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### **SPEECH BY MR GAN KIM YONG, MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & MINISTRY OF MANPOWER, AT THE OFFICIAL CONCLUSION OF ICAAS-NLB LIFE SCIENCES LECTURE SERIES ON "BODY PARTS: THE SCIENCE OF HUMAN RECONSTRUCTION" ON THURSDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2006, AT 7PM AT POSSIBILITY ROOM, LEVEL 5, NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD**

Ms Ngian Lek Choh, Deputy Chief Executive & Director of NLB;  
 Prof KK Phua, NLB Board Member & Founding President of ICAAS; Dr Lee Hing Yan, President of ICAAS;  
 Prof Wong Lim Soon, Main Coordinator of this Lecture Series & Immediate Past President of ICAAS;  
 Distinguished Guests;  
 Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good evening.

I am pleased to be here with you at the closing session of the second Life Sciences lecture series organized by the Imperial College Alumni Association of Singapore (ICAAS) and the National Library Board (NLB).

2. The world is seeing a new wave of scientific and technological advances in recent years. The Life Sciences are right at the forefront of this new wave, with major breakthroughs in fields such as gene therapy, bioengineering, stem cell culture, biochip technology, and transgenic plants and animals.

3. Advances in the Life Sciences present attractive economic opportunities, given their potential to transform our daily life. The multidisciplinary facets of the Life Sciences can nurture new industries in biomedicine, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, instrument inventions and others, hence generating the knowledge-based and value-added bio-economy. This is the key impetus for Singapore to develop the Life Sciences industry as another economic pillar for our nation's development.

4. Beyond Economics, the knowledge gained and the advances made in the Life Sciences will enable scientists, doctors and engineers to manipulate life in revolutionary ways. With the power to manipulate life, Life Sciences brings with it attendant ethical, legal and social issues. Knowledge in the Life Sciences can be a double-edged sword – using it in a responsible manner and guided by ethical considerations, moral reasoning and accountability, it can be creative and save lives. However, abusing this same knowledge can be destructive. We must therefore have the necessary knowledge and tools to understand these developments to make the right decisions that could affect our society and our community.

5. Advances in the Life Sciences also play an important role in managing emerging risks we face globally, such as new diseases and bio-terrorism. More than ever before, nations are aware of the impact that the tiniest of microbes can have on human civilization and our way of life. An example that strikes close to home for us here is the coronavirus that caused SARS which almost crippled our economy and our society. A more recent example is the H5N1 virus that causes the avian flu that threatens many countries around the world. The close international collaboration in the fight against these diseases has resulted in rapid advancements in the research in these fields.

6. In order to prepare our students for the future, the Ministry of Education has taken steps to enhance the learning of the Life Sciences in schools since 2001. The general student population will have a basic understanding of life sciences, so as to kindle their interest. Students who are to pursue a career in the Life Sciences will be given opportunities to acquire in-depth knowledge and skills in this field. This holistic approach will give our students general exposure to the various disciplines in the basic and applied sciences.

7. I am happy to note that the NLB and the ICAAS have taken the initiative to launch the Life Science lecture series in 2001 to educate the layman on popular and current themes in the Life Sciences. The close partnership leverages on the strength of the alumni of the Imperial College London, renowned for its excellence in science, technology and medicine, as well as on the mission of the NLB, to expand the learning capacity of the nation so as to enhance national competitiveness.

8. The theme of this Life Sciences series is "Body Parts: The Science of Human Reconstruction". I understand that four public lectures and one workshop have been conducted by eminent scientists and practitioners. The topics presented included personalized medicine, prosthetic devices, stem cells, their applications for regeneration of body parts and related ethical issues, as well as assistive technologies to enable people with disabilities to overcome their limitations.

9. This evening's panel discussion is on an interesting topic, "The Making of the Six Million-Dollar Man". Many of us would remember watching this well-known and popular TV series. The show's premise is intriguing especially in the light of recent advances made in the Life Sciences. Do we really have the capability to build a bionic man? I am sure the audience can look forward to an interesting and enlightening session with the panelists.

10. On this note, I would like to congratulate the ICAAS and the NLB for successfully organizing the second series of the Life Sciences lectures. I wish you all the best as you work on future partnerships.

Thank you.

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