

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT S R NATHAN AT THE SWEARING IN OF THE SIXTH PRESIDENT AT THE ISTANA ON WEDNESDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER 1999 AT 8.00 PM

Ladies and Gentlemen

Three years ago, I returned after completing my assignment as Ambassador to the United States. Then, another assignment awaited me at the Nanyang Technological University. Now, that of the Second Elected President of Singapore.

2 I am humbled by this new honour to be the Sixth President of the Republic. I am deeply touched by the encouragement and support I received from you, Mr Prime Minister, Senior Minister and your Cabinet colleagues. Likewise that of my family, close friends, Civil Service colleagues and indeed from Singaporeans of all races. My special thanks also goes to the Trades Unions, community organisations, clan associations, and various social organisations representing different ethnic groups. Above all, the numerous ordinary men and women from all walks of life, who came forth to show their affection and support.

3 I am acutely aware that the Presidency is no ordinary job. It is the highest office of the land. This is a duty I am ready to undertake. I promise to give of my best, the very best I can, and without fear or favour.

4 Questions have been asked as to what I hope to achieve in this new Mission. All I can say is that I will be a President for all Singaporeans. Every community of Singaporeans will be my parish.

5 As President, I have custodial powers under the Constitution. These are to protect our past reserves and the integrity of the public service. In this I will be assisted by able and respected Singaporeans who constitute the Council of Presidential Advisers. I will exercise these powers in Singapore's national interests, as my duty and conscience requires.

6 I will work closely with the Government to realise the intent of this new institution. For it to develop, it will require nurturing and time. The Government and President Ong Teng Cheong have worked this institution these past six years, and developed a mutual understanding on how it can operate. They have worked out ways of giving effect to the Constitutional provisions of the Presidency. How each party will conduct itself within the Constitutional framework to protect our past reserves has since been agreed. The arrangements are set out in the White Paper on "The Principles of Determining and Safeguarding the Accumulated Reserves of the Government, and the Fifth Schedule Statutory Boards and Government Companies". I accept what is reflected in that White Paper. It will be the basis for me to work with the Government to implement the second key mechanism.

7 This custodial function of the elected Presidency is relatively new. My predecessor, the first elected President, Mr Ong Teng Cheong has ironed out some ambiguities and also tested out the powers and workings of the institution. He has demonstrated that it can be made to work. Changing circumstances are liable to throw up new challenges and unanticipated issues. They will need to be worked upon. I will build upon the foundation that has already been laid out. As we accumulate more experience working this institution, efforts to refine the arrangements will continue. Through practice and precedent we will be defining how these Presidential safeguards will function.

8 Finally, as a Singaporean, I am proud of what Singapore has achieved in the 34 years, since independence – a thriving economy, a harmonious multi-racial society, a cohesive community and a confident sovereign nation.

9 We still have much to do if we are to make Singapore a first-world economy, a world-class home and an oasis of talent. More importantly to develop deeper roots as a nation, by strengthening the unity, cohesion, and harmony of our society. The Presidency as an institution can do much towards that end. Ensuring sustained political stability, continued growth and prosperity is everyone's responsibility. It behoves us to work together. I offer my wholehearted commitment to work with all Singaporeans on that road to our future.

10 In a few months, a new dawn will break. We will face a new millennium. There will be new issues to grapple with, challenges to be overcome, and opportunities to seize in a globalised world. Just as we did 34 years ago, when our backs were against the wall, I know that we can do it again. It will require each and everyone of us to feel passionately for this land and, through unity and cohesion endure and thrive in the coming millennium. I will work with you on that journey to the best of my ability.