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14 MAR 2025

Speech by 2M Tan See Leng at the National Robotics Programme's RoboSG! 2025 Event

Prof Quek Tong Boon, Chief Executive, National Robotics Programme
Fellow Cabinet colleagues SMS Janil and MOS Alvin
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

1. Good morning, it is my pleasure to be here this morning at RoboSG!, a biennial flagship event by the National Robotics Programme.

Introduction

2. It is amazing to witness the growth of this programme. Two years ago, I spoke at this same event on the need to strengthen our local robotics ecosystem and invest in developing robotics capabilities. Last year, I also announced the \$60 million investment in the next phase of the National Robotics Programme, or NRP in short.

3. I am glad to hear the NRP's progress, and to see some of the results exhibited around us today. We have succeeded in developing robotics capabilities that are applied across many domestic industries:

a. In healthcare, where I spent a good part of my career in, more institutions like the National Cancer Centre Singapore have started using robots for simple tasks such as medicine-picking and delivery. This allows the care team to focus on direct patient care.

b. Prof Quek mentioned that robotics for construction is challenging, but we are seeing some very nice and very hopeful progress. Today, HDB is already using robots for painting, plastering and sanding at BTO sites. Workers can be deployed to perform higher-value – and in some instances – less risky work, such as operating machines.

4. Yet, this may just be the beginning. To quote Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, the ChatGPT moment for robotics is “just around the corner”. As innovation accelerates, there is strong promise for what the robotics industry can bring to us.

a. Today, Asia is the powerhouse of industrial robot production, accounting for 70% of all new robot installations in 2023^[1]. This is in part fuelled by Industry 4.0 and the push towards automation. As the global economy continues to innovate and automate, robotics adoption and demand will only grow.

b. Rapid advancements in AI are also laying the ground for new growth areas, like humanoid robotics. This is a field where robots are built to resemble humans, and can perform tasks and interact more naturally than general robots. Companies in the US, Japan, and China are investing significantly and aggressively in this area, and gearing up to seize their share of the pie once market demand takes off exponentially.

5. What do all these mean for Singapore?

a. We are a small market, but that should not stop us from riding the wave and catching the sails.

b. At MTI's Committee of Supply (COS) debate last week, DPM Gan shared that innovation is at the heart of economic growth. We have achieved some success on this front, such as with our semiconductor and biomedical manufacturing industries. Leading companies are doing critical R&D here and creating both good jobs and spillovers for the wider economy.

6. Robotics is an emerging area that we want to grow next.

a. Through the National Robotics Programme, we have established ourselves in the robotics R&D space. Besides developing applicable technologies like the Robotics Middleware Framework for various end-uses, NRP projects have also trained more than 700 research scientists, engineers, and professionals in Singapore.

b. We are therefore in a position of strength. And we will build on this to level up the industry in three ways.

i. First, at the systems-level, we will be more purposeful in driving translation of robotics research, and turning them into viable applications.

ii. Second, at the company-level, promote collaboration between leading players and local robotics companies, so that our companies can become more competitive.

iii. Third, for a select group of promising robotic startups, to support them in their growth and expansion locally and abroad.

7. Let me elaborate. First, we will ride on our existing strengths in robotics R&D, and push for translation of more mature technologies into useful end-applications. We will capitalise on the strengths of our public sector R&D, so that the rising tide of robotics can lift all boats. NRP's “RoboCluster” initiative, which I announced at MTI's Committee of Supply last year, is a key part of this effort.

a. “RoboCluster” taps on the collective innovative power of public sector researchers, end-users, and robotics companies. It brings together these groups to identify industry needs and develop solutions using the R&D capabilities available in our system today. As a start, clusters have been formed to develop robotics use cases for four key domains, namely facilities management, manufacturing, aviation, and maritime.

b. Thus far, the RoboCluster for facilities management has welcomed two approved proposals, one of which is between SUTD and Spinoff Robotics. The proposal could potentially reduce up to half the manpower required for façade cleaning jobs, and enhance workplace safety. Several other proposals are also under way to facilitate greater translation of robotics technologies.

8. Second, for robotics companies with established innovation capabilities and would like to achieve greater speed-to-market, we will provide them the pathway to innovate better and to also access business opportunities. Schemes such as the Partnerships for Capability Transformation scheme, or PACT, are useful for this purpose. As part of PACT, local enterprises work with leading companies in the field in product development and can benefit from the transfer of technological know-how and networks.

a. Aubotic is one of the local robotic automation companies which has contributed to and benefited from PACT. Aubotic partnered SK tes, a global leader in battery lifecycle management, to co-develop robotics technologies for the recycling industry. The technology is expected to reduce manual inefficiencies in SK tes' recycling process, thereby improving its productivity by over 30%. As for Aubotic, it is now better positioned to access business opportunities in the green industry.

9. And finally, for a select group of high-performing, promising startups, we want to accelerate their growth and help them scale abroad. Often, while these startups have innovative robotics technologies, they are less familiar in terms of how to get funding, or in crafting a market strategy to sell the product. We will therefore pull together existing resources to support these companies in their growth journey, through a new RoboNexus initiative that I will be launching later on.

10. RoboNexus will provide tailored support based on the maturity stage of the startup. It is anchored by an Advisory Board made up of public and private sector experts, which will offer resources to help participating companies grow their businesses – these include mentorship, access to technology providers, and opportunities to venture into global markets.

a. We have in fact started a pilot run of RoboNexus last September, and the early results have been encouraging.

b. Three participating companies – LionsBot, KABAM Robotics and dConstruct Robotics – went on a US trip led by NRP last year. They were able to learn from global best practices and strengthen their plans for international growth. I look forward to seeing this first batch of RoboNexus companies successfully access new markets, secure funding, and grow their international presence.

Conclusion

11. Let me conclude. Over the years, the NRP has established a strong foundation in robotics research and developed capabilities that we are proud of. But as the pace of robotics advancements accelerate, staying ahead would require us to be nimble and bold. I encourage companies to keep innovating, forge impactful partnerships, and work with us to push the boundaries of what is possible. The future of robotics is ours to shape.

12. Thank you.

^[1] Source: International Federation of Robotics (IFR) World Robotics 2024 Report
Press Release stated 70% of all newly deployed robots in 2023 were installed in Asia.

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13 MAR 2025

Speech by DPM and Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong at American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore (AmChamSG) Office Opening Ceremony



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