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**PRESS RELEASE**

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SPEECH BY MR TEH CHEANG WAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT, AT THE 21ST ANNIVERSARY DINNER CUM  
VARIETY SHOW AND OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE GEYLANG  
WEST COMMUNITY CENTRE EXTENSION AT UPPER BOON KENG  
ROAD ON SUNDAY, 12 DECEMBER 1982 AT 7.30 PM

It gives me great pleasure to be here tonight for the official opening of the Geylang West Community Centre extension. This occasion marks another important milestone for our constituency.

Geylang West Community Centre began humbly in a small single-storey building at Lorong 3. In 1977, the centre moved into its present permanent home. Today, with the new extension, Geylang West Community Centre has become one of the biggest centres in Singapore providing facilities to accommodate a full range of activities. The government has borne half of the construction cost of the extension while the remaining half has been met by donations from well-wishers and members of the public. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude and appreciation to all donors for their generous support.

Over the last 20 years, the changes that have taken place in Geylang West are typical of what has occurred in many parts of Singapore. In 1959, permanent housing in Geylang West constituency was found only in the area between Guillemard Road and Sims Avenue. These permanent houses were crowded and had a high population density. The conditions in the rest of the constituency were also extremely bad. The bulk of the population lived in the Kallang Basin area, cramped into temporary zinc and attap huts, crowded kampongs and pockets of slums. There was, of course, no modern sanitation. At high tide, a good part of the basin was submerged under water. Accessibility was poor as proper roads were virtually non-existent. Children attended ill-equipped rural type schools. Fire was a constant hazard, and there were, in fact, several major fire disasters in the constituency in the 1950s and the early 1960s,

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notably the Kampong Koo Chai and Pulau Minyak fires. These conditions were not confined to Geylang West, but were prevalent in other parts of Singapore. The changes that have occurred in the last two decades can only be described as dramatic. In Geylang West 78 per cent of the constituents are now HDB dwellers, living in flats developed in areas which were formerly slums. They enjoy a comprehensive range of facilities. Most of the residents own their homes. Today, Geylang West is almost fully developed. Only a small part of the constituency awaits further development.

As I mentioned earlier, the community centre is only one of the many facilities Singaporeans enjoy as a result of the present government's policies. Indeed, one of the most fundamental aims of the government is to continuously improve the economic and social well-being of the people. The majority of Singaporeans come from migrant stock. Our forefathers settled here many years ago from various Asian countries, notably China and India. Students of Chinese history will agree with me that since ancient times, no Chinese government has been able to provide the Chinese people with a standard of living comparable to what Singaporeans enjoy today. Throughout their history, the Chinese people never had the good fortune to enjoy the degree of freedom and social justice which exist today in Singapore. All that Singaporeans possess today has been possible because of good government. But what good government takes decades to build up, bad government can take away almost overnight. The tragic plight of the boat-people of Vietnam bears testimony to this. Articles in the press tell us that many of the people who left Vietnam in leaky boats were either drowned or murdered by pirates and those who managed to escape death end up in refugee camps or in foreign countries where they face an uncertain future.

Singaporeans would do well to remember the misfortunes of the boat-people. Those who believe that they could migrate to Australia, Canada, or other Western countries if the present government collapses are being naive. Only a very small percentage of the population can find alternative homes in foreign countries.

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They are the very rich or the talented professional. The overwhelming majority will have nowhere to go. Therefore, Singaporeans should think wisely and continue to support good government.

The last two decades have seen unprecedented economic growth and prosperity in Singapore as a result of a prudent and efficient government. This has led in turn to higher living standards and greater opportunities for all the people. In housing, for example, the HDB today provides homes for more than 70 per cent of the population. Despite this achievement, the government continues to further improve housing standards. In 1980 the HDB experienced great difficulty in persuading contractors to tender for its construction projects. As a result only about 20,000 units of flats will be completed this year. However, to make up the deficiency, the HDB will build 120,000 units over the next three years, from 1983 to 1985. Therefore, most of the applicants on the waiting list can be assured of getting their flats by 1985. I firmly believe that with the continued support of Singaporeans, the government can achieve even greater economic success and prosperity in the coming decade.

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