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An opportunity, says Goh

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, AUG. 19. "If we view China as a threat, we will be immobilised by fear. But if we see it as an opportunity, we will come up with creative ideas to ride on China's growth." This strategic view of China as a political power, which finds itself at an economic take-off stage, has been voiced by Singapore, not by any of Beijing's presumptive rivals on the international stage.

In a bid to reinvigorate the city-state as a dynamic force at the core of international economic activities, the Singapore Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, last night addressed the nation on three main aspects of the new challenges before it. Mr. Goh's call for riding the crest of a Chinese economic wave, which seems possible in the context of Beijing's recent entry into the World Trade Organisation, has been matched by his plain-speak on why the Muslim minority in Singapore should follow the path of moderation.

The need to sustain Singapore's economic vibrancy at the present critical juncture of global uncertainties and local realities formed the main focus of Mr. Goh's speech at a traditional annual rally. The two other challenges that he addressed were the politics of countering extremism within the Muslim microcosm as also the choice before the citizens of the city-state to stay on in the country as "all-weather Singaporeans" and not

"fair-weather Singaporeans". As for the new economic puzzles that confront Singapore as it "re-makes itself at this time", Mr. Goh paid much attention to the China factor.

Singapore's firms, he noted, could find new ways to partner Chinese companies that might wish to invest abroad.

In any case, some Chinese concerns were already using Singapore as a gateway to other parts of Asia. He cited the re-export of sewing machines to India besides the sale of washing machines and motorcycles to some south-east Asian countries.

While making a pointed reference to China's growing prowess in software know-how, Mr. Goh asked Singaporeans to recognise the limits to China's capacity to act as a magnet for foreign capital and seize the opportunities.

"No matter how attractive China is, foreign investors will not put all their eggs in one basket. They will want another place in Asia to base their factories and regional headquarters. Singapore can be this other place," Mr. Goh said.

The Singapore Prime Minister's exhortation against Islamic extremism was related entirely to the city-state's recent experiences in this regard. Making an elaborate study of this new challenge to the multi-racial and multi-religious Singapore, he spoke of the crosscurrents within Islamic societies across the world.

20 AUG 2002

Mahathir 'saddened' by U.N. move

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, MAY 4. The Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, said he was 'saddened' by the U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan's decision not to go ahead and probe the killings of Palestinians in the Jericho refugee camp.

Dr. Mahathir, who travels to Washington to meet the U.S. President, George W. Bush, later this month, said: "I am saddened by the retreat of the U.N. declared by Kofi Annan."

The outspoken Malaysian leader was quoted as telling reporters: "If one country like Israel can defy the whole world, what's the use of having the U.N.? Our stance in Malaysia is firstly there must be a UN team in Palestine."

The Prime Minister, whose relationship with the U.S. has warmed in the aftermath

of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, urged 'Muslim' countries to agree on a joint course of action in dealing with the West Asian conflict.

"As long as they ('Muslim' nations) are split, they will not be able to use whatever power they have to eradicate the arrogance of Israel," the Malaysian leader said.

Dr. Mahathir's visit to Washington, the first since 1994, will see a convergence of views on some issues like the need to combat terrorism, but the Malaysian leader is hardly likely to dilute his views on issues of concern like the Palestinian cause.

The Malaysian Defence Minister, Najib Tun Razak, who is in the U.S., is said to have provided hard information about the ongoing defence cooperation between America and Malaysia at a lecture in Washington.

Mr. Najib revealed that more than 75 U.S.

ships had called at Malaysian ports in the last two years, U.S. Navy Seals conducted training in Malaysia twice a year and Malaysia provides one of the few bases outside of America for jungle warfare training.

The Malaysian Defence Minister said, according to a report in *The Straits Times* today, the country had also been protecting U.S. ships in the Strait of Malacca since September 11. (The Indian Navy, too, is performing similar duties for U.S. ships).

There is little doubt that Dr. Mahathir has consolidated his position in Malaysia after the events of September 11 winning widespread approval for the arrest of Islamist elements. Malaysia, which is a relatively prosperous Muslim-dominated nation, is being seen as a 'model', moderate State in which Islam is the dominant religion.

Musharraf must crack down on Kashmir terror: Goh

Ravindra Kumar in Singapore

May 2. — He knew well before the results of the Pakistan referendum were out that General Pervez Musharraf would "win". But Singapore Prime Minister Mr Goh Chok Tong says the Pakistani leader will make a signal contribution to Asian security if he goes "all out to control terrorism". And the definition of terror "must include people who commit terrorist acts in Kashmir".

In a freewheeling 90-minute discussion this week at his office here with editors of the *Asia News Network* that comprises 12 Asian newspapers, including *The Statesman*, Mr Goh stressed the need for all Muslims to appreciate that the fight against terror was not directed at Islam.

He suggested Singapore was disenchanted with Association of SouthEast Asian Nations, whose prospects at one point in the discussion he described as "generally bleak" economically, talked about his recent talks with Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, about his country's currently-strained relations with Ma-

aysia, about Asian free trade and about his own plans to step down.

