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Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR MAH BOW TAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE
NATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME ON "SINGAPORE, OUR GARDEN CITY" AT THE LOWER PEIRCE
TRAIL,

OLD UPPER THOMSON ROAD, ON FRIDAY, 12 NOV 99 AT 11.35 AM

Prof Leo Tan, Chairman National Parks Board;

Ladies and gentlemen:

Introduction

In 1996, the Prime Minister mooted the idea of introducing National Education to students. The programme is aimed at engendering in Singaporeans, especially our younger generation, a shared sense of nationhood and an understanding of the past. Knowledge of the Singapore Story, including our unique challenges, constraints and

vulnerabilities, will go a long way in equipping our young to meet the challenges of the future. MOE has since introduced National Education in our schools.

2 This morning, I am happy to launch NParks' contribution to the National Education programme. With three decades of experience in the greening of Singapore, NParks is ready to help young Singaporeans understand and appreciate our Garden City. This awareness of the makings of our Garden City hopefully will translate into a conscious effort by our young to care for our parks and greenery and to treasure our natural heritage.

Public's Perception of Singapore as a Garden City

3 Singapore has earned a reputation as a Garden City, among visitors and Singaporeans alike. When asked in a Singapore Tourism Board survey in 1997, "What appeals most to you about Singapore", 3 out of 4 tourists cited our "clean and green" environment.

4 Similarly, a Gallop Poll commissioned by NParks last year found that more than 80% of Singaporeans believed that living in a Garden City adds value to their lives. But the job is not over yet. NParks aspires to create the impression that we are in a garden the moment we step out of our home or office.

When respondents were asked whether the Garden City was "one that makes you feel that you are in a garden whenever you are outdoors", some 56% thought so. The purists, however, do not regard structures like housing, office buildings, industrial buildings, shopping centres, roads, expressways and cars as being part of a Garden City. Taking this feedback into account, NParks will strive to further soften the harshness of concrete and highrise buildings.

Consultative Style of Park Management

5 In planning and managing our parks and open spaces, we must look at ways to meet the aspirations of the public wherever possible. NParks is therefore more actively involving the community in its park development and management programmes. Through surveys and dialogue with grassroots organisations and professional bodies, facilities and programmes can be better tailored to suit the needs of the population.

Friends of NParks

6 As an extension of this consultation process, NParks is establishing a "Friends" programme for various parks, gardens and the Nature Reserves. These "friends" of NParks will be the informal channel of feedback and communication between park visitors and NParks, and will assist in providing inputs for the improvement of park facilities. They will also help in inculcating care and

behavioural change among our park users. Their role will become increasingly important as our parks are used more and more for community activities and as outdoor classrooms.

7 I would like to take this occasion to acknowledge the efforts of NParks' volunteers, including the nature wardens. I appreciate your contribution to NParks' educational outreach programmes and in inculcating responsible behaviour among those who visit the nature reserves. As volunteers and nature wardens, you have ample opportunities to exchange ideas with NParks' officials. Your feedback is valuable as your expertise and experiences can help enhance the outreach programmes, and contribute to park management and planning policies.

A Balanced Approach Between Nature Conservation and Development

8 The National Education programme will also help our students appreciate the need to strike a balance between nature conservation and development. Given the scarcity of land in Singapore, our nature conservation strategy is that of multiple or integrated land-use. However, as our parks are integrated for multiple use, we will take every effort to ensure that they do not lose their identity and character. Not all parks will be treated the same way, as they cater to different needs and tastes. We must also be pragmatic about land use in Singapore if we are to cater to an estimated population of at least 5 million in the long term.

9 Demographic changes are also relevant. For instance, it is projected that in 30 years' time, 1 in 4 Singaporeans will be over the age of 60. Park designs must therefore take into consideration the needs of this segment of the population, even as we cater to the changing needs of the other age groups. Parks that are popular for recreation and exercise can also be considered for education and social functions.

10 Where development takes place near or within parks and nature areas, for instance to provide basic facilities for the public, these should be carried out in a sensitive manner. Such developments should seek to preserve the character of these areas as far as possible by blending with and capitalising on assets like natural vegetation and waterways.

Lower Peirce as an Outdoor Classroom

11 This site where we are gathered today, Lower Peirce, is one of the many parks and nature areas that teachers and students will visit under the National Education programme. NParks will use the educational packages developed for Lower Peirce and four other parks, namely Sungei Buloh Nature Park, Pulau Ubin, Fort Canning and East Coast Park, to drive home the message that everyone has a role to play in making Singapore a Garden City.

12 By encouraging teachers and students to visit these parks and having these resource materials available, more focused learning can be achieved. Furthermore,

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students will be able to interact directly with the experts at these parks. NParks will work closely with MOE to promote the National Education programme.

13 The late Aldo Leopold, widely regarded as the father of wildlife ecology, said that "people will behave ethically only towards something they can experience and have faith in". In a sense, this is what our National Education programme is all about. We should continue to encourage our students to come to our parks and our nature areas, and allow them to experience and appreciate nature. This would in turn help groom them into active citizens who care about making Singapore a Garden City.

14 It now gives me great pleasure to launch the National Education programme on "Singapore, Our Garden City".

15 Thank you.

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