Speech by Durar Tasneem Binte Mohd Zaheer On Behalf of 2026 Lifelong Learning Scholars

Good evening.

Guest of Honour, Mr Edwin Tong,

Minister for Law and Second Minister for Home Affairs

Mr Lawrence Tan Han Tong, Chairman of the Tan Kah Kee Foundation,

Mr Ng Chee Hwa, Vice-Chairman of the Tan Kah Kee Foundation and

Donor of the Ng Teng Yeng BBM Lifelong Learning Scholarship,

Professor Eugene Tan, Chairman of the Tan Kah Kee Foundation Scholarship Committee,

Mr Peter Lam, CEO of ITE, Deputy CEOs, Principals of ITE Colleges, distinguished guests, fellow scholarship recipients, parents, family members, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Durar Tasneem, from Technical Diploma in Beauty and Wellness Management, ITE College East. I am deeply honoured to stand before you today as a recipient of the Tan Kah Kee Foundation Lifelong Learning Scholarship.

As a Ceylonese Singaporean who was homeschooled for most of my childhood, I never imagined that one day I would be standing here receiving a scholarship that celebrates lifelong learning. This moment is not only a milestone for me, but also a reminder that there are multiple pathways to success.

My educational journey has been anything but conventional.

I was homeschooled from the age of seven. While homeschooling gave me the freedom to learn differently, it also came with many questions from others.

"How do you know you are learning enough?"

"Wouldn't it be easier to attend a regular school?"

Overtime, those questions became my own doubts. I began to wonder whether I truly belonged in a traditional education system.

Those doubts grew even stronger after receiving my O-Level results. I was not accepted into any of my dream schools. At the time, it felt as though every insecurity I had carried for years had finally been proven right.

Looking back today, I realized what felt like my greatest disappointment became one of my greatest opportunities.

I enrolled in Higher Nitec in Beauty and Wellness Management at ITE College East. Although it was not the path I had originally planned, it became the place where I found my confidence.

With the encouragement of my lecturers and the support of friends who believed in me, I discovered a genuine passion for the beauty and wellness industry. Every practical lesson, every theory class, and every challenge helped me to grow—not only as a student, but as a person.

For the first time, education was not simply about chasing grades. It became about discovering my strengths, building confidence, and realizing that growth is not measured by how quickly we had reached our destination, but by our willingness to keep learning along the way.

Looking back, I no longer see my journey as a series of setbacks.

I see it as a series of lifelong lessons.

Despite the challenges, I graduated with a Certificate of Merit and as one of the recipients of the Outstanding Graduate Award, an honour awarded to the top one percent of graduates.

I am now pursuing my Technical Diploma in Beauty and Wellness Management at ITE College East. I look forward to continuing to learn, challenge myself, and contribute meaningfully to the beauty and wellness industry.

Although I may not know exactly where my journey will lead, I know the kind of person I hope to become. To lead with empathy, continue learning with humility, and create opportunities for others to discover their own potential.

I also hope my journey can encourage home schoolers and young people who have ever doubted themselves in their own potential. If my story can remind even one person that an unconventional path can still lead to meaningful opportunities, receiving this scholarship will mean even more to me.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Tan Kah Kee Foundation and the scholarship selection panel for believing in me and investing in my future.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated lecturers at ITE College East, thank you for seeing my potential before I fully saw it in myself. Your encouragement and belief have shaped not only my education but also the confidence I carry today.

To my parents, thank you for always working tirelessly to provide for our family. Thank you for dedicating yourself to homeschooling my siblings and me, and for teaching us that learning begins with curiosity, perseverance, and love.

To my siblings and my closest friends, thank you for believing in me, especially during the moments when I struggled to believe in myself. This honour belongs to all of you as much as it belongs to me.

Finally, to my fellow scholarship recipients, today we celebrate how far we have come. Tomorrow marks the beginning of another chapter.

If there is one lesson my journey has taught me, it is this:

One examination does not define your future.

One setback does not undermine your potential.

Failure is never the final chapter.

Every challenge is another opportunity to learn, to grow, and to become stronger.

That, to me, is the true spirit of lifelong learning.

Thank you.