Mr Goh was refreshingly candid and always charming, even whilst blaming some Malaysian newspapers for the recent unpleasantness,



Singapore Prime Minister Mr Goh Chok Tong

or when suggesting that Singapore's media "criticises politely", and even while asserting that Singapore would not tolerate "rudeness" to government leaders.

His recent meeting with Mr Vajpayee had embraced bilateral matters and a wider discussion on the "nature of terrorism". But Mr Goh did not "believe for a moment" that Mr Vajpayee's position on the role of the Muslim community in India

had hardened — suggested recently in a section of the Indian media — as a consequence of that meeting.

As Prime Minister of a country that addresses issues of multi-culturalism similar to India — on a far

smaller scale, no doubt, but with a great deal of success — Mr Goh had a prescription for how to fight Islamic extremism and handle a minority Muslim community. His suggestions:

- Don't alienate the majority of Muslims by giving them the idea that you are anti-Islam;
- Get moderate Muslims to be more assertive; and,
- If the religion is being oppressed in some countries, find a way to resolve the situation;
- Accept that all nations must join together to fight terrorism.

Mr Goh did not believe that poverty was the main cause for Islamic terrorism; it was one of many. More obvious was the belief among many Muslims that their religion was being suppressed.

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, Singapore had cracked down on Islamic groups with links

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Singapore cracks whip on scarf girls

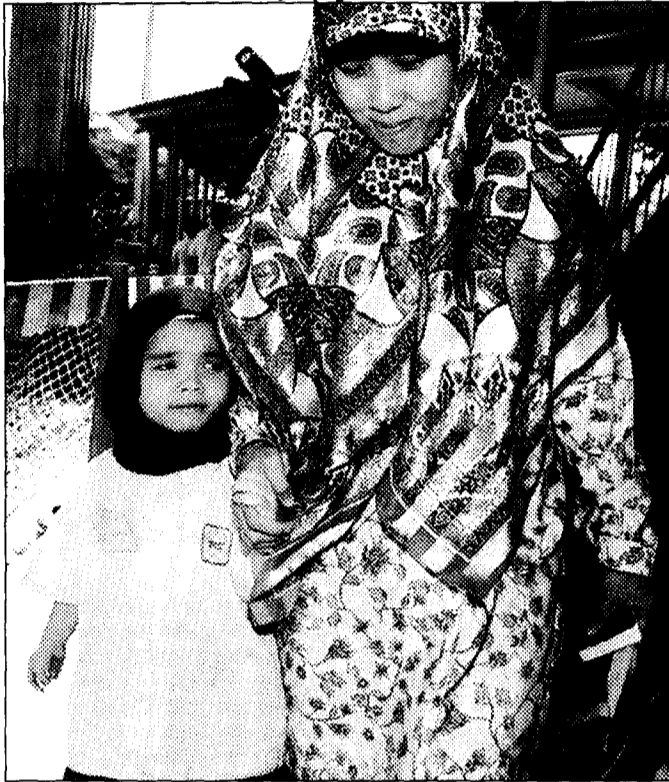
Singapore, Feb. 4 (Reuters): Singapore's government, weighing the thorny issues of religious freedom and social cohesion, took a hard line against two Muslim girls today, suspending the primary school pupils for wearing headscarves to class.

Clutching the hands of family members, the girls had little idea of the storm surrounding them or the broader ramifications as the city state stresses moderation and unity after the recent detention of 13 suspected Muslim militants.

Nurul Nasihah and Siti Farwizah Mohamad Kassim came to class in headscarves and school uniforms, flouting the Monday deadline to comply with the state policy barring the traditional Malay Muslim "tudung" and other non-standard clothing.

The ministry of education said in a statement the girls "have been suspended from school and are not allowed to attend classes unless they are in the prescribed school uniform".

For devout Malay Muslims, the tudung is obligatory once girls hit puberty but some parents have them wear it from a



Seven-year-old Nurul Nasihah and her mother leave the Whitesands Primary School after her suspension in Singapore. (AFP)

tender age. Nearly all of Singapore's 450,000 Malays are Muslim, making Islam the second-largest religion after Buddhism.

Nurul was suspended by her school almost immediately as her father complained of being painted into a corner.

"What can I do? The government is not giving me any leeway," Mohamad Nasser told reporters. "My daughter's education is as important as my faith, my religion."

Six-year-old Siti spent about two hours in class before her father fetched her on news of the suspension.

Both girls started their first year of school last month.

A third girl, Khairah Faroukh, who began wearing a headscarf two weeks into the school year, has until February 11 to comply with the dress code or face suspension, the ministry said.

"The wearing of the school uniform is an important means of building unity among students without distinction of race, religion and social status," the statement said.

Another Muslim family has taken their tudung-wearing

daughter out of school to be educated at home.

Singapore, whose Chinese majority outnumbers the Malay and Indian communities by three to one, experienced violent race riots in 1964 but has largely enjoyed ethnic peace since then.

Muslim leaders have emphasised the moderate nature of their community since the September 11 attacks on the US, anti-US anger in Muslim behemoth Indonesia and the arrests of the suspects in December for plotting a bombing campaign.

