

## Speech by Professor Chong Chi Tat, Chairman of Management Board

Professor Tan Chorh Chuan

President of NUS

Distinguished guests, colleagues and friends

Ten years is a period that is not too short for a review or summary, nor too long for recollection by those who saw it from the very beginning. In the case of the IMS, its conception, though certainly not its creation, goes back to the 1980's. Those of us in the Auditorium this morning who call mathematics their profession, will each have a perception of what constitutes an ideal environment conducive to mathematical research. In my case three experiences shaped my view of this. The first was the time spent as a graduate student. The second took place when I attended my very first mathematical meeting at the Oberwolfach in Germany in 1984. The Institute is perched on a hillside in a lovely valley amidst the Black Forest. Every week, arriving on Sunday and leaving the following Saturday, a group of mathematicians who share common interest in a particular mathematical subject, get together, take walks, do hikings in the Forest, attend lectures, discuss ideas and perhaps exchange gossips almost continuously for six days. The third occasion took place in 1990 when I spent half a year at the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute in Berkeley. Here again is a mathematical institute located on a hilltop overlooking the striking San Francisco Bay, a short bus ride from Evans Hall, home of the Mathematics Department of UC Berkeley. In the MSRI, or Misery as some would call it, graduate students have plenty of opportunities to talk to young postdoctoral researchers and established mathematicians, down the corridors, on a blackboard or in the lecture theatre. The experience was inspiring, and the environment exciting.

Many of us in Singapore who have had the fortune of such encounters dreamt about something similar here. It started off as idle canteen talks, and later evolved into serious but failed attempts. However, time was moving fast. In 1998/99 we found ourselves submitting a proposal to the Ministry of Education on the establishment of an institute for mathematical sciences. To our surprise and great delight, the proposal was taken up with great interest and our dream and vision in the canteen became reality at the turn of the Century.

So what has IMS achieved in the past ten years? A quick count shows that it has organized, since activities began in 2001, 37 specialized programs and 35 other activities, including workshops, conferences and summer schools. According to my estimate, close to 2500 scientists, mathematicians, engineers, clinician, scientists and other professionals have participated in these activities. And the subjects featured covered a wide range of topics. They include the most fundamental of mathematics, the Foundations of Mathematics, to such diverse areas as cryptography, finance and economics, climate change, genomics, and communications. It is said that mathematics permeates through all subjects of human endeavor. The programs and activities at the IMS is a testimony to this. Through the time spent at the IMS, many have come to notice the work done in Singapore and the vibrant environment Singapore provides to researchers. Some have chosen to pursue graduate studies at the NUS; some have chosen to take up a career in Singapore, and many research collaborations have ensued. In my view, IMS has contributed not in a small way to the research vibrancy and international visibility of the University and perhaps of Singapore.

Of course the success of IMS was not due to the efforts of the Institute alone. Every program, every workshop that was organized involved people from either departments in the NUS, A\*STAR institutes, NTU or SMU. In that sense, IMS success is the collective effort of many in Singapore, and their overseas colleagues.

The dream and vision that originated from canteen talks has a nice ending. But in comparison with MSRI and the Newton Institute in Cambridge, IMS is still relatively modest. The next ten years will probably call for an even bolder vision and bigger dreams. Perhaps it's time to start another round of idle canteen talks. Many of us will be happy to participate in this exercise.

Thank you for your attention.

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