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**SPEECH BY DR TONY TAN KENG YAM, CHAIRMAN OF THE
NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION, AT THE 80TH
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF NUS FACULTY OF SCIENCE
HELD ON SATURDAY, 24TH OCTOBER 2009 AT 7.00 PM AT
SHERATON TOWERS**

**Prof Andrew Wee and Mrs Wee
Dean, Faculty of Science
National University of Singapore**

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

**I would first like to thank your Dean, Professor Andrew Wee, for
kindly inviting my wife and me to join all of you this evening to celebrate
the 80th anniversary of the NUS Faculty of Science.**

**The NUS Faculty of Science can trace its roots all the way back to
1929, when Raffles College was established to provide classes in
Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics.**

The College then had three faculty members and admitted just ten students.

Twenty years later in 1949, the College was renamed Faculty of Science under the University of Malaya, with Professor Norman S. Alexander as Dean.

Recruitment of faculty and enrolment of students quickly increased in tandem with the growth and development of Singapore.

Today, the Faculty of Science is one of the biggest schools under the NUS umbrella, staffed by 250 academic faculty, 400 research and teaching staff, and 300 administrative, technical and support staff.

Annual student enrolment averages 1300 undergraduates and 200 post-graduates.

Faculty's Contribution to Singapore Education and Economy

Mathematics and Science have always been important areas of emphasis in our education system.

During the 1980s when the labour market was tight and wages were high, Singapore's strategy was to restructure our economy – from labour-intensive, low-skilled industries such as textiles and electronic-assembly operations, to higher-skilled and higher value-added industries, such as petrochemical, aircraft servicing, and computer chips manufacturing.

At that time, a sound education system with strong focus on Maths and Science helped Singapore move up the value chain, by equipping our workforce with the necessary knowledge and skills to work in the new industries.

Today, the emphasis on Maths and Science continues to be important as Singapore moves further up the value-chain into new areas of cutting-edge technology, including biomedical sciences, water and environment technologies, digital media, precision engineering and nanotechnology.

Maths and Science are also important in our rapidly expanding high value-added services industries, such as the logistics and financial services, which require graduates with strong grounding in disciplines like Maths, Physics and Computer Science, in order to solve real-world problems, manage risks and create useful financial products.

For Singapore's economic strategy to succeed, we need to ensure that Science and Maths education in Singapore continues to be relevant, rigorous and engaging for all students.

Only then can we groom quality engineers, technical specialists and managers to drive Singapore's economy in the high value-added manufacturing and services industries, and nurture top scientists and

researchers to create new knowledge and technologies that will put Singapore at the forefront of research, innovation and enterprise.

The Faculty of Science has done well in this respect.

The Faculty's alumni members, trained in the crucible of an intense curriculum that emphasises research, analysis and synthesis, have permeated all sectors of our economy.

Many alumni members including some familiar faces I am pleased to see here this evening, have moved up the ranks to occupy executive management and corporate board positions.

On the scientific research front, the Faculty is among the lead agencies that prepare our students well to engage in R&D and in creative and innovative undertakings that are opening up as the Singapore Government increasingly invests in building up our research capability and capability.

For example, the National Research Foundation (NRF) and MOE are jointly funding Research Centres of Excellence (RCEs), each with a budget of \$150 million or more, to build peaks of excellence in our universities.

These RCEs, which aim to be among the top 5 in the world in their respective fields within a decade, serve as talent magnets to attract global top talent to Singapore to do world-class research.

The Centres' research spans the full range of disciplines from the biological and physical sciences to computational sciences and mathematics.

They provide additional platforms for post-graduate students to engage in cutting-edge research, and pursue fulfilling research careers after graduation.

The excellence of the Faculty of Science can be seen in that the Faculty is home to two of the four RCEs announced so far - the Centre for Quantum Technologies (CQT), and the Centre for Mechanobiology.

We have attracted world-renowned professors – Professor Artur Ekert (from Oxford University) to lead the CQT; and Professor Michael Sheetz (from Columbia University), with Co-Director Professor Paul Matsudaira (formerly from MIT) to lead the Mechanobiology RCE. Paul is also the new Head of the Department of Biological Sciences at the NUS.

Alumni Relations

I commend the Faculty for maintaining a strong relationship with its alumni.

Over the years, the Alumni members' collective contributions by way of experience, expertise and donations have benefited both the Faculty and the University.

The late Emeritus Professor Kiang Ai Kim was well-known for his scholarship and philanthropy.

The late Dr Lee Kum Tatt was both a gifted administrator and an inspiring mentor to his students and charges.

Ms Olivia Lum, founder of Hyflux and alumna of the Chemistry Department, is well known for her entrepreneurial achievements in water technologies.

More recently, Mr Johnny Tan leads the largest alumni body – The NUS Society – in its close and symbiotic relationship with the University.

Together, they are representative of the strong and vibrant community of alumni who have made time to give back to their alma mater.

Emeritus Professor Kiang (2004), Dr Lee (2005) and Ms Olivia Lum (2005) have been recipients of the Faculty's Distinguished Alumni Awards.

This evening, the Faculty continues its tradition of upholding and recognizing individuals who have distinguished themselves in national leadership, service and research excellence.

I congratulate the 6 recipients of the Distinguished Science Alumni Awards and the 11 recipients of the Outstanding Science Alumni Awards, and

thank them for their untiring efforts and for epitomizing the best attributes of the NUS Faculty of Science.

Thank you.