"The government is walking on a tightrope," Bilveer Singh, associate professor of political science at the National University of Singapore, said.

"They have to keep all the racial groups in balance while giving in to things which do not harm the national whole."

There is no hint the headscarf issue will become explosive but it caps a series of grievances that include the exclusion of Muslim men from sensitive areas of the military and concern over Malays lagging behind the Chinese economically.

Japan, Singapore sign free trade deal

410-1A By Amit Baruah. 14/1

SINGAPORE, JAN. 13. Japan and Singapore today signed a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) as the Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, arrived here on the last leg of his South-East Asia tour. The trade agreement is expected to remove tariffs on 94 per cent of Singapore's exports to Japan, up from the current level of 84 per cent and covers some 3,800 items. Tariff on key agricultural and fishery products (a sensitive area for Japan) will, however, be excluded from the FTA. In a speech at the signing ceremony, the Singapore Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, said the FTA would have a positive impact in the region. "It can serve as a catalyst for similar integration between Japan and the regional economies. It will help anchor Japan's economic presence in ASEAN. This last point is important as Japan's continued confidence in the region will contribute to the region's recovery, and to its future growth," Mr. Goh said.

The Prime Minister stated that the "new age" agreement signed today was not just a conventional FTA but dealt cooperation in key areas like information-communication technology, science and technology, financial services, tourism and human resource development. Mr. Goh said that the FTA grew out of a discussion he held with the late Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Keizo Obuchi, in

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December 1999. "That the agreement has been achieved in the short period of two years bear testimony to our belief in the value of the (FTA)." "During our delegation meeting, Prime Minister Koizumi also spoke about Japan's plans to initiate a Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

Singapore welcomes and supports this initiative, and looks forward to its early realisation. It will further strengthen relations between Japan and ASEAN, and help each other to grow and prosper," he said. He said that in the past decade, Japan has shown itself to be a consistent and dependable friend. "During the economic boom, Japan was a key investor in the region. During the financial crisis of 1997, Japan took steps to help the region," he said. In a separate speech at a banquet held in honour of Mr. Koizumi this evening, the Singapore Prime Minister said that Japan played an important role in anchoring the United States in East Asia. "As a key U.S. ally, it hosts US naval bases. The US-Japan security alliance contributes to regional peace and stability. It provides balance to the important Japan-U.S.-China triangular relationship," he said, hoping that Japan will continue to "deeply engage" South-East Asia in the years ahead. "You are visiting South-East Asia in the midst of change. The countries here have to grapple with domestic political changes

THE HINDU

14 JAN 2002

Malaysia deports Misuari to Philippines

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, JAN. 7. After more than a month of haggling, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) chief, Nur Misuari, was deported by Malaysia to Manila today. Mr. Misuari faces rebellion charges in the Philippines.

The MNLF leader was arrested in Malaysia after he fled a failed uprising in the southern Mindanao region in protest against the Government's decision to back a rival in elections to the post of Governor.

The Arroyo Government blew hot and cold before accepting an agreement reached between the

Foreign Ministers of the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia that Mr. Misuari would be returned to Manila.

Speaking to reporters, the Malaysian Foreign Minister, Syed Hamid Albar, said in Kuala Lumpur that Mr. Misuari was flown back to Manila in a Malaysian military aircraft this morning.

"We never change our mind. That is the position we have taken from the start and we have said we will send him back. We have kept our word and our commitment to the Philippines Government," Mr. Hamid said.

"We are happy that we have



Nur Misuari

kept our commitment and it (a reference to Mr. Misuari) is no longer our responsibility," Mr. Hamid stated.

There is a palpable sense of relief in the statement of Mr. Hamid — a clear indication that Malaysia wanted to get rid of Mr. Misuari as quickly as possible.

Malaysia did not want its relations with the Philippines to be

disturbed by the Misuari issue and had been asking Manila to accept the MNLF leader as quickly as possible.

The Philippine President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and her Government, however, seemed to have taken the view that Mr. Misuari's return to the country could complicate matters with their new allies in Mindanao — a faction of the MNLF and the larger Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Towards the end of November, Mr. Misuari's supporters rose in rebellion during which 160 persons were killed in fighting with the security forces.

Singapore leaders support Malaysia arrests

Reuters

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SINGAPORE, Jan. 6. — Singapore's Muslim leaders today supported the arrest of 15 suspected militants by the Malaysian government, including several who had trained in Al-Qaida camps in Afghanistan, saying those were extremists.

The suspects were apprehended using laws allowing detention without trial between 9 and 24 December, the government said yesterday.

The support came a day after Malaysia disclosed that since 9 December, it too had locked up 13 suspects with possible links to Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaida network.

Searches of the residences and offices of the suspects yielded information on bomb construction, photographs and video footage of target surveillance, Al-Qaida linked material as well as tampered passports and forged immigration stamps.

"You should be able to separate and demarcate what is terrorism and what Islam and the Malay/Muslim community is about," Mr Abdullah Tarmugi, minister-in-charge of Muslim affairs said.

THE STATESMAN

7 JAN 2002