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OPENING ADDRESS BY DR OW CHIN HOCK,

MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,

MAYOR OF TANJONG PAGAR CDC DISTRICT AND

MP FOR TANJONG PAGAR GRC AT THE

FORUM ON 'S21 VISION' ON

SATURDAY, 22 MAY 1999 AT 3.00 PM

AT LENG KEE COMMUNITY CENTRE MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM

It is my pleasure to be here with you this afternoon at this forum to share views and hear your feedback on 'The Singapore 21 (S21) Vision'. The report on the S21 Vision was launched by the Prime Minister on 24 April 99. The S21 Vision was the result of more than a year's discussion of the S21 Committee with about 6,000 Singaporeans. Briefly, it is a vision for 'a Singapore where every citizen matters, where each can make a difference to society as an active participant, and where everyone has opportunities to succeed, with success redefined to include achievements in non-material and non-economic pursuits.'

This vision has been condensed into five dilemmas and five ideas. The Leng Kee Community Centre's current affairs club and its YEC have prepared some transparencies on the key points of the S21 Vision Report. These will guide you in your discussion.

The S21 Vision was debated in Parliament on 4 – 6 May. In joining the debate, the Prime Minister cautioned that "Singapore is not a nation yet. It is only a state, a sovereign entity", and PM asked, "Will a Singapore 'tribe' emerge?" The Senior Minister reminded us in the debate that "The past is valuable in telling us how we got here and having us understand what are our perils, what are our fault lines, and don't mistake them. They are not going to disappear in 20, 30, 40 years." SM endorsed the S21 report, but said it was like "pushing this boulder up the hill." These are additional thoughts for you to ponder. These have nothing to do with the fact that one is less enthusiastic and less confident about the capacities of the younger generation, or putting a dampener on the proceedings. These messages were to inject some realism and share with younger Singaporeans some sobering thoughts in the discussion on Singapore's future.

I. Pluralistic Society

Let me share with you my personal thoughts on the S21 Vision: First, on the nature of our society. In my interview on SAP schools with Zaobao on 1 May, I raised two macro points: (1) our society is a pluralistic society with different races, languages, cultures and religions. We cannot be homogeneous. We have to seek common ground while allowing these differences to exist (ㄗㄛㄟㄣˊㄅㄛˊ). The common ground is to be found in national consciousness, the same path we have travelled and shared experiences in nation building in the past, and a common destiny and vision in the future. National consciousness and cultural identity are two different concepts. A pluralistic society is a pillar for Singapore's survival. If we lose it, our survival would be threatened; and (2) to maintain such a pluralistic society, we must have policies and institutions to support it. For example, we have the Presidential Council for Minority Rights, GRCs, the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and the bilingual policy. Each ethnic community also has its own self-help group, Chamber of Commerce, radio station and TV channel. We must take a holistic view of these policies and institutions. You cannot say "for our country to survive, I don't want you to preserve your characteristics, but I want to keep mine." Once you question any of the policies and institutions, the rest will be affected and similarly questioned.

II. Self versus Community

Among the five key ideas of the S21 vision, two are about individuals – "Every Singaporean Matters" and "Opportunities for All". Some of you may recall that one of the five shared values is "Nation before Community and Society before Self". Indeed, herein lies another dilemma – self versus community. Every Singaporean does matter, and every Singaporean must be given opportunities to develop his potential to the fullest. But different individuals have different attributes, capabilities, and interests, and they should be allowed to pursue their own career paths to the best of their ability. Indeed, every society needs different talents, different skills – politicians, entrepreneurs, professionals, civil servants, managers, scientists, scholars, unionists, community leaders, workers, artists, athletes, etc. We have praised those who climbed Mount Everest, we have honoured medallists of the Asian Games and we recognize the businessman of the year annually. But we also need to encourage scientists, researchers, and academics to excel and put Singapore on the map in these areas. Doing a PhD is not necessarily for self-fulfilment, it is a job requirement. But in emphasizing "every Singaporean matters", we should avoid excessive individualism and the "me too" attitude.

III. S21 and CDCs

Take the Tanjong Pagar CDC as an example. Our CDC, together with the GROs and VWOS in the District, has embarked on a series of programmes and activities. These programmes and activities may be categorised into five areas in line with the five ideas in the S21 vision.

