

SPEECH BY MR LIM KIM SAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AND COMMUNICATIONS AND MP FOR CAIRNHILL, AT
THE 'WATER IS PRECIOUS' EXHIBITION AT CAIRNHILL COMMUNITY CENTRE
ON 16TH JULY 1976 AT 8.00 P.M.

The past few weeks have shown us just how devastating shortage of water can be. In Europe which is now in the thrall of one of the worst droughts ever experienced, rivers have dried up and crops and livestock are wiped out by the lack of rain. French farmers for instance estimate damage at \$11.2 billion (20 billion francs). The situation in Switzerland is so severe that the Government has authorised exorbitant fines of up to \$20,000 (US\$8,000) on anyone caught wasting water. In some parts of Britain, the drought has increased the chemical content in the water supply to such a high level that it is unsafe for young children to drink. When countries in the temperate region which used to have no water shortage problems start making appeals to conserve water, we in the tropics who are more prone to such weather vagaries should make even greater efforts to do so.

Compared to these bone-dry European countries, we can be considered to be very fortunate to have received adequate rainfall in the last few months. Nevertheless, the threat of water shortage is too near and too real for us to relax in our water conservation efforts. The next 2 or 3 months are usually dry months. When the North East Monsoon failed to bring the rain last year, we almost had to introduce water rationing. But we were spared the water rationing exercise by the water stored in the newly completed Upper Pierce Reservoir which offers an additional storage capacity of 27.77 million cubic metres.

In 1973, about 527,000 cubic metres of water was consumed daily. The corresponding figures for 1974 and 1975 were 537,000 and 585,000 cubic metres respectively. For the first 6 months of this year, our records show that 589,000 cubic metres of water has been consumed daily. The demand for water in Singapore will continue to rise. With no corresponding increase in suitable water catchment areas, the Public Utilities

Board will have to resort to unconventional means of tapping water. Of course, the water collected through these means will be less sweet than those from existing sources and its quality will deteriorate.

The Kranji River has been dammed and turned into a Reservoir. This is an example of unconventional means of tapping water. Water collected in this reservoir drains through residential and farming areas. It is polluted and naturally has a higher salt or chloride content. Well, some of us have tasted the water originating from this reservoir and have commented that it tastes different. However, let me assure you that it is harmless and potable and within world health standard requirements. So, there is nothing to worry about its suitability for human consumption and for use in industries using low pressure boilers.

This is the kind of water we have to learn to accept because Singapore will have to rely more and more on unconventional means of tapping water to meet rising demand.

In Europe, the deterioration in the quality of water as a result of pollution has necessitated the installation of ion exchange treatment plants in most big industries to treat water to suit their own requirements. Similarly, large local industries using high pressure boilers are expected to install their own treatment plants. Though we have been having high quality water, the PUB has its own plants to reduce the chloride content in water for use in its power stations and gasworks. It is installing new plants to remove the higher salt content of the water we can expect from now on. How fast our water deteriorates will depend upon our ability to keep our rivers and streams free from pollution. If we do not reduce pollution in our water, we may one day have to bottle water specially for human consumption as is now the case in many countries.

The European experience has shown just how unstable weather conditions can be. It has also shown how precious a commodity water is. Until water conservation becomes something of a second nature in us, there should be no let up in our water conservation efforts. It is my hope that we shall not have to resort to stringent measures to achieve our objective.