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SPEECH BY MR MATTHIAS YAO, MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE & MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR  
MACPHERSON ON MACPHERSON GARDEN PRECINCT OPENING CEREMONY ON SATURDAY, 10 APR 99 AT  
8.00 PM

UPGRADING KEEPS FAMILIES TOGETHER

## National Archives of Singapore

I am very happy to be here this evening to share the joy of the residents in marking the completion of the Batch 4 upgrading programme in this estate. 10 blocks of flats have been upgraded. They house about 1200 families. They now join the residents of another 15 blocks that were upgraded in an earlier batch. Together, they form the new MacPherson Garden.

The residents voted yes to upgrading in 1995. From then, the project progressed smoothly. The internal and external works were carried out according to plan. A few minor problems surfaced along the way, but these were solved quickly and with minimum trouble.

This is a testimony to the hard work put in by the Working Committee, the HDB officials, and the contractor Hor Kew Pte Ltd, as well as the co-operation, support and understanding of all the residents here. I thank everyone involved, and

congratulate you on the completion of a successful project.

The physical transformation of the estate after upgrading is obvious.

We now have covered links, pavilions, landscaped gardens and traffic-free walkways. The flats have new lifts and a new look. Some have additional space for a bathroom or kitchen extension.

These new features certainly make the estate and flats much more comfortable and pleasant to live in.

However, during these few years of looking after the upgrading projects here, I observed that upgrading also brings some social benefits that are less obvious.

There are 3 benefits.

First, upgrading preserves community spirit. Most of the residents in MacPherson, especially the older ones, have grown fond of living in the estate and do not wish to go elsewhere. But as the estate deteriorated over the years, residents began to look elsewhere for a more modern environment. Ten years ago, many residents here were in the queue to buy a new flat in a new estate. Although there were constant repairs and maintenance carried out in the old estate, these were not enough to make an old estate become new again. As more residents left MacPherson, the community spirit started to thin out. New ties had to be built all over again in new areas and with new residents.

By voting for upgrading, the residents in MacPherson had to endure two years of disruption, dust and dirt. But in effect, they voted to modernise the estate so that they can continue to live here, to be among old friends, and to be close to familiar surroundings.

Because of upgrading, the community spirit that has been built up over the last 30 years in MacPherson will continue to grow and strengthen.

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Second, upgrading keeps families together. Before we had upgrading, newly married couples would apply for flats in the new estates. These new estates are built in the less populated areas in Singapore. They can be quite far away from the old estates where their parents live in.

Nevertheless, the young couples still preferred the new estates because of the modern designs and facilities in those areas.

Upgrading changed this thinking. In my visits to the families in MacPherson, I have met many young couples who used to live with their parents nearby before they were married.

They bought the upgraded resale flats here so that they can continue to be near to their parents.

They no longer need to go to a new estate many kilometres away to enjoy a newer and

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cleaner environment. The upgraded flats in the upgraded precincts can now meet their requirements.

At the same time, parents and children can remain as close as they were before.

Third, upgrading brings new vigour to an old estate. New buyers used to look for new flats in the new estates only. Now, upgraded resale flats have become an attractive alternative option. Because the older estates are more centrally located, there is the added advantage of better public transport services. Buyers can see exactly what they are buying, and need not wait for the facilities to be built stage by stage as they are already there in the estate. Also they can get a grant from the Government to help them pay for a resale flat. Hence, many more young couples are choosing to buy upgraded flats to set up their homes. This brings a new vigour, a sense of vitality, into an aging estate.

Community spirit, family togetherness and renewed vitality that result from upgrading are far more valuable than the physical improvements that have been made.

They make upgrading a good programme to support. I am sure all the residents here are happy that they voted for upgrading. I thank HDB, Hor Kew, and the working committee for making it a reality.

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