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Speech by Second Minister for Defence and President of SAFRA, Mr Ong Ye Kung, at the People's Association NS50 Appreciation Ceremony (Chua Chu Kang GRC), on 28 May 2017, 1535hrs, at Keat Hong Community Centre

28 May 2017

Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister for Health, Advisor to Chua Chu Kang GRC,
My Parliamentary colleagues,
National servicemen and families,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon everybody. Thank you for allowing me to be a special guest for your ceremony today. I am very happy to join you for this NS50 Appreciation Ceremony here in Choa Chu Kang. This series of ground-up events has been organised all over Singapore, and really, we want to thank the People's Association (PA) for supporting this and supporting NS50. Thank you very much to PA. This is really just a small way for the community to recognise the contributions and sacrifices of our national servicemen, and for us all to say thank you. Thank you to all our national servicemen.

The families of our national servicemen are also here with us, and I want to thank you too for the roles you play in supporting national defence. It is often our families that give us the reason and motivation to serve and defend our nation. Further, your unwavering support that

gives our national servicemen the peace of mind to give their best in their training and operational duties, even when the going gets tough.

Another important pillar of support is the Singapore society. All of us have either personally served National Service (NS), or have loved ones - children, spouses, boyfriends - who have or are serving NS. We know how it is like, how tough it can be, but it is a sacrifice for our country and all of us are in it together as Singaporeans. So on behalf of the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), I thank Singaporeans for your support for NS, and for speaking up for national servicemen from time to time, when the situation calls for it.

It has been 50 years since we started NS. NS has come a long way since the pioneer batch of national servicemen first enlisted in 1967. Now, more than one million national servicemen have served or are serving NS. Because potential aggressors know Singaporeans are solidly united in defending our country, we are able to achieve peace, stability and the conditions for our country to grow and our society to develop. And we must remember, in an increasingly complex world plagued with all kinds of terror such as the recent suicide attacks in Manchester and Jakarta, cyberattacks, and geopolitical uncertainties, we must continue to have a strong SAF, to underpin Singapore's prosperity and preserve our way of life.

The contribution of our national servicemen and their families are immense, and your sacrifices are significant. MINDEF and the SAF will do our best to ensure the NS experience is a worthwhile one, and to recognise your contribution in whatever way we can. Training methods have improved greatly over the years. Skills acquired during NS are increasingly useful to servicemen, even after they start their careers. Rules are relaxed so that NSmen can better juggle in-camp and professional responsibilities. And at important milestones such as NS50, we use the occasion to express our gratitude and recognise the contributions of national servicemen, such as (through) the NS50 vouchers that many of you will be receiving.

In addition, we have over the years developed a network of SAFRA clubhouses, partly to provide recreation facilities for national servicemen, and partly also to develop a strong sense of community. Today, we have six clubhouses - Toa Payoh and Mount Faber serving the central part of Singapore, Jurong serving the West, Tampines serving the East, Punggol and Yishun serving the North - which are rapidly building up. Collectively, they serve 330,000 national servicemen and their families as members, with each of the clubhouses attracting a

monthly average of 120,000 visitors. For NS50, all NSmen will be given one year free membership. Later this year, if the member pays one year's worth of annual fee, he will get three years of membership.

The provision of SAFRA clubhouses has been meaningful to national servicemen, and we want to improve our efforts in this area. The North-western of Singapore is rapidly building up too, including Choa Chu Kang and a new town at Tengah, and we would like to expand SAFRA facilities for national servicemen and their families living in this part of the country.

I am therefore pleased to announce that MINDEF will build a seventh SAFRA clubhouse in the north-west part of Singapore and in Choa Chu Kang. I was told SAFRA Choa Chu Kang will be less than (a) 5-minute walk from where you are now. SAFRA Choa Chu Kang will serve more than 90,000 national servicemen and their families residing in the north-west region. Our servicemen training in nearby SAF camps at Kranji, Lim Chu Kang, Sungei Gedong and Tengah will also benefit, with convenient access to NS cohesion activities conducted by SAFRA for NS units.

What is special about SAFRA Choa Chu Kang is that it will be nestled within Choa Chu Kang Park. It will be an integral part of the park, as the park will be an integral part of the clubhouse. What we will aim to achieve is a seamless blend between the clubhouse and the park facilities. This will therefore be a unique, tranquil and green setting for the clubhouse, which will in turn make the park a more attractive place, (and a) meeting point for Singaporeans. NParks will also be enhancing the current Park Connector Network in Choa Chu Kang to provide the accessibility from the stadium to the park and the new clubhouse.

The new clubhouse will be themed a "Fitness Oasis". So Choa Chu Kang residents will become fitter than the rest of Singapore. There will be ample exercise facilities, in addition to popular services such as swimming pools, restaurants and other recreation facilities. SAFRA is planning to incorporate a skypark running circuit within the club and a sheltered swimming pool overlooking the greenery of the park. There are plans for an EnergyOne gym that also incorporates the park amenities. SAFRA's Kids Amaze will adopt a nature themed playground and offer programmes that inculcate values on appreciating nature.

Since its inception in 1972, SAFRA clubhouses have served many generations of national servicemen, as gathering places to recreate memories and strengthen bonds. When SAFRA

Choa Chu Kang is completed, SAFRA's network of clubhouses will be even more effectively distributed throughout the island, to serve national servicemen living in different parts of Singapore.

As we commemorate NS50 this year, SAFRA will also do something special. We will be introducing a string of initiatives and events to commemorate the occasion. SAFRA will introduce 50 events under the theme of NS50. SAFRA will also work with its partners to offer 500 special deals and provide 50,000 give-aways. Through these efforts, SAFRA aims to engage over 500,000 national servicemen and their families.

Each generation must play its part to leave Singapore better for the next generation, and the NS50 theme "From My Generation to Yours" signifies the passing on of this sacred duty from one generation to the next. All of us - whether national servicemen, or those who support them in the home, workplace or community - are together responsible for the defence of Singapore. In this NS50 year, let us commit ourselves to taking up, fulfilling and passing on this duty to defend Singapore and our nation. Thank you very much.

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