing challenge of ensuring social mobility for a new generation of Singaporeans.

In his words: "Our strategy must again be to lift the tide for all Singaporeans."

It was the central theme in his speech, as he presented the Ministry of Education's (MOE) latest plans and responded to Members of Parliament, several of whom spoke about the need for pupils from lower-income families to have access to opportunities to realise their potential.

As Madam Halimah Jacob (Jurong GRC) noted that social mobility through education has been the greatest leveller in Singapore, and as Mrs Josephine Teo (Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC) added that "no one will be so naive to think that students from higher income families will have no advantage", Dr Ng acknowledged how the poor will need extra help.

"But we must not become myopic in neglecting the whole of Singapore," said the minister, who cautioned that social mobility is not about "holding back" those who are able, "just because they come from middle income homes or are rich ... so that others can catch up".

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MM Lee: I stand corrected

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SINGAPORE — Some two months after his statements — which were contained in the new book *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going* — evoked strong reactions from the Muslim community here, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew acknowledged yesterday in a press statement that his view that it was harder to integrate Muslims was "out of date".

Mr Lee's comments came after the issue of Muslim integration received an airing in Parliament yesterday.

Pointing out that *Hard Truths* was "based on 32 interviews over a period of two years", Mr Lee said: "I made this one comment on the Muslims integrating with other communities probably two or three years ago. Ministers and MPs, both Malay and non-Malay, have since told me that Singapore Malays have indeed made special efforts to integrate with the other communities, especially since 9/11, and that my call is out of date.

"I stand corrected. I hope that this trend will continue in the future."

Yesterday, five MPs raised the issue of integration of Muslims in Parliament during the debate on the expenditure of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports.

Reiterating that integration "is a continuous process", Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim told the House: "Progress by all communities, including Malay-Muslims, has been good. There will occasionally be hiccups and sometimes feelings are hurt when perspectives differ on sensitive issues that we hold dear. But we should not let such hiccups hold us back."

Dr Yaacob noted that the Malay-Muslim community had "redoubled outreach efforts" following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on Sept 11, 2001, to "forge even stronger ties with fellow communities".

For instance, the mosques hosted inter-faith dialogues. Said Dr Yaacob: "These sessions have helped build understanding and respect among various religious communities. As a result, in my considered view, today our integration and mutual confidence between races and religions is stronger, more resilient and more mature than it was a decade ago, before 9/11."

Dr Yaacob added: "In pursuing integration, we reaffirm our Singaporean Muslim identity which encapsulates our way of life, and our aspirations to be open, forward-looking and successful community."

Hard Truths is published by Singapore Press Holdings (SPH). In the book, when asked to assess the progress of multi-racialism here, Mr Lee said: "I think we were progressing very nicely until the surge of Islam came, and if you asked me for my observations, the other communities have easier integration — friends, intermarriages and so on, Indians with Chinese, Chinese with Indians — than Muslims.

"I would say, today, we can integrate all religions and races except Islam." He added: "I think the Muslims socially do not cause any trouble, but they are distinct and separate."

Asked what Muslims could do to integrate, Mr Lee was also quoted in the book saying: "Be less strict on Islamic observances and say: 'Okay, I'll eat with you'."

Hard Truths was a book based on 32 interviews over a period of two years. I made this one comment on the Muslims integrating with other communities probably two or three years ago. Ministers and MPs, both Malay and non-Malay, have since told me that Singapore Malays have indeed made special efforts to integrate with the other communities, especially since 9/11, and that my call is out of date. I stand corrected. I hope that this trend will continue in the future.

Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew



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