

Speech by Prof Wang Gungwu

Chairman, Board of Trustees

ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

Renaming of ISEAS to ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute

On 12 August 2015

1. Minister for Education, Mr Heng Swee Keat, Honourable Ministers, Puan Noor Aishah and family, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.
2. Let me first of all welcome you to ISEAS. On behalf of my fellow members of the Board of Trustees, I thank you for joining us this morning for the most important event since our founding - the renaming of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) - as ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.
3. Three years after Singapore became independent, ISEAS was founded in 1968. One year later, ASEAN came into being. All these three events in that sense stem from the same period, and are children of similar historical conditions. It is therefore fitting that the change in ISEAS' name takes place this year when Singapore celebrates its 50th anniversary.
4. ISEAS was the vision and creation of Dr Goh Keng Swee, who wanted the Institute to be a scholarly Institute, a centre of Southeast Asian Studies, with a great deal of autonomy to its research agenda and with an international standing. Over the last 47 years, the Institution in my mind has fulfilled Dr Goh's vision. Much has been achieved in the field for which it was created, the study of

Southeast Asia. That ISEAS is about the study of Southeast Asia is now a given connection in most people's minds.

5. Though this was not always obvious to the general public, ISEAS contributed in important ways to the development of Southeast Asian Studies as an academic discipline, and more profoundly to the ontology of this region we today take for granted as "Southeast Asia".
6. ISEAS research relies strongly on the institute's greatest comparative advantage, which is that it is located in the very region it was created to study, and that many of its researchers are from the region as well. Its general approach is multi-disciplinary and socio-anthropological and much attention is given to recognizing breaking trends throughout the region.
7. In fact, the activities of ISEAS and its publications have over the last few decades played an important role in describing the region as an entity, in drawing the connections between the parts, be these countries or ethnicities, and in helping the world understand the international political, economic and cultural contexts in which Southeast Asia functions.
8. The ISEAS Library's Southeast Asia collection is well regarded in the academic world with our Indonesia collection ranked among the best in the world. Our expository of private papers includes unique collections on prominent leaders from Singapore and Malaysia, including S. Rajaratnam, Tan Cheng Lock, Lim Kim San, David Marshall, Tun Dr Ismail and H.S. Lee.

9. ISEAS Publishing has produced as many as 2,500 academic books so far, and with recent technological developments, it has branched out into different forms of electronic publishing as well.
10. ISEAS is also the home of three worthy academic journals, each produced by its different programmes: Contemporary Southeast Asia, dealing with political and strategic matters; the Journal of Southeast Asian Economies, dealing with economic issues; and Sojourn, which deals with social, cultural issues in the region. We also have the annual edition of Southeast Asian Affairs, which is now in its 42nd year of publication.
11. Given the major changes taking place in the countries in the region, throughout East Asia and in the world, our work at the Institute is far from over. It is in fact never completed, and with the added impetus of the changes the Institute is undertaking, we can all look forward to further achievements from its researchers and its staff, supported as they always are by our many friends of ISEAS in Singapore, the region and beyond.
12. We are honoured that from today onwards, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies will be renamed ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, after Singapore's First President. We all know that Yusof Ishak believed in multi-culturalism and secularism. Similarly, ISEAS studies the complexity and diversity that is Southeast Asia, as well as the integrative process happening within the ASEAN framework, and the region's interactions with the rest of the world.
13. Thank you all again for joining us on this auspicious occasion.