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As regards the second idea of 'Strong Families: Our Foundation and Our Future', the CDC has also formed a Family Development Strategic Planning Committee to review the needs of families and to organise family oriented activities to promote family bonding, such as family sports carnival, Family Heritage Day, Family Day and Community Arts Week. The family has come under increased pressure. Nuclear families will be the trend. In most cases, both parents will be working and the children will often have to be looked after by either the grandparents or maids or left in the care of a child care centre. To alleviate the burden of these dual income families, the Youth Development Strategic Planning Committee under the CDC, jointly with various voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) and self-help group, has set up four Before-and-After-School Care (BASC) Centres and six more BASC centres will be set up in the district to reach the target of 10 BASC centres by the year 2000.

In line with the third idea of 'Opportunities For All', our CDC emphasizes that educational opportunities must remain open to all who have the ability, regardless of family, financial or social background. To do so, the CDC, jointly with the CCCs, has provided scholarships, bursaries and other financial aid to assist students in their academic pursuit. In addition, the CDC has also collaborated with several VWOs and self-help group to jointly set up 5 Student Service Centres by the year 2000. The first was the Redhill Student Service Centre, jointly set up with CDAC and Leng Kee GROs, and the second centre in Clementi, jointly set up with Singapore Polytechnic and Clementi GROs, are already in operation. With the rapid advancement of information technology (IT), the CDC and GROs have also jointly set up several IT Centres in the district and are promoting IT-related activities to make IT accessible to all, especially those from the lower income families.

The fourth idea of the S21 Vision is 'The Singapore Heartbeat' which is perhaps the most important among the five ideas. As Singapore becomes more internationalised and cosmopolitan in the 21st Century, and talents are highly mobile, it would be more crucial to have a strong national heartbeat. Regardless of where we live and where our origins are, we must have a strong sense of belonging to this country. We must ask ourselves why Nobel Prize winner Professor Li Yuanzhe (李遠哲) chose to go back to Taiwan, and in the 1955, why Professor Qian Xuesen (錢學森) decided to return to China. At home, a substantial number of Singaporeans who had top academic qualifications, good jobs, sound achievements and excellent opportunities overseas also chose to come back to their home base - Singapore, even though they were not bonded. This is not a question of material reward, indeed, some of them would have been better off monetarily if they had continued to stay overseas. Rather, this is about heartware - an X-factor that cannot be explained fully.

To ensure that our own talents who have excelled overseas do come back to serve, we should have an instinctive sense of shared values, shared history and shared destiny, simply because we are Singaporean. To keep this Singapore heartbeat strong, the various GROs have organised annual National Day activities to promote patriotism, including the display of our national flag and the annual National Day Dinner, but they should try to include more residents. Our CDC plans to jointly organize with GROs visits to the National Education Exhibition and historical sites and monuments. To enable the new citizens to feel a sense of belonging to the country and community in which they reside in, the CDC has also organised decentralised citizenship ceremonies for the new citizens. Community bonding is also essential in the achievement of the Singapore heartbeat. Hence, our CDC and GROs have jointly organised many activities requiring mass participation of residents, so as to promote community bonding and social interaction.

The fifth idea is 'Active Citizens, Making A Difference to Society'. Active citizenship encompasses the kampong spirit and gotong royong. Membership in CDC, Town Council, GROs, VWOs, school Advisory Committees and various social organizations is a good indicator of active citizenship. The joint implementation of the Community Safety and Security Programme with the Home Team is another good illustration of how residents can play an important part in the safety and security of their own community. The CDC hopes to instil a sense of cohesiveness and belonging in our residents by giving them a direct stake in the crucial aspects of our community's well being. Further, our CDC will reach out to residents in private estates to involve them in our CDC or its Divisional CDC Liaison Committees (CLCs) and our Town council and its Committees. This together will inject the 'soul' of community spiritedness that will bring about social cohesion in our affluent society.

Today's forum is just the beginning. I would like the grassroots leaders, together with the CDC Liaison Committee (CLC), to draw up an action plan of programmes and activities on S21. I hope the other nine CLCs in other Divisions would do likewise, so that our CDC can coordinate these plans into our Tanjong Pagar CDC S21 plan. In closing, I would like to stress that everyone has a part to play in the Singapore 21 Vision because it is a vision that concerns all of us. It is only when we all work together and share the same heartware that we can make a difference to our future.

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