REMARKS BY MR HENG SWEE KEAT
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AT THE SINGAPORE SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE
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Opening

1. It is a great pleasure to join you at the Singapore Scientific Conference 2025, and I extend a warm welcome to speakers and delegates from around the world.

2. For centuries, science and innovation have shaped humanity's progress. This year, as Singapore celebrates SG60, this Conference also celebrates 60 years of scientific excellence, and how far our research and innovation journey has come.

3. Our sustained investment in research, innovation and enterprise (RIE) has enabled us to grow, from a technology adopter to a trusted global partner in science and innovation.

4. Our journey has been guided by a simple conviction: that human progress has been enabled by our curiosity and pursuit of science, to better understand the world, and by our creativity in technological innovations that uplift lives.

5. In the coming years, as progress in science, technology and innovation accelerate, we must embrace this spirit even more, if we are to continue to uplift people and safeguard our beautiful but fragile planet.

Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2030 (RIE2030)

6. Our sustained investments in Science & Technology, and more recently, in supporting Innovation and Enterprise, have allowed us to build a strong talent base and robust research capabilities. Our researchers are well recognised for advancing and applying scientific knowledge across many fields, and our universities and research institutions are highly regarded globally.

7. Last Friday, we released Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2030 or RIE2030, our latest five-year plan to strengthen our national research and innovation ecosystem. The Government has allocated $37 billion for RIE2030.

This is about 1% of our projected GDP, and a 32% increase over the last 5 years.

8. Some key highlights of RIE2030 include:

A) We will fund research and innovation to advance key national and economic priorities, build capabilities in AI, data and compute to enable cutting-edge research and innovation, and further strengthen our talent pool and basic research capabilities.

B) We will continue to fund basic academic research, with about one-third of the total budget allocated for basic research. This will enable us to develop a broad base of scientific capabilities and intellectual property that we can draw on later.

9. As the critical success factor in any research endeavor is the breadth and depth of talent, we will continue to attract and develop a critical mass of high-calibre scientific talent. We will also diversify our talent mix, to scientific innovators and entrepreneurs, beyond researchers and scientists.

A) For instance, to grow our pool of science innovators, we recently launched a new fellowship programme called Activate Global Fellows – Singapore . Hosted by NTU, in partnership with US-based non-profit Activate, this programme will support deep-tech startup founders with funding, as well as access to networks and resources to grow their ventures.

B) To attract and nurture young talent, we are introducing the NRF Postdoctoral Award for promising young researchers, with competitive research grant and salary for up to 4 years to support them in leading independent research.

C) We will continue to bring together bright young minds from Singapore and the world. The Global Young Scientists Summit (GYSS) is another example - it is a talent bridge that connects emerging scientific leaders across borders, to be inspired by Nobel laureates, Turing Prize winners and Millenium Technology prize winners. By bringing young talents together, we hope to enable them to build meaningful relationships that can evolve into long-term collaborations. Our GYSS 2026 will be in January 2026.

D) This Singapore Scientific Conference is yet another example of how our scientists, innovators and industry partners are coming together, to explore the frontiers of science and innovation, and to be inspired.

Forging a "Sustainable Future Through Science & Technology"

10. The theme of this year's conference is "A Sustainable Future Through Science and Technology".

11. Singapore places a strong focus on sustainability, which is a key thrust in our RIE 2030 plan. Climate change is no longer a distant threat, but a clear existential issue for a low-lying island nation. It is also a threat to the entire planet, as ecosystems and biospheres are so deeply integrated. We must work together to adapt, innovate, and share solutions for a sustainable future for all.

12. A major domain of our RIE2030 plan is to tackle Urban Solutions and Sustainability – how a city can find innovative solutions to our land and carbon constraint. We have identified five priority areas: decarbonisation, climate change adaptation, land resilience, sustainable urban development, and innovation translation.

13. For instance, our coastal protection research programme is developing cutting-edge solutions to safeguard Singapore against rising sea levels – from nature-based solutions that harness mangroves and coastal ecosystems, to advanced engineering approaches that can withstand the forces of climate change. We have announced a plan to build a Long Island, off the East Coast of Singapore.

14. The global energy transition is one of the most critical issues in tackling climate change and in enabling countries to meet the growing energy demands, which is rising sharply especially as companies invest in AI and data centres. Singapore is actively exploring with our ASEAN partners, to source for renewable sources of energy. We have also set up the Singapore Nuclear Research and Safety Institute, to build deeper understanding of nuclear technologies and safety requirements, as countries around the world build nuclear facilities to meet their needs.

15. But sustainability research in RIE2030 is not confined to a single domain. It can and should leverage resources and capabilities across the whole RIE ecosystem.

16. For example, Our Trusted Research and Real-World Data Utilisation System, or TRUST data system, was established to enable trusted and secure access to research, health and administrative datasets for health-related research, is being extended beyond healthcare to support our Cities of Tomorrow programme.

    Through TRUST, researchers working on heat resilience can securely access and analyse integrated datasets from multiple agencies – energy consumption patterns, urban planning data, environmental monitoring information – to develop comprehensive solutions for managing Singapore's urban heat challenge.

17. Similarly, AI is being deployed to tackle sustainability challenges, from optimising energy systems and predicting climate impacts to enhancing resource efficiency across our economy.

18. In the Manufacturing, Trade and Connectivity domain, we see an emerging market for sustainable products and early signs of a more mature industrial system taking shape globally.

    We are advancing Singapore's bioeconomy capabilities, leveraging our existing energy & chemicals and biotechnology capabilities to transform our existing base, to anchor new high-value industrial activities in the energy & chemicals sector which will be transformed.

19. We are also investing in alternative feedstocks and bioprocess development – areas that hold strong promise for transforming our approach to manufacturing and resource utilisation.

20. By developing technologies that can convert waste streams, agricultural residues, and other non-traditional materials into valuable products through advanced bioprocessing, we can reduce our dependence on conventional raw materials, minimize waste, and create new circular economy opportunities. These capabilities will be essential as the world transitions towards more sustainable production systems.

21. While our research ecosystem is small compared to those of major economies, it can be highly effective if we break down silos – across disciplines, across industries. The best innovation comes at the intersection of different disciplines and stakeholders. So, we seek

to bring together the best minds from around the world, promote a collaborative spirit, to create solutions that benefit Singapore and the world.

Strategic Importance of International Collaborations

22. Along the same vein, Singapore will continue to invest in strategic collaborations with major research institutions and companies around the world.

23. At the launch of RIE2030, I announced that NRF will be setting up the Singapore-Horizon Europe Complementary Fund.

24. Horizon Europe is the European Union's key funding programme for research and innovation. There are many areas of common strategic interests to both sides, from next-generation clean energy technologies to advancing precision medicine to artificial intelligence.

25. Our Complementary Fund will support research or activities conducted in Singapore by researchers from eligible Singapore entities, as part of Horizon Europe projects in priority areas for Singapore and Europe.

26. NRF will also establish National Contact Points in Singapore, to reach out to eligible Singapore research entities, publicize grant calls and encourage participation.

27. The grant calls for 2026 to 2027 will open for applications this week. I encourage potential collaborators – including many of you here, to engage NRF. NRF will also be conducting dialogue sessions to share more details in the coming weeks. We look forward to our researchers working with collaborators from other countries to participate in Horizon Europe programmes.

Conclusion

28. The Singapore Scientific Conference 2025 brings together voices from across disciplines and continents. **Singapore seeks to be a Global-Asia Node of Technology, Enterprise and Innovation, a trusted, neutral node where the best minds can have interesting exchanges, forge partnerships, and turn scientific excellence into innovations to tackle our shared global challenges.**

29. I thank the many eminent speakers – some based here and some coming in from all over the world. I trust that you will all have interesting exchanges and go on to collaborate.

30. Let us work together to build new connections and new discoveries, and to make an impact, for Singapore, and for the world.