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**SPEECH BY MR YEO CHEOW TONG, ACTING MINISTER FOR HEALTH
AND MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AT THE OPENING OF THE NATIONAL BLOOD CENTRE
ON FRIDAY, 22 APRIL 1988 AT 5.30 PM**

This ceremony marks new milestones for the two departments which are housed within the new National Blood Centre building, namely the Blood Transfusion Service, and the Department of Scientific Services.

Blood, as all of you know, is very important. Unfortunately, there is as yet no artificial substitute for it. We still need to depend on people for the supply of blood.

Blood is used every day in our hospitals to replenish that which is lost during surgical operations or because of certain medical conditions. We therefore need to encourage more Singaporeans to come forward to regularly donate blood.

ATTRACTIVE FACILITIES

In the old premises used by the Blood Transfusion Service, blood donors were subjected to a stuffy, cramped and unattractive environment. All these have changed with the new National Blood Centre. Gone are the cramped conditions. Donors will now arrive at the spacious reception area where they are speedily registered, using our computerised registration system. They can then donate their blood in very well-appointed and pleasant surroundings. And after the donation, they will be able to relax and recover in a comfortable lounge. I am confident that donors coming to the National Blood Centre for the first time will be pleasantly surprised with this new facility. I hope they will feel so comfortable that they will come back to donate regularly.

CAPACITY

The new Centre has been designed and built to handle about 120,000 donors each year. This is double the total donations we are receiving today from the various collection centres.

NATIONAL EMERGENCIES

The National Blood Centre has also been designed to cope with national emergencies, involving mass casualties. Donors who responded to the appeal for blood donations during the Hotel New World disaster will recall the congestion and long queues at the former BTS building. In the event of future emergencies, the Blood Transfusion Service will be able to convert the auditorium and various rooms in this new building into waiting or registration areas. We will be able to cope comfortably with 240 donors per hour, compared to the 60 in the previous BTS premises.

To test our ability to handle emergency situations, my Ministry has been conducting emergency blood donation exercises. The next emergency exercise will be held on 21 and 22 May. It will involve 19 constituencies in the southern sector of Singapore. The National Blood Centre will serve as one of the three blood collection centres for the exercise.

BE REGULAR DONORS

Another objective of these emergency exercises is to remind Singaporeans that the healthy in the community must give blood regularly if we are to maintain adequate blood supplies at all times. By participating in saving the lives of others, the donors are also ensuring that should they themselves fall ill, adequate blood will also be available. I hope Singaporeans in the 19 constituencies that will be involved in the coming exercise, as well as those living in other parts of Singapore, will come forward to donate their blood. I hope they will go on to become regular blood donors.

OTHER FACILITIES

The new premises will enable the Blood Transfusion Service to increase the refrigerated storage space for storing blood. With its new laboratories, the BTS will be able to undertake more research work in areas like blood group serology, plasma proteins and cryopreservation of blood cells. With this new Centre, I am confident that the Blood Transfusion Service will be able to make further improvements in blood collection, in safeguarding our blood supply and in efficiently processing blood components.

DSS

The Department of Scientific Services is the other occupant in this new building. As the key national reference laboratory in forensic, pharmaceutical, food and environmental analysis, it must keep abreast of the latest changes in the respective fields of interest.

I am happy to note that the Department has become one of the first multi-disciplined laboratories in the region to be fully computerised. Reflecting the high priority placed by our Government on combating drug abuse, the Department has also equipped itself with the latest, state-of-the-art technology for the detection of drug abuse.

The DSS will also be playing an important part in our programme to discourage smoking. I had earlier this month announced that the Ministry will be setting limits on the nicotine and tar content of cigarettes imported and sold in Singapore. The Department of Scientific Services will be setting up a cigarette testing laboratory at the cost of \$250,000 to verify compliance with the limits.

In closing, let me extend our warmest appreciation to all our blood donors. They have given their generous services to the community, to save lives.

I would also like to thank all those who were involved in one way or another to make this National Blood Centre project a reality.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my great pleasure to declare open the National Blood Centre.

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