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SPEECH 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 LENG KEE DEEPAVALI NIGHT '99 ON
SATURDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 1999 AT

8.00 PM AT BUKIT MERAH CC HALL

It is my pleasure to join you this evening for the Leng Kee Deepavali Night '99. This event is organised to enable our Indian residents to get together to celebrate this festive occasion, and also to provide an opportunity for the other ethnic groups to have a better understanding of the Indian culture and religion.

2 Though we live in a multi-racial society, I believe that many of us do not

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really understand why the Indian Singaporeans celebrate Deepavali, or even the meaning of Deepavali itself. It is important to have some knowledge of each community's cultural heritage, religions, customs and traditions so as to promote better understanding and mutual respect. Having the same national identity is not enough. We must have something extra, such as understanding and appreciating each other's culture to help bond us together.

3 As I learn from my Indian friends and community leaders, "Deepavali", literally means a "row of lights" and therefore, it is the "Festival of Lights". Some communities in India like the Sikhs call it DIWALI. Whichever way you call it, like many other Hindu festivals, it celebrates the triumph of good over evil. It is also a time to do spring-cleaning and pray for good fortune and more prosperity.

4 It is opportune for us to reflect and take stock of ourselves. It is crucial for our nation's survival and our people's high living standard that we should remain economically competitive, pursue high growth, and prepare for the arrival of the knowledge-based economy (KBE) and globalisation. However, material achievement must be accompanied by "spiritual" fulfillment. Religious beliefs and moral values will help provide a better balance for our society and individual Singaporeans. Our children should not be carried away by modern day celebrations and myths. In Singapore, we encourage all ethnic groups to have their own cultural heritage, religions, and moral values, and at the same time, maintaining harmony and mutual respect between them. These are fundamentals that we should pass on to our children and future generations.

5 All parents expect their children to do well and hope to lead and guide them on the right career path. If any Indian family in our town runs into any problems on their children's education, they can always seek assistance from our Tanjong Pagar CDC or from Mendaki, which caters for the Indian Muslims or Sinda, for the Hindu children.

6 Some older Indian residents, and the senior citizens of other ethnic groups, especially those from low-income households, are apprehensive about regular medical check-ups because of their perception that such medical check-ups are expensive and/or they lack awareness of its importance. Our Town Council used to provide free medical screening for residents of our town. This role is now taken over by our CDC.

7 For the benefit of the Indian residents in Leng Kee, the Leng Kee Indian Activity Executive Committee, together with the Federation of Indian Muslims (FIM), jointly organised an Indian Family Health Fair on 3 October 1999. Health Screening, health food cooking demo and health talk were conducted for the Indian residents.

8 Also, to increase awareness among older residents of the importance of a "Healthy Lifestyle", such fairs should be organised on a more regular basis by all the Residents' Committees with our CDC. For older Indian residents, the Indian Activity Executive Committee and the Federation of Indian Muslims may consider organising more of such health fairs in future.

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9 Let me wish all our Indian residents a very Happy Deepavali.

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