

CONGRATULATORY REMARKS BY MINISTER CHAN CHUN SING

26TH ASCOJA CONFERENCE IN SINGAPORE

ON 19 FEBRUARY 2022 AT VOCO ORCHARD

1. Good morning.
2. It is a pleasure to address you at the 26th edition of the ASEAN Council of Japan Alumni conference, organised by the Japanese University Graduate Association of Singapore (JUGAS).
3. To the delegates who are attending in person and virtually from across ASEAN, a warm welcome from Singapore.

An Important Community

4. Formed in 1970, JUGAS plays an important role in supporting Singaporean students who wish to study in Japan through its scholarships, book prizes and pre-departure briefings.
5. JUGAS members have also contributed to strengthening economic, cultural, and diplomatic ties with Singapore. For instance, JUGAS is part of the organising committee for the annual Japanese Speech Contest in Singapore, which aims to deepen Singaporean students' understanding of Japan, and the importance of the bilateral relations between our two countries.

Impact of Covid-19 on Education & Singapore's Efforts

6. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused disruptions on many fronts worldwide. The education sector has not been spared. Many schools around the world were forced to shut down or move their curriculum online.

7. From the onset, Singapore has taken measures to minimise disruptions in our schools and Institutes of Higher Learning. This has helped to ensure that our young continue to receive a good educational experience despite Covid-19.

8. Along the way, our schools pivoted to Full Home-based Learning and weekly rotation of Home-Based Learning, before having students back in school with safe management measures in the second half of 2021. While the introduction of Home-Based Learning had its challenges, it also gave us new opportunities. Both teachers and students have become more skillful in harnessing the strengths of Blended Learning to develop future-ready skills. Many students have become more self-directed and independent in their learning, and more resilient to disruptions.

9. Last December, we also extended the national vaccination programme to 300,000 children aged 5 to 11, as part of our efforts to keep our schools and community safe.

10. In addition to sustaining good educational experience locally, it is important to ensure that our students remain connected with the rest of the world, despite Covid-19.

11. Many of our schools have readily adopted local-based internationalisation programmes, given the ongoing restrictions on travel. Such programmes comprise a mix of face-to-face enrichment activities conducted locally, as well as virtual engagements with overseas partner schools and personalities for more authentic learning about the partner country.

12. We hope that these programmes will continue to take place even as travel resumes, so that our students have varied opportunities to interact with their overseas peers, in addition to the in-person exchanges.

Covid-19 and International Tertiary Education

13. Beyond the general education sector, many young people seeking tertiary education overseas have been deeply affected as cross-border travel arrangements remain fluid and uncertain over the past two years.

14. Many had to pivot to online learning. Fortunately, several of the universities in our two countries had established online learning options and resources, ensuring that students' learning was not greatly disrupted.

The Importance of Maintaining Cross-cultural Ties

15. Overseas tertiary education has always provided Singaporeans the opportunities to immerse in foreign cultures and develop long-lasting, cross-cultural friendships. Likewise, Singapore welcomes contributions from foreign students who wish to stay on in Singapore after their education. It is also our hope that they will continue to explore different avenues to strengthen the friendships forged in Singapore when they return to their home countries.

16. It is only through more of such interactions that we can achieve greater cross-cultural understanding and help our youths benefit from immersive learning opportunities across countries.

17. I hope conferences like the one today will continue to keep the connections between our youths in the region active and vibrant.

Conclusion

18. Congratulations on bringing the Japanese and ASEAN community together once again, and I wish JUGAS and ASCOJA a successful conference.