

SPEECH BY MR DESMOND LEE, MINISTER IN PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, AND 2ND MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT NPARKS' LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY FAIR AND GARDENERS' DAY OUT ON 19 AUGUST 2017, 9.40AM, HORTPARK

Mr Alan Tan,
Chairman, LIAS

Professor Leo Tan,
Chairman, Garden City Fund

Mr Kenneth Er,
CEO, NParks

Friends from the Landscape Industry,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1 Good Morning. I am happy to see so many familiar faces at NParks' Landscape Industry Fair and at the Gardener's Day Out. Gardeners' Day Out is a lively community event which has been growing from strength to strength as communities come together to share their plants and greenery. I would like to begin by congratulating Professor Leo Tan, who two weeks ago, won recognition for Singapore and for his own hard work as the ASEAN biodiversity champion. Congratulations.

2 We bring together all of Singapore's green thumbs at one event this morning – community gardeners, nursery operators, landscape maintenance, and construction professionals. All of you play an important part in keeping our City in a Garden beautiful and green. Thank you for supporting Singapore's greening and conservation efforts.

Evolving Our Landscape Industry

3 Today, I would like to speak about the future of our landscape industry. Like other areas of our economy, this is a sector that also needs to transform, for two reasons. First, our landscape industry is very labour intensive and dependant on foreign guest workers. And, second, we are a small country, and very short of land. Land scarcity will always be a challenge.

4 The Government will help you. First, we will set aside land specifically for landscape nurseries, because nurseries are crucial in supplying plant materials for Singapore. Currently, we do not have land specifically earmarked for nurseries. Our nurseries are now on land that had been tendered out for agriculture generally, and they have had to compete with other farming businesses. Nurseries had to compete with vegetable farms, fish farms and other sectors of the agriculture business for agricultural land.

5 Going forward, we will set aside more than 100 hectares at Lim Chu Kang and Sungei Tengah, specifically earmarked for landscape nurseries. These lands will now be administered by NParks, which understands the landscape industry's needs. It will be a close collaboration between NParks and many in the landscape sector.

6 I announced last year that the nursery land tenders will be launched by mid-2018. But NParks has worked hard to bring forward the first batch of tenders. The first 40 hectares will be rolled out in tranches starting from November this year. This will provide more time for you to bid and move to new sites.

7 We will also help nurseries get their new sites up and running faster. NParks will provide more basic infrastructure like drainage systems and electrical connections so that the new operations can start faster. We will share more details about the land tender exercises at an industry briefing next week. I encourage interested parties to attend to find out more.

Greening More Productively

8 Providing land is one part of the equation. We also want to help nurseries make better use of technology in order to become more productive, efficient and effective in what they do. Higher yields are not only a more efficient use of scarce land in Singapore, but they mean better business for our local landscape players.

9 We will help you adopt more technology in your operations if you wish to do so. Last year, I announced the enhanced Landscape Productivity Roadmap. We had topped up the Government funding support for the roadmap by \$5.6 million. Of that sum, \$3 million went into the Landscape Productivity Grant. It co-funds the cost of purchasing productive technology for your businesses. We also raised the funding cap so that you can buy better machines. Nurseries that are moving over to new sites can tap on the Landscape Productivity Grant. For example, you can use it to co-fund smart irrigation systems and other productive technologies.

10 The Grant is not just for our nursery operators. Landscape maintenance or construction companies can also use it if you wish to

mechanise. A company known as Jiam Construction, managed by Mr Jack Tan, is an example of a company that has benefited. Jack used the grant to defray the cost of buying a skid steer loader. This skid steer loader can transport up to 500kg of flower pots per trip, enabling the company to transport its plants 5 times faster. You can take a look at the loader, and other productive machinery like the robotic mower and spider lift, at today's fair.

11 I hope that this encourages us to tap on the Landscape Productivity Grant to increase productivity and make use of technology to help us do our work better. The take-up has been good so far with more than 60 companies using the grant. But we still have a sizeable pot of more than \$2 million left.

Growing our Local Green Collar Workforce

12 Finally, it is important to recognise that we are not mechanising or using technology for its own sake. It will be wrong to do so. As you bring in technology and machinery, it must adapt and fit the new business process you are putting in place to achieve a better outcome. As you adopt technology and machinery, it is also about bringing along our people with it. When you bring in new technology, you bring in new processes and ways of doing things, and our people must want to embrace this. The human factor is at the heart of the advancement of technology and mechanisation. We want to upskill and create better jobs for our green-collar workforce. People lie at the heart of our greening journey and technology can help create new opportunities for the industry's local core.

13 We are working closely with the industry, not just to push for technology and mechanisation, and funding it, provide land for nursery operations, and for NParks to centrally manage this whole industry collaboration and transformation. We are also going to work closely with you to upskill and strengthen our local core, and create good jobs for those who graduate from our ITEs, polytechnics and other institutions. For example, we have the NParks-LIAS-ITE Scholarship which supports aspiring youths interested in landscaping careers. But landscape management is also an art, so it is important to acquire practical experience. In this regard, I am heartened that many of you have stepped up and provided apprenticeships and industry attachments. I hope more firms will come on board to share experiences.

Conclusion

14 Let me end by thanking Eng Lam for his contributions as he steps down as Chairman of LIAS. I think that the industry made many strides during his tenure. In tandem, allow me to extend a warm welcome to Alan, the new chairman. There is still much to do in greening Singapore so we look forward to working with you.

15 Thank you and have an enjoyable Saturday.

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