

**SPEECH BY RADM (NS) TEO CHEE HEAN,
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AND SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE,
AT THE CERTIFICATE PRESENTATION TO VOLUNTEERS OF
THE CORAL REEF RESCUE PROJECT AT PULAU AYER CHAWAN
ON SUNDAY, 4 JUNE 1995 AT 10.00 AM,
AT THE SINGAPORE TELECOM THEATRETTE,
COMCENTRE, EXETER ROAD, SINGAPORE 0923**

Environmental degradation has become one of the major preoccupations of our generation. Uncontrolled development or inadequate planning which has not taken sufficient account of environmental issues has had detrimental effects on the environment in both developed and developing countries alike. The threats of increasing pollution, ozone depletion and global warming are signs of a deteriorating world environment.

2 These have prompted significant efforts to deal with the emerging environmental concerns at the global level. The 1992 Earth Summit was one such historic event. Since then, there have been commendable efforts to promote environmentally sound and sustainable development at national, regional and international levels. At the regional level, ASEAN countries have committed to working closely on environmental issues of common concern. Such cooperative efforts must continue as ASEAN countries, being geographically close to each other, will always be confronted by similar if not common environmental problems. These collective efforts will contribute to the environmental well-being of our peoples and preserve and enhance their natural heritage.

3 Worldwide, the challenge facing all our countries is how to achieve sustainable growth given each country's own level of development and its own distinctive resource endowment. Each country will need to balance economic priorities with environmental responsibilities.

4 These goals - economic development and environmental protection - are not in conflict. Indeed they are two facets of our primary goal of building a better life for our peoples and for our children. As a small country with very limited land, Singapore is acutely aware of its environmental responsibilities. If we despoil what little we have, we and our children will have to live with the consequences. We do not have the option of abandoning this piece of land and building afresh on a new site.

5 In Singapore, we are fortunate to have attained economic progress without compromising our living environment. The environmental standard that Singaporeans enjoy today is comparable to that in many highly developed countries. This did not happen by a stroke of luck nor was it because Singapore did not have to contend with any critical environmental problems. Indeed Singapore has had to contend with severe environmental challenges in creating a pleasant and healthy environment on such a small island for a population of three million people and eventually more.

6 Our pleasant and healthy environment has come about because of the Government's commitment to and our people's support for a policy that calls for a sensible balance between economic and environmental priorities. With this, Singaporeans are still able to enjoy the pleasures offered by our limited natural heritage despite the high degree of urbanisation. In fact, even the fauna and flora have found Singapore an attractive place to thrive in, judging from the growing number of migratory species which have chosen to pay a visit to Singapore each year.

7 Preserving the water quality of our coastal waters is a case in point. As an island state, our coastal waters are our economic assets, and it is only natural to expect intensive economic and social activities along our coasts. Nevertheless, we have long recognised the importance of keeping them clean.

8 Marine pollution essentially comes from two sources - land-based pollution and shipping activities. The latter is often more spectacular and attracts media attention, especially if a major accident or oil spill has occurred; but we must also not forget the insidious effects of pollution from land-based sources which,

if not properly treated, will find its way through drains, rivers and finally to the sea in a continuous but unspectacular stream.

9 To ensure that our coastal waters are pollution free, we need a balanced approach to address these two sources of pollution that affect not just the Singapore Straits but also the waters of the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea which are contiguous to it.

10 Singapore has spared no effort in developing the environmental infrastructure to deal with both sources of pollution. Our systems for solid waste management, sewerage and drainage ensure that land-based sources of pollution are kept well under control. When the Singapore River is cleaned up, it is not just the river that is clean but, more importantly, it is the surrounding sea into which the River flows that becomes cleaner.

11 To control pollution from shipping activities, Singapore also has proper reception facilities to handle slops and sludge from ships. To improve the safety of shipping in the surrounding waters, we have also worked with the neighbouring countries and the major maritime countries to improve navigational safety in the Straits. The Port of Singapore has on its own invested in a Vessel Traffic Information System with a chain of radar stations to provide an advisory service to ships transiting the area. In the event of an accident, there are also oil spill response teams set up by the major oil companies to deal expeditiously with the situation. These measures should be regularly reviewed by all interested countries to see where more effort is required.

12 Through the provision of this infrastructure and the rigorous enforcement of anti-pollution legislation, the quality of our coastal waters has remained relatively clean; and even though we are the busiest port in the world, our waters can support marine life, including coral reefs. Economic development and regard for the environment can go hand in hand.

13 Singaporeans must also not forget that keeping the seas clean is not just to keep the coral alive and to have clear waters to swim and go boating in. Eventually, the seas will be our own source of life - we shall have to depend on our seas for the water we need to drink, so we should be mindful of what we discharge into it.

14 When I was asked to officiate at this certificate presentation ceremony, I accepted the invitation without hesitation. This coral reef rescue effort is a good example of environmental collaboration between a private company and non-governmental organisations. I would like to first commend the Nature Society of Singapore for organising this rescue effort which, I understand, is one of the largest of its kind ever to be attempted.

15 I would also like to congratulate the more than 450 volunteer divers who have participated in the project for without you, its completion would not have been possible. I hope that the success of this project will serve to encourage like-minded organisations and individuals to do the same in other areas of environmental concern.

16 I also wish to commend the HongKong Bank for sponsoring the rescue project. HongKong Bank is no new entrant to the environmental arena in Singapore, having sponsored and supported several environmental projects in Singapore and the region since 1989. I hope that other corporate citizens will also join in the effort towards building an environmentally caring and conscious society in Singapore.

17 Finally, let me commend the volunteers for the perseverance and efforts you have shown on this coral rescue project. I am sure that your contribution to the natural environment will not go unnoticed. Thank You.

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