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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Dr Lee Boon Yang, 9 Sep 99, 6.30 pm

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR LEE BOON YANG

MINISTER FOR MANPOWER AND

MP FOR JALAN BESAR GRC

AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE

NEW SCHOOL BUILDING OF

BENDEMEER SECONDARY SCHOOL

ON THURSDAY, 9 SEP 99 AT 6.30 PM

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Director (Higher Education & Public Affairs), MOE, Dr John Lim

Chairman, School Advisory Committee, Mr Patrick Tay

Principal, Mrs Karen Oei

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 Today marks the Official Opening of Bendemeer Secondary School at these new premises, occupied since June last year. I would like to congratulate the Principal, teacher and students on this auspicious occasion.

2 This opening marks a new phase for Bendemeer Secondary School. The first phase started in 1977 when the school was located along Serangoon Road. During those 22 years, Bendemeer Secondary served as an important neighbourhood school. It enrolled most of its students from nearby Beng Wan Primary School and Bendemeer Primary School. This cluster of three schools provided primary and secondary education to many children in Bendemeer, Kallang and Whampoa estates.

3 The relocation of Bendemeer Secondary to these new premises struck me as a tremendous improvement on its own. I visited the school for the first time about 3 weeks ago. I observed that it was located in a quiet and peaceful neighbourhood. Its airy classrooms are no longer disturbed by traffic noise from the busy Serangoon Road. It is surrounded by St George's Estates, home to many of its pupils. There is a certain sense of tranquillity and intimacy with the families served by the school. I am not an expert but I hope that such good "feng-shui" will enable Bendemeer Secondary to attain high achievements in the years ahead.

4 Education is, and will always be one of Government's top priority. Education has two key roles in nation building. First, it grooms our young citizens for their roles as working adults. Education equips our children with knowledge and skills, to contribute to Singapore's economic activities. I believe it was Michaelangelo, who once said that inside every piece of Carrera marble, there is a beautiful sculpture. The sculptor's art is to knock away the surrounding stone with hammer and chisel to release this beautiful sculpture. Every child has talents and potential. Education enables Nature's endowment to bloom and flourish. Through good education, we enable the next generation to realise their full potential.

5 Education also has another key role in nation building. It provides a common experience for our children, an understanding of our history and the challenges that we face as a nation. It also imparts values and moulds the character of the next generation to become honest, upright and responsible citizens. Through education, we strengthen our social bonds and national resilience. This is perhaps as important as learning the 3 "Rs".

6 A new school is just an assembly of concrete and steel. It is the Principal, teachers and students who will breathe life into this building and transform it into an institution of pride, joy and achievements to be celebrated by our community. The challenge before you is thus to be innovative and dedicated as

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teachers so that your students will one day leave, not just with knowledge but also armed with values and a sense of responsibility to the nation.

7 Indeed I am glad to note that the school has already charted out a course to provide a more meaningful and well-rounded education to the students. The school has introduced a wide range of projects and group activities to enrich its curriculum. It is applying the latest in educational technologies, including the use of Information Technology to widen the scope of learning by the students and prepare them for living and working in an Information Age. Bendemeer Secondary has taken on the task of character development by introducing activities and teacher-student relationships, which will help students to develop their fullest potential. The school is also encouraging and nurturing students' creativity and innovativeness by promoting learning projects which are driven by the students' own special interests. Students with interesting ideas will have the opportunities to explore and elaborate on their ideas and interests. Their natural curiosity will be leveraged for them to learn and acquire even more knowledge.

8 In its effort to prepare students for their roles and contribution to our economic life, the school is setting up a School Co-operative. This will certainly give the teachers and students some hands-on experience in business and may well be the spark to ignite in some students, a visionary entrepreneurial spirit that will add-value and create wealth in the years ahead.

9 I also noted the school's effort to engage parents and the community as their partners in education. This is an essential link in the chain. The school cannot exist in isolation. It must become an active member of the community. Hence, Bendemeer Secondary has established contacts and co-operation with parents and community organisations.

10 Let me cite an example. Under the umbrella of the school's Community Involvement Programme (CIP), the school has intensified its effort to raise students' awareness and sense of responsibility for the community. The school has collaborated with Central Singapore Community Development Council and Kolam Ayer Grassroots Organisations on a joint project to raise funds for needy students of the school. Pupils from Bendemeer Secondary also participated in various community activities, such as cleaning and washing the void decks of the neighbouring HDB blocks and collection of old newspapers. By taking part in such simple yet meaningful activities, students learned how to reach out to the rest of the community. Their participation also raised their awareness and appreciation for their neighbourhood environment. They also gained a better understanding of their responsibility as a member of this community to help those who are less able and to care for our environment.

11 I hope the school will continue with such projects to enhance students' ties and interactions with the local community organisations. Such effort will reinforce MOE's school-home-community partnership strategy. It is also very much in line with the spirit of the vision of Singapore 21 to nurture active citizens who will not just add value to the economy or look after their well being. More importantly, active citizens will also participate in guiding and shaping our society and Nation. Your students should in future be keen to play their part in community life, providing leadership or ideas and personal effort to bring improvements and benefits to fellow citizens. This will elevate your motto "From Each His Best" to a new dimension of doing the best for the community and Nation.

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12 The strategy adopted by Bendemeer Secondary is certainly well positioned and in the right direction to achieve our vision of "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation". It will enable the school to not only equip our young citizens with the required knowledge and "book learning" but also ensure that they acquire sound values, develop the right attitude, skills and social responsibility to enable Singapore to remain a harmonious, successful and prosperous nation in the 21st century.

13 In conclusion, I commend the Principal, Staff and School Advisory Committee for their commitment towards the total development of our young citizens. I congratulate Bendemeer Secondary School on this memorable occasion. I wish the whole school community continued success as they take on the challenges of the new millennium.

14 It is now my pleasure to officially declare open the new premises of Bendemeer Secondary School.

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