

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY ASSOC PROF KOO TSAI KEE, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE

LAUNCH OF THE ADOPTION OF MANDAI FOREST BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION ON
SATURDAY, 13 NOV 99 AT 11.00 AM AT MANDAI FOREST

Prof Leo Tan;

Ladies & gentlemen:

Introduction

A very good morning to all of you. It is indeed a pleasure to see so many
of you here today, eager to play an active role in preserving our natural heritage.

2 Mandai Forest, together with the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve, forms the
Central Catchment Nature Reserves. This Central Catchment covers an extensive area
totalling more than 2,000 hectares and has one of the richest and most diverse
ecological systems in the world. Indeed, our Nature Reserves actually contain more
species of trees than all of North America.

3 Clearly, we have every reason to be proud of and to cherish our valuable
forests. This is especially relevant at this point in time as many of our native
forest species face a constant threat from new and exotic species of plants. In
recent years, various locations in the Nature Reserves have been invaded by
aggressive pioneers like the Resam ferns and other introduced exotic plant species.
Such plants disrupt the natural regeneration process of native forest species.
Their presence has also contributed towards the extinction of some animals which
depend on the forests to survive.

4 To combat this problem, and to rejuvenate our forests, NParks embarked on a reforestation programme in 1991. We are gathered here today as part of this very important programme to ensure the survival of our forests for future generations.

Benefits of Adopt-a-Park Scheme

5 Less than three years ago, in February 1997, NParks launched its Adopt-a-Park Scheme in response to the Prime Minister's call for a more gracious and caring society. This Scheme provides a platform for the community to participate in the management and maintenance of public parks. The Scheme started off with primary schools, and its success soon drew interest from other quarters of society -- secondary schools, junior colleges, grassroots organisations and unformed groups. The National Institute of Education (NIE) is the first tertiary institution to adopt a part of the Nature Reserves as an outdoor classroom for environmental education.

6 Under this programme, NIE has adopted a plot of land for reforestation. This gives NIE, together with NParks, the opportunity to take on a new approach to environmental education. After all, the forest is a living laboratory that offers good learning opportunities. It offers a training ground for students to carry out scientific studies. In the process, you will also stand to gain a sense of ownership of our natural heritage. This will, hopefully, instill in all of you a deep and lasting appreciation and concern for the living environment. Young people tend to be more attuned to nature appreciation and this opportunity for hands-on expression will also enhance social cohesiveness as you come together to work for the betterment of society.

7 I understand that eight schools, working in partnership with NIE, have responded to this reforestation programme so far. This is a very encouraging sign. It indicates their optimism in the programme's educational benefits and their readiness to incorporate nature activities into their ECA programme. I urge more schools to take up such nature conservation assignments.

Understanding your role as participants

8 As you come together to learn in this "living lab", don't lose sight of the long-term purpose of this project, which is to help our native forest species regenerate. We must also conserve the indigenous plants, by propagating and introducing them into the Nature Reserves. You have the privilege of belonging to a pioneer generation who can hopefully, sometime in the future, look back with pride at your contribution in conserving our forests.

9 Your role here is important -- you are adopting a piece of nature. And under your care, this piece of land will flourish and may eventually, one day, be restored to its former glory. In addition to this, you are the fresh new cohort of trainee teachers who will soon be entrusted to nurture and mould the next generation of curious young minds in our schools. I trust that this programme will create a lasting impression in you and spur you on to share with your future students the invaluable lessons you have gained in this forest. Finally, be sure to soak in the freshness and calm of this beautiful forest, a most welcome relief from the hustle and bustle of city life.

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10 Just look around you. Nature took hundreds of years to build up this Nature Reserve. I hope this Clean and Green Week activity imparts an important lesson to all of us, which is, not to take our environment for granted. Otherwise, one day, it may not be around anymore.

11 On that note, let's pick up our changkuls and get some trees planted!

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