CEO, SPH Media Group, Ms Teo Lay Lim  
Editor-in-Chief, Chinese Media Group, SPH Media Trust Ms Lee Huay Leng  
CE, NLB, Mr Ng Cher Pong  
Colleagues and friends from Singapore  
Friends joining us virtually from afar  
  
**Speech is delivered in Chinese, except for paragraphs 11-12 in English**  
  
1. Good afternoon. I am happy to join you at this year’s Singapore Book Fair.  
  
2. The theme of this year’s Book Fair is “Re-Start”. Because of COVID-19, the Book Fair had to pivot online for the past two years. Finally, with the easing of the safe management measures this year, the Book Fair can return to a physical format, which all of us, booklovers and authors alike, have all missed.  
  
3. Fittingly, SPH has chosen to locate the Book Fair for the first time at one of our most iconic libraries, the National Library. This is a place where our nation nurtures a love for reading amongst all citizens. You also have an additional venue at the Bras Basah Complex next door – another first in the Book Fair’s history. I understand that you have a line-up of virtual activities, so that overseas authors and booklovers can continue to join us. With all these new efforts, and your experiences gained from organising virtual fairs amid COVID-19, I am sure that the Book Fair will “Re:start” and bring new surprises to readers!  
  
**Importance of Reading**  
  
4. The Book Fair increasingly takes place in a world where digitalisation pervades every aspect of our lives, changing the way we live, work and play. It is natural to ask ourselves, do books and book fairs still have a place in our society? Will our future generations still appreciate reading as much as we do, especially when other media – including non-stop social media interactions, on-demand video content, and online gaming – compete for their attention?  
  
5. These are valid concerns. Yet, whenever we ask these, it is also helpful to remind ourselves of the enduring value of books and reading.  
  
6. At the individual level, reading exposes us to new ideas. It challenges our thinking, allowing us to reflect and gain a better understanding of both ourselves and the world around us. As we are inundated with information – and misinformation – the ability to read and learn from trusted sources uplifts our skills and capabilities and sharpens our discernment. In challenging times, such as the pandemic, reading frequently provides answers to our most difficult questions; and can bring solace to wearied minds and souls. When I was a teenager, San Mao’s works invoked my curiosity on how people found meaning and purpose in their lives. When I was a young mother, I remembered how I had turned to books for answers on how to be a better parent. When my children entered their teens, Lung Ying-tai’s Dear Andreas prepared me mentally on what was to be expected when raising youths. Now for work, I need to understand the opportunities and challenges brought about by digitalisation, and answers frequently present themselves in books, including e-books – instead through search engines. Books may not offer direct answers, but they never fail to help us think more sharply!  
  
7. For parents and their young, reading is not only a good way to stimulate our children’s minds. It is also an important way for us to bond; and transmit our treasured values from generation to generation.  
  
8. As a society, it is of utmost importance to have our own local literature. It reflects Singapore’s lived experiences, joys and challenges, and allows us to appreciate different perspectives and connect with one another at a deep and meaningful level.  
  
**Empowering Singaporeans to Learn**  
  
9. This is why NLB will never rest on our laurels to promote reading and learning amongst our citizens. Our libraries are constantly evolving to stay relevant. Last year, we launched LAB25, or the Libraries and Archives Blueprint 2025, to transform our libraries and archives into an omni-channel network so that Singaporeans can read and learn anytime and anywhere. Singaporeans can tap on the vast digital resources available on the NLB Mobile App. Learning nodes are also set up outside the libraries - in parks, shopping malls and other public spaces. LAB25 also strives to build an “Informed Citizenry” by enhancing information literacy amongst Singaporeans, as well as nurture “Singapore Storytellers” by nurturing a stronger appreciation and understanding of the Singapore experience amongst our people.  
  
10. However, to nurture an informed citizenry that is curious and hungry for knowledge, government efforts alone are not sufficient. Hence, I am thankful for SPH Media Trust’s steadfast efforts in growing our reading community - by partnering like-minded partners, like Federation of Merchants’ Associations and Heartland Enterprise Centre Singapore - to hold this Book Fair. The Fair, which has been held for almost 40 years, is an important platform for our local authors and book publishers to showcase their talents; and for our community to immerse themselves in a literary environment, where they can connect, share and even co-create with local and international book communities!  
  
11. Now, please allow me to say a few words in English. Last weekend, Parliamentary Secretary Rahayu and I were at Singapore’s first-ever Digital for Life Festival. That event shared many similarities with today’s Book Fair. It was also a platform that brought together people to learn and explore, and to better equip ourselves in this digital age.  
  
12. I am heartened to note that in this Book Fair, the SPH Chinese Media Group is also organising a second run of the Youths Help Seniors Go Digital workshop. The workshop was first held in April 2022 and had gathered good responses from our senior participants who were keen to learn digital skills. I am told that the number of participants has doubled to 120 participants this time. Thank you to the trainers from Lianhe Zaobao and students from Ngee Ann Polytechnic for contributing to the Digital for Life movement. As more reading and learning happen online, the skills taught at such workshops will be much needed. Moving forward, NLB will work with more partners, including tech companies, to equip our citizens with the necessary digital skills to engage with emerging technology.  
  
13. Let me end by thanking you once again for inviting me today. Like many of you here today, I am excited to start touring the Fair. For example, illustrator Ah Guo’s new work. I love his intricate drawings and imaginative storyline filled with childlike wonder.  
  
14. I hope you will all be inspired by these and the many other writers featured at the Fair. Happy reading and happy learning for all of us! Thank